

Jeremiah

1

Summary: *Jeremiah 1 establishes the prophet's identity, commissioning, and mandate. The superscription (vv. 1-3) places Jeremiah in the priestly town of Anathoth and spans his ministry from Josiah's thirteenth year (627 BCE) through the fall of Jerusalem (586 BCE). God's call comes with an extraordinary claim: Jeremiah was known, consecrated, and appointed before birth (v. 5). The prophet protests his youth, but God overrides the objection and commissions him with authority over nations. Two visions follow — the almond branch (shaqed/shoqed wordplay, vv. 11-12) and the boiling pot tilting from the north (vv. 13-14) — establishing the twin themes of divine watchfulness and coming judgment from Babylon. The chapter closes with God's promise that Jeremiah will face fierce opposition but will not be overcome.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The call narrative of Jeremiah 1:5 is among the most theologically significant verses in the Hebrew Bible for the doctrine of divine foreknowledge and prophetic vocation. The shaqed/shoqed wordplay in verses 11-12 is untranslatable — God sees an almond tree (shaqed) and declares 'I am watching (shoqed) over my word to perform it.' The pun functions as a visual-verbal confirmation of God's vigilance. The boiling pot vision (vv. 13-14) introduces the 'foe from the north' motif that dominates the first half of the book. The concluding metaphor — Jeremiah as a fortified city, iron pillar, and bronze wall — is remarkable for what it promises: not comfort, not success, but indestructibility under siege. God does not promise Jeremiah an easy life; he promises that Jeremiah will survive the hardest one.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 5 required careful handling of yada ('knew') — this is not mere awareness but intimate, purposeful knowing, the same verb used for covenant relationship. We chose 'knew you' rather than 'chose you' to preserve the relational depth while noting the covenantal force. The almond branch wordplay (shaqed/shoqed) cannot be reproduced in English; we rendered the meaning and documented the pun in the translator notes and expanded rendering. The word na'ar ('youth, boy') in verse 6 is ambiguous regarding Jeremiah's exact age — it can mean anything from a child to a young man. We rendered 'only a youth' and noted the range. The verb natatti ('I have given/set') in verse 5 uses the prophetic perfect — a past tense describing a future or ongoing reality — which we rendered as present: 'I have appointed you.'*

Connections: The call narrative parallels Moses (Exodus 3-4, similar reluctance and divine assurance), Isaiah (Isaiah 6, temple commissioning), and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1-3, visionary call). The 'before you were born' language anticipates Paul's self-understanding in Galatians 1:15. The 'foe from the north' motif connects to Ezekiel 38-39 (Gog from the north) and the broader ancient Near Eastern tradition of invasion from the north. The fortified city metaphor for the prophet anticipates the siege of Jerusalem itself — Jeremiah becomes a miniature of the city he is sent to warn, besieged but not destroyed.

¹The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. ²The word of the LORD came to him in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. ³It continued through the days of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah, king of Judah — until Jerusalem was taken into exile in the fifth month. ⁴The word of the LORD came to me: ⁵Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you came out from the womb, I set you apart. I appointed you as a prophet to the nations. ⁶But I said, "Oh, Lord GOD! I do not know how to speak — I am only a youth." ⁷But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth.' To everyone I send you to, you will go, and everything I command you, you will speak. ⁸Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to rescue you," declares the LORD. ⁹Then the LORD stretched out his hand and touched my mouth. The LORD said to me, "See — I have placed my words in your mouth. ¹⁰See, today I have appointed you over nations and over kingdoms — to uproot and to tear down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." ¹¹The word of the LORD came to me: "What do you see, Jeremiah?" I said, "I see the branch of an almond tree." ¹²The LORD said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching over my word to carry it out." ¹³The word of the LORD came to me a second time: "What do you see?" I said, "I see a boiling pot, and it is tilting away from the north." ¹⁴The LORD said to me, "From the north, disaster will be unleashed upon all the inhabitants of the land. ¹⁵For I am about to summon all the clans of the kingdoms of the north," declares the LORD. "They will come and each will set up his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its surrounding walls, and against all the cities of Judah. ¹⁶I will pronounce my judgments against them for all their wickedness, because they have abandoned me, burned incense to other gods, and bowed down to the works of their own hands. ¹⁷As for you — prepare yourself! Stand up and speak to them everything that I command you. Do not be shattered by them, or I will shatter you before them. ¹⁸Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land — against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land. ¹⁹They will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue you," declares the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription identifies Jeremiah by patronym, priestly lineage, and geographic origin. Anathoth was a Levitical city assigned to the descendants of Aaron (Joshua 21:18), about three miles northeast of Jerusalem. The priestly background is significant — Jeremiah will later clash with the Jerusalem priesthood as an outsider priest from a peripheral town. Some scholars connect his father Hilkiah with the high priest who discovered the Book of the Law under Josiah (2 Kings 22:8), though this is uncertain.
2. The thirteenth year of Josiah is approximately 627 BCE, five years before Josiah's major religious reforms (622 BCE). This means Jeremiah's prophetic career began before the discovery of the Book of the Law in the temple (2 Kings 22:3-13). The standard prophetic reception formula *devar-YHWH* ('the word of the LORD') indicates direct divine communication.
3. The superscription spans approximately forty years (627-586 BCE), covering the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah. Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin are omitted, likely because their reigns were too brief (three months each). The 'fifth month' refers to Av (July-August) 586 BCE, when Nebuchadnezzar's forces destroyed the temple and deported the remaining population. The Hebrew *galut* ('exile, captivity') is the defining catastrophe of Judah's history.
4. The narrative shifts to first person — Jeremiah now speaks directly. The formula *devar-YHWH* ('the word of the LORD') followed by *le'mor* ('saying') introduces direct divine speech. The *le'mor* is rendered as a colon in English rather than the redundant 'saying.'
5. Three verbs define God's prenatal action toward Jeremiah: *yada* ('knew' — intimate, purposeful knowledge), *hiqdashti* ('I set apart, consecrated'), and *netattikha* ('I appointed, gave'). The last verb uses the prophetic perfect — grammatically past tense but describing a reality that extends into the present and future. 'To the nations' (*lagoyim*) gives Jeremiah's ministry an international scope beyond Judah alone, which the oracles against the nations (chapters 46-51) fulfill. The threefold structure — known, consecrated, appointed — moves from the inward (relationship) to the outward (mission).

6. The exclamation ahahh is a cry of distress or protest, not a polite demurrer. The Hebrew na'ar can mean anything from a boy to a young man of military age; its exact age range is debated. Jeremiah's protest echoes Moses ('I am not a man of words,' Exodus 4:10) and establishes the pattern of prophetic reluctance. The address Adonai YHWH ('Lord GOD') combines the title of sovereign authority with the divine name.
7. God does not dispute Jeremiah's youth — he overrides its relevance. The construction is emphatic: 'to all that I send you, you will go' — there will be no exceptions or preferred assignments. The commission parallels Moses' commission in Exodus 4:12 ('I will be with your mouth and teach you what to say'). Jeremiah's adequacy comes from the sender, not the sent.
8. The Hebrew mippenehem (literally 'from their faces') suggests the intimidation of facing hostile audiences. God's promise itti ani ('I am with you') is the foundational assurance formula of the Hebrew Bible (cf. Genesis 26:3, 28:15, Exodus 3:12, Isaiah 41:10). The verb lehatzilekha ('to rescue you') implies Jeremiah will face real danger — the promise is not protection from trouble but deliverance through it. The formula ne'um YHWH ('declares the LORD') seals the divine speech.
9. The physical gesture of touching the mouth parallels Isaiah's commissioning, where a seraph touches Isaiah's lips with a burning coal (Isaiah 6:6-7). In Jeremiah's case there is no purification — the act is commissioning, not cleansing. The verb natatti ('I have placed') uses the prophetic perfect, indicating a completed divine action. Jeremiah's words from this point forward carry divine authority because they originate with God, not the prophet.
10. Six infinitives define Jeremiah's mandate: four destructive (natosh 'uproot,' natots 'tear down,' ha'avid 'destroy,' haros 'overthrow') and two constructive (banot 'build,' nata 'plant'). The four-to-two ratio reflects the book's overwhelming emphasis on judgment before restoration. These six verbs recur throughout Jeremiah as a thematic refrain (cf. 18:7-9, 24:6, 31:28, 42:10, 45:4). The scope — 'over nations and kingdoms' — matches the international mandate of verse 5.
11. The first of two confirmatory visions. The almond tree (shaqed) is the 'wakeful tree' because it blossoms earliest in the year, often while snow still covers the ground. The wordplay shaqed/shoqed is the interpretive key — God asks what Jeremiah sees, and the answer itself becomes a prophetic message. This type of vision-with-wordplay also appears in Amos 8:1-2 (qayits/qets, 'summer fruit'/'end').
12. The KJV's 'I will hasten' obscures the wordplay. The verb shoqed does not primarily mean 'hasten' but 'watch, be wakeful, be alert.' God is not saying he will speed up his word but that he is actively watching over it to ensure its fulfillment. The pun shaqed/shoqed cannot be reproduced in English — no single English word captures both 'almond tree' and 'watching.' The phrase heitavta lir'ot ('you have seen well/correctly') affirms that Jeremiah's prophetic sight is functioning.
13. The second vision. The Hebrew sir naphuach is a pot being heated until its contents boil over. The phrase upanav mippenei tsaphonah ('its face from the face of the north') is directional — the pot is tilting from the north, meaning its scalding contents will pour southward toward Judah. This is the first appearance of the 'foe from the north' motif that dominates Jeremiah's early oracles (4:6, 6:1, 6:22, 10:22). The 'north' becomes almost a theological symbol in Jeremiah — the direction from which destruction comes.
14. The verb tippatach ('will be opened, unleashed') suggests something being broken open or let loose — like the boiling pot spilling its contents. The ra'ah ('disaster, calamity') here is not moral evil but the coming military catastrophe. The phrase 'all the inhabitants of the land' indicates comprehensive judgment — no one in Judah will be untouched.
15. The image is of conquering kings setting up their judgment seats at the gates of a conquered city — the gates were the place of legal authority and public judgment. God himself is summoning (qore') these foreign powers as instruments of his covenant judgment. The plural 'kingdoms of the north' does not identify a single nation but a coalition; historically this was fulfilled by the Neo-Babylonian empire and its vassals.
16. Three charges are listed: abandonment of God (azavuni, 'they abandoned me'), worship of other gods through incense offerings (vayeqatteru le'lohim acherim), and idolatry — bowing to 'the works of their own hands' (ma'asei yedehem). The last phrase is devastating: the gods they worship are things they themselves manufactured. The irony runs throughout Jeremiah — Israel trades a living God for objects they carved.
17. The idiom te'ezor motnekha (literally 'gird your loins') means to tuck your robe into your belt for action — rendered here as 'prepare yourself.' The warning is striking: if Jeremiah loses courage before the people (techat mippenehem), God himself will break Jeremiah before them (achittekha lipnehem). The verb ch-t-t ('to be shattered, dismayed, broken') is used in both halves, creating an internal wordplay — fear of people will bring worse consequences than fear of God.
18. Three metaphors of indestructibility: fortified city (ir mivtsar), iron pillar (ammud barzel), and bronze walls (chomot nechoshet). These are all siege-resistant structures — God is saying Jeremiah will be besieged but not breached. The list of opponents is comprehensive: kings, officials (sarim), priests, and common people ('am ha'arets). Every stratum of society will oppose Jeremiah, and he will outlast them all. The word sarim ('officials, princes, commanders') refers to the ruling class rather than royal offspring.
19. The chapter closes by returning to the assurance formula of verse 8: itti ani ('I am with you'). The verb nilchamu ('they will fight') promises not peace but warfare — Jeremiah's entire career will be one of opposition. The promise is not immunity from attack but survival through it. The verb lehatzilekha ('to rescue you') frames the chapter's conclusion with the same verb that opened the divine promise in verse 8, creating an inclusio of divine protection around the entire commissioning.

2

Summary: *Jeremiah 2 is a covenant lawsuit (riv) in which God prosecutes Israel for spiritual adultery. The chapter opens with a tender recollection of Israel's early devotion in the wilderness — the 'honeymoon period' of the covenant relationship (vv. 1-3). The tone then shifts to accusation: Israel has abandoned the living God for gods that are 'no gods,' trading the spring of living water for broken cisterns that hold nothing (v. 13). The indictment is comprehensive — priests, rulers, prophets, and people have all defected. The chapter closes with Israel still denying guilt even as the evidence overwhelms, like a thief caught in the act who insists on innocence.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The imagery of 2:13 — 'the spring of living water' versus 'broken cisterns that cannot hold water' — is one of the most powerful metaphors in the Hebrew Bible and one of the defining images of Jeremiah's theology. Jesus draws on this imagery in John 4:10-14 and 7:37-38. The legal structure is a covenant riv (lawsuit), a genre found also in Micah 6 and Hosea 4, in which God brings formal charges against his covenant partner. The wild vine metaphor (v. 21), the stained garment (v. 22), the restless camel and wild donkey in heat (vv. 23-24) — Jeremiah's images are vivid, earthy, and deliberately shocking. The chapter's rhetoric is designed to make the listener feel the absurdity of Israel's choices: no nation has ever traded its gods, even though their gods are worthless — but Israel has traded the living God for nothing (v. 11).*

Translation Friction: *The word chesed in verse 2 required careful handling — it describes Israel's early covenant loyalty to God, an unusual direction for this term (usually God's chesed toward Israel). The metaphor of Israel as a young bride (v. 2) and then as a promiscuous woman (vv. 20, 23-25, 33, 36) raises the tension between prophetic rhetoric and modern sensibility — we rendered the Hebrew faithfully without euphemism while noting the metaphorical framework in translator notes. The word sorekah ('choice vine,' v. 21) versus 'wild vine' required documenting the agricultural reality. The animal metaphors in verses 23-24 are sexually explicit by design — the prophet is deliberately using shocking imagery to describe Israel's lust for foreign gods.*

Connections: *The covenant lawsuit genre connects to Hosea 4:1-3, Micah 6:1-8, and Isaiah 1:2-20. The wilderness honeymoon motif echoes Hosea 2:14-15. The 'living water' image anticipates Jesus's conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4) and his declaration at the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:37-38). The 'broken cisterns' image is inverted in Zechariah 13:1, where a fountain is opened for cleansing. The wild donkey in heat (v. 24) parallels Hosea 8:9 (Ephraim as a wild donkey). The accusation that Israel has become worse than the nations who keep their false gods (v. 11) foreshadows Ezekiel's similar charge in Ezekiel 5:6-7 and 16:47.*

¹The word of the LORD came to me: ²"Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: This is what the LORD says — I remember the faithful love of your youth, the love of your bridal days, how you followed me in the wilderness, through a land not yet sown. ³Israel was holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest. All who consumed her incurred guilt; disaster came upon them," declares the LORD. ⁴Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob — all the clans of the house of Israel! ⁵This is what the LORD says: What wrong did your ancestors find in me, that they went so far from me? They went after worthless things and became worthless themselves. ⁶They did not ask, 'Where is the LORD who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness — through a land of desert plains and ravines, through a land of drought and deep darkness, through a land no one crosses and no one inhabits?' ⁷I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and its bounty. But when you entered, you defiled my land and made my inheritance a detestable thing. ⁸The priests did not ask, 'Where is the LORD?' Those who handle the law did not know me. The shepherds rebelled against me. The prophets prophesied by Baal and followed things that are of no use. ⁹Therefore I will bring my case against you," declares the LORD, "and against your grandchildren I will bring my case. ¹⁰Cross over to the coasts of Cyprus and look! Send to Kedar and examine carefully — see if anything like this has ever happened. ¹¹Has any nation ever exchanged its gods — even though they are not really gods? Yet my people have exchanged their Glory for what is of no use. ¹²Be appalled at this, O heavens! Shudder and be utterly desolate," declares the LORD. ¹³For my people have committed two evils: they have abandoned me — the spring of living water — and they have dug out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. ¹⁴Is Israel a slave? Was he born into servitude? Why then has he become plunder? ¹⁵Young lions have roared over him; they have raised their voices.

They have made his land a ruin; his cities are burned and emptied of inhabitants. ¹⁶Even the people of Memphis and Tahpanhes have shattered your skull. ¹⁷Have you not brought this upon yourself by abandoning the LORD your God at the very time he was leading you on the way? ¹⁸And now — what business do you have on the road to Egypt, drinking the waters of the Nile? What business do you have on the road to Assyria, drinking the waters of the Euphrates? ¹⁹Your own wickedness will discipline you, and your acts of turning away will convict you. Know and see that it is an evil and bitter thing that you have abandoned the LORD your God, and that reverence for me is not in you," declares the Lord GOD of Hosts. ²⁰For long ago I broke your yoke and tore off your chains. You said, 'I will not serve!' Yet on every high hill and under every leafy tree you sprawl as a prostitute. ²¹Yet I planted you as a choice vine, from the purest stock. How then have you turned into the wild shoots of a foreign vine before me? ²²Even if you scrub yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt remains before me," declares the Lord GOD. ²³How can you say, 'I am not defiled; I have not gone after the Baals'? Look at your path in the valley — acknowledge what you have done! You are a restless young camel, darting back and forth on her paths, ^{24a}a wild donkey accustomed to the wilderness, sniffing the wind in the desire of her appetite. In her heat, who can restrain her? None who seek her need exhaust themselves — in her mating month they will find her. ²⁵Keep your feet from going bare and your throat from thirst! But you said, 'It is hopeless! No — I love strangers, and after them I will go.' ²⁶As a thief is shamed when he is caught, so the house of Israel will be shamed — they, their kings, their officials, their priests, and their prophets, ²⁷who say to a tree, 'You are my father,' and to a stone, 'You gave birth to me.' For they have turned their backs to me, not their faces. Yet in the time of their disaster they say, 'Rise up and save us!' ²⁸Where then are the gods you made for yourself? Let them rise up — if they can save you in the time of your disaster! For your gods have become as numerous as your cities, O Judah. ²⁹Why do you bring a case against me? All of you have rebelled against me," declares the LORD. ³⁰In vain I struck your children — they did not accept correction. Your own sword has devoured your prophets like a ravaging lion. ³¹You of this generation — see the word of the LORD! Have I been a wilderness to Israel, or a land of thick darkness? Why then do my people say, 'We roam free! We will come to you no more'? ³²Does a young woman forget her jewelry? Does a bride forget her sash? Yet my people have forgotten me for days beyond counting. ³³How skillfully you arrange your path to seek lovers! You have even taught the worst women your ways. ³⁴On your garments is found the blood of the innocent poor. You did not catch them breaking in — yet despite all this, ³⁵you say, 'I am innocent; surely his anger has turned from me.' Now I am about to enter into judgment with you because you say, 'I have not sinned.' ³⁶Why do you run about so recklessly, changing your course? You will be put to shame by Egypt, just as you were put to shame by Assyria. ³⁷From this alliance too you will go out with your hands on your head, for the LORD has rejected those you trust in, and you will find no success through them.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The standard prophetic reception formula. This introduces the first extended oracle of Jeremiah's ministry — a covenant lawsuit that runs through the entire chapter.
2. The verse introduces the 'honeymoon' metaphor — Israel as God's young bride following him through the wilderness. The word *kelulutayikh* ('your bridal days, your betrothal') comes from the root *k-l-l* and describes the period of wedding celebration. The image of following God 'through a land not yet sown' portrays the wilderness as barren and dangerous, making Israel's youthful trust all the more remarkable. This idealized memory of wilderness devotion also appears in Hosea 2:14-15.
3. The firstfruits metaphor (*re'shit tevu'atoh*) is drawn from the agricultural law — the first portion of the harvest belongs exclusively to God (Leviticus 23:10, Deuteronomy 26:1-11). Israel's status as 'firstfruits' means she is consecrated, set apart, and under divine protection. The verb *ye'eshamu* ('they incurred guilt') is cultic language — those who devoured Israel committed a sacril offense, not merely a political one.
4. The address shifts from Jerusalem specifically to 'the house of Jacob' and 'all the clans of the house of Israel,' broadening the audience to the entire people. The name 'Jacob' recalls the patriarch and the covenant origins of the nation. The word *mishpechot* ('clans, families') encompasses every kinship unit within Israel.
5. The covenant lawsuit opens with a devastating rhetorical question: God demands to know what injustice (*avel*, 'wrong, iniquity, crookedness') his people found in him. The implied answer is 'none.' The wordplay *hevel/yehbalu* ('worthless things/became worthless') is devastating — Israel became like what it worshipped. The word *hevel* ('breath, vapor, emptiness') is the same word that dominates Ecclesiastes ('vanity of vanities'). Applied to idols, it means they are insubstantial, empty, nothing.

6. Five descriptions pile up to emphasize the wilderness as hostile terrain: aravah ('desert plain'), shuchah ('ravine, pit'), tsiyyah ('drought, parched land'), tsalmavet ('deep darkness, death-shadow'), and uninhabited wasteland. God guided Israel through all of this, yet they never asked 'Where is the LORD?' The word tsalmavet traditionally rendered 'shadow of death' may be a compound (tsel + mavet) or an intensive form meaning 'deep darkness.' We render 'deep darkness' as the more linguistically defensible reading.
7. The word karmel ('fertile land, garden land, orchard') describes the promised land as an abundant garden — the opposite of the wilderness. The possessive pronouns are critical: 'my land' (artsi), 'my inheritance' (nachalati) — the land belongs to God, not to Israel. Israel is a tenant who has polluted the landlord's property. The word to'evah ('abomination, detestable thing') is covenant-curse vocabulary — the worst possible evaluation of what Israel has done with God's gift.
8. Four leadership groups are indicted: priests (kohanim), handlers of the Torah (tofsei hatorah — likely scribes or legal authorities), shepherds (ro'im — rulers or political leaders, using the common ancient Near Eastern metaphor of king as shepherd), and prophets (nevi'im). Each has failed in a way specific to their role. The phrase lo yeda'uni ('they did not know me') uses the covenantal yada — the Torah specialists, whose job was to maintain covenant knowledge, have lost knowledge of God himself.
9. The verb ariv ('contend, bring a case, argue in court') is the technical term for a covenant lawsuit. God is not merely complaining — he is filing formal charges. The extension to 'your grandchildren' (benei veneikhem) indicates that the covenant violation is not a single generation's failure but a generational pattern that will carry consequences forward.
10. God calls witnesses from the far west (Kittim/Cyprus, representing the Mediterranean world) and the far east (Kedar, the Arabian desert tribes descended from Ishmael, Genesis 25:13). The rhetorical strategy is to survey the entire known world for a parallel to Israel's behavior. Kittim originally referred to the city of Kition on Cyprus but came to represent western maritime peoples generally.
11. The argument from lesser to greater: if pagan nations, whose gods are mere constructs (lo elohim, 'not gods'), remain faithful to them, how much more absurd is it for Israel to abandon the living God? The word kevodo ('his Glory') is a title for God himself — some scholars connect this to the kavod theology of God's manifest presence. Paul quotes this logic in Romans 1:23, applying it to humanity's general exchange of God's glory for created images.
12. God summons the heavens themselves as witnesses — a convention of the covenant lawsuit genre (cf. Deuteronomy 32:1, Isaiah 1:2, Micah 6:1-2). Three imperatives pile up: shommu ('be appalled, be stunned'), sa'aru ('shudder, be horrified'), charvu ('be desolated, be dried up'). The heavens themselves should be devastated by what Israel has done. The escalating intensity — appalled, shuddering, desolate — reflects the enormity of the covenant breach.
13. This is the theological center of the chapter. The 'two evils' are not independent but causally linked: abandoning God (the spring) is what drove them to dig cisterns (idols). The word meqor ('spring, source, fountain') describes naturally flowing water — the most precious resource in an arid land. Cisterns (bo'arot) are inferior by nature: they hold only collected rainwater, which goes stale. Broken cisterns are utterly useless — they cannot even hold the inferior water they were built to store. Jesus draws on this imagery in John 4:10-14 ('living water') and 7:37-38.
14. Two rhetorical questions challenge Israel's degraded state: Israel is not a slave (eved) by nature, nor a home-born servant (yelid bayit — one born into the household of a master). Yet Israel has become baz ('plunder, spoil') — the condition of a conquered and looted nation. The implicit answer: Israel's degradation is self-inflicted, the consequence of abandoning God's protection.
15. The 'young lions' (kefirim) are a metaphor for invading nations — powerful, aggressive, predatory. The verbs describe total devastation: the land is shammah ('desolation, waste') and the cities are nitsetah ('burned, set ablaze'). The image is of a helpless prey animal being torn apart by lions — Israel without God's protection is defenseless.
16. Memphis (Noph) and Tahpanhes were major Egyptian cities. The image of 'shattering the skull' (literally 'grazing/feeding on your crown') describes Egyptian military domination. This likely refers to Pharaoh Necho's campaigns through Judah. The verb yir'ukh ('they graze/feed upon you') uses pastoral imagery — Israel is being consumed like grass by Egyptian cattle.
17. The rhetorical question forces Israel to recognize self-inflicted causation. The phrase be'et molikhekh baderekh ('at the time he was leading you on the way') heightens the absurdity — Israel abandoned God while God was actively guiding them. The abandonment was not during a time of divine absence but during a time of divine presence.
18. The 'waters of Shichor' is the Nile (the name comes from an Egyptian word for a branch of the Nile delta). The 'River' (nahar) without further specification always means the Euphrates in Hebrew. The metaphor is political: 'drinking the waters' of Egypt or Assyria means seeking military alliance with those empires. Instead of trusting the 'spring of living water' (v. 13), Israel is running to drink from foreign rivers — trading divine protection for imperial patronage.
19. The word meshuvotayikh ('your turnings away, your apostasies') comes from the root shuv ('turn') — the same root that means 'repentance' when directed toward God. Here it describes turning away from God, the opposite direction. Israel's own infidelity will serve as its own punishment — the consequences are built into the betrayal itself. The title Adonai YHWH Tseva'ot ('the Lord GOD of Hosts') combines three divine designations for maximum authority.
20. The breaking of yoke and chains refers to the Exodus liberation. God freed Israel from Egyptian bondage, but Israel used that freedom not for covenant faithfulness but for spiritual adultery. The Qere reading 'I will not serve' (e'evod rather than e'evor) better fits the context of rebellion. The phrase 'every high hill and under every leafy tree' is standard language for Canaanite worship sites (bamot, 'high places') where fertility cults

operated. The verb *tso'ah* ('sprawling, lying down') combined with *zonah* ('prostitute') creates an explicitly sexual image for idolatry.

21. The vine metaphor for Israel appears also in Isaiah 5:1-7 (the Song of the Vineyard), Psalm 80:8-16, and Ezekiel 15. The *sorekah* ('choice vine') was a premium variety producing the finest grapes. The *zera emet* ('seed of truth/reliability') means the planting stock was genuine and true. The shock is the transformation: a carefully planted premium vine has degenerated into *sarei haggefen nokhriyyah* ('wild shoots of a foreign vine') — it has become something other than what was planted. The question 'how?' (*eikh*) expresses divine bewilderment.
22. *Neter* ('lye, natron') is a mineral alkali used as a cleaning agent in the ancient world. *Borit* ('soap, alkali') is a plant-based cleanser. Together they represent the strongest cleansing agents available. The verb *nikhtam* ('is stained, is marked') suggests a permanent stain that no human effort can remove — the guilt is too deeply embedded in the fabric. The image anticipates the later promise that God himself will cleanse what Israel cannot clean (31:34, 33:8).
23. Israel's denial — 'I am not defiled' — is contradicted by the evidence. 'The valley' (*gai*) likely refers to the Valley of Hinnom (Ge-Hinnom), where child sacrifice was practiced (7:31, 19:2-6, 32:35). The camel metaphor is vivid: a *bikrah qallah* ('young female camel, swift/restless') that cannot be controlled, running in every direction. The image captures the frantic, undisciplined nature of Israel's pursuit of foreign gods. The plural *ha-Be'alim* ('the Baals') refers to the various local manifestations of Baal worship.
24. The metaphor escalates from restless camel to wild donkey (*pereh*) in heat. The image is deliberately crude and sexually explicit: the wild donkey sniffs the wind to catch the scent of a mate, driven by uncontrollable lust. The phrase *be'avvat nafshah* ('in the desire of her appetite/soul') describes an appetite that dominates the entire being. The point: Israel's pursuit of foreign gods is not a rational choice but an animal-like compulsion. The males (those who seek her) do not even need to pursue — she makes herself available. Hosea uses similar imagery (Hosea 8:9).
25. The warning to keep feet shod and throat moist describes the physical toll of chasing after foreign gods — running barefoot and parched through the wilderness in pursuit. Israel's response is chilling: *no'ash* ('it is hopeless, it is useless') — not repentance but resignation to addiction. The declaration 'I love strangers' (*zarim*, 'foreigners, foreign gods') is Israel's own confession of infidelity, spoken defiantly rather than penitently.
26. The simile is pointed: a thief is not ashamed of stealing — he is ashamed of being caught. Israel's shame is not moral remorse but the embarrassment of exposure. The list of four leadership groups (kings, officials, priests, prophets) matches the indictment of verse 8, creating a structural link between the leaders' failure and the people's shame.
27. The absurdity is at full force: calling a wooden idol 'father' and a stone idol 'mother' (the verb *yelidinu*, 'you gave birth to us,' is feminine, suggesting the stone represents a mother goddess — likely *Asherah*). They have turned *oref* ('the back of the neck') to God instead of *panim* ('face'). Yet when disaster strikes, they turn back to God with 'rise up and save us' — expecting from God the help they sought from wood and stone.
28. The taunt reprises the accusation of 11:13: Judah has manufactured a god for every city. The phrase *asher asita lakh* ('which you made for yourself') emphasizes that these are human manufactures, not divine beings. The challenge 'let them rise up, if they can save you' echoes Elijah's mockery of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:27). Manufactured gods cannot rise because they were never alive.
29. The irony is sharp: Israel tries to bring a *riv* ('case, lawsuit') against God, but it is God who has the legitimate case against them. The verb *pesha'tem* ('you have rebelled') is the language of willful, deliberate transgression — not accidental straying but conscious defection. The word *kullekhem* ('all of you') eliminates any claim of individual innocence.
30. God's disciplinary measures (*hikketi*, 'I struck') were intended as *musar* ('correction, instruction, discipline') — not punishment for its own sake but corrective action to bring about return. It was wasted. Worse, Israel has killed its own prophets — the very messengers God sent to bring them back. The sword is 'your sword' (*charbkhem*) — Israel's own violence turned against God's spokesmen. This is the murderous nation that Jeremiah has been sent to address.
31. God addresses 'this generation' (*hador*) directly. The rhetorical questions challenge Israel to name any failure on God's part — has he been barren wilderness or impenetrable darkness to them? The word *radnu* is debated: it may derive from *rud* ('to roam, wander') meaning 'we roam freely,' or from *radah* ('to rule') meaning 'we are lords.' We follow the reading 'we roam free,' which better fits the context of Israel asserting independence from God.
32. The comparison is between something unthinkable and something Israel has done. A *betulah* ('young woman, virgin') would never forget her ornaments (*edyah*), and a *kallah* ('bride') would never forget her wedding sash (*qishurehah*). These are treasured, identity-defining possessions. Yet Israel has forgotten God — not for a moment but for *yamim ein mispar* ('days without number'). The implied question: is God less precious to Israel than jewelry is to a bride?
33. The verb *teitiviy* ('you make good, you improve, you perfect') describes the practiced skill of seduction — Israel has become expert at arranging liaisons with foreign gods and foreign powers. The accusation 'you have taught the wicked your ways' (*et ha-ra'ot limmadt et derakhayikh*) means Israel has become so proficient at infidelity that even seasoned practitioners of evil learn from her. The irony is biting — the people called to be a light to the nations have instead become their tutor in wickedness.
34. The accusation shifts from spiritual adultery to social injustice: the blood of innocent poor people (*evyonim neqiyyim*) stains Israel's clothing. The phrase *lo ba-machteret metza'tim* ('you did not find them breaking in') means these were not thieves killed in legitimate self-defense (cf. Exodus 22:2, which permits killing a burglar caught in the act). These were innocent people murdered without justification. The bloodstains are visible evidence of guilt — not hidden but on the hems of their garments for all to see.

35. Israel's most damning statement: 'I have not sinned' (lo chatati). With blood on her garments, with altars on every hill, with the evidence of chapters of accusation stacked against her, Israel still claims innocence. The verb nishpat ('I will judge, I will enter into judgment') indicates formal legal proceedings. God does not respond to the denial with argument but with a court date — the trial will settle the matter.
36. The verb tezli ('you run about, you cheapen yourself') suggests frantic, undignified rushing from one alliance to another. Israel keeps changing political partners — first Assyria, now Egypt — and each betrays her. The verb leshanot ('to change') describes Israel's inconstancy: she cannot commit to one path. The promise of shame from Egypt mirrors the shame already experienced from Assyria, establishing a pattern: every imperial alliance ends in humiliation.
37. The image of leaving 'with hands on your head' (yadayikh al roshekh) is a gesture of mourning, grief, and humiliation — the posture of a captive or a mourner (cf. 2 Samuel 13:19, Tamar after her assault). The word mivtachayikh ('your sources of confidence, your trusted ones') refers to the foreign powers Israel has relied upon. God has rejected (ma'as) these alliances — they are not merely unhelpful but divinely opposed. The chapter ends not with repentance but with the certainty of failure: Israel's chosen path leads nowhere.

3

Summary: *Jeremiah 3 extends the faithless wife metaphor introduced in chapter 2, comparing Israel and Judah to adulterous women who have abandoned their husband — the LORD. God asks whether a divorced woman can return to her first husband (invoking Deuteronomy 24:1-4), yet still calls Israel to return. The chapter contrasts 'faithless Israel' with 'treacherous Judah,' declaring that Judah is worse because she witnessed her sister's punishment yet did not learn from it. The second half pivots to an extraordinary vision of future restoration: the ark of the covenant will no longer be remembered, all nations will gather to Jerusalem, and God's people will call him 'My Father' and never again turn away.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The verb shuv ('return/turn') dominates this chapter — appearing in nearly every form and nuance, sometimes meaning 'turn back to God' and sometimes 'turn away from God.' The same root carries repentance and apostasy, faithfulness and betrayal. This wordplay is untranslatable in English and represents one of Jeremiah's most sophisticated rhetorical devices. The declaration in verse 16 that the ark of the covenant 'will not come to mind, nor will they remember it, nor will they miss it, nor will it be made again' is one of the most radical statements in the Hebrew Bible — the holiest object in Israel's worship is declared obsolete. We also note that verses 1-5 use second-person feminine singular (addressing Judah/Israel as a woman), while verses 12-18 shift to second-person masculine plural (addressing the people as a community), and verses 19-25 shift again to a communal confession. Each shift in address required careful rendering.*

Translation Friction: *The legal analogy in verse 1 invokes Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which prohibits a divorced woman from returning to her first husband if she has married another. God applies this to Israel's idolatry — she has 'been with many lovers' — yet astonishingly still calls her to return. This theological tension (law says no return; grace says return) is central to the chapter and we preserved it without resolving it. The word meshuvah ('faithlessness, apostasy, turning away') in verse 6 is built from the same root shuv as teshuvah ('repentance, return'), creating a paradox we documented. The shift between poetry (vv. 1-5, 12-13, 19-25) and prose (vv. 6-11, 14-18) required careful formatting decisions.*

Connections: *The divorce analogy connects to Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and Hosea 1-3 (the faithless wife motif). The call 'Return, faithless Israel' anticipates the great return oracles of chapters 30-33. The vision of the ark no longer needed (v. 16) anticipates the new covenant of 31:31-34 where the law is internalized. The phrase 'My Father' (avi, v. 4, 19) connects to Hosea 11:1 and foreshadows the new covenant intimacy of 31:9. The communal confession in verses 22-25 foreshadows the penitential liturgy of Daniel 9. The contrast between Israel and Judah echoes Ezekiel 16 and 23.*

1If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and becomes another man's, can he return to her again? Would not that land be utterly defiled? Yet you have prostituted yourself with many lovers — and still you would return to me? declares the LORD. 2Lift your eyes to the barren heights and look — where have you not been violated? You sat waiting for them beside the roads like a desert nomad lying in ambush. You have defiled the land with your prostitution and your wickedness. 3So the showers have been withheld and the spring rains have not come. Yet you have the brazen face of a prostitute — you refuse to be ashamed. 4Have you not just now called out to me, 'My Father! You are the companion of my youth'? 5'Will he

stay angry forever? Will he hold a grudge to the end?' Look — you have spoken this way, yet you have done every evil you could. ⁶The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: Have you seen what faithless Israel has done? She went up on every high hill and under every spreading tree, and she prostituted herself there. ⁷I thought, 'After she has done all these things, she will return to me.' But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. ⁸I saw that for all the acts of adultery that faithless Israel had committed, I sent her away and gave her a certificate of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah was not afraid — she too went and prostituted herself. ⁹Because she treated her prostitution so lightly, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and with wood. ¹⁰And even after all this, her treacherous sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart but only in pretense, declares the LORD. ¹¹Then the LORD said to me: Faithless Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.

¹²Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say:

Return, faithless Israel — declares the LORD.

I will not look on you with anger,
for I am faithful in love, declares the LORD.

I will not hold a grudge forever.

¹³Only acknowledge your guilt —
that you have rebelled against the LORD your God
and scattered your favors to strangers
under every spreading tree,
and you have not obeyed my voice,
declares the LORD.

¹⁴Return, unfaithful children — declares the LORD — for I am your master. I will take you, one from a city and two from a clan, and I will bring you to Zion. ¹⁵Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, and they will tend you with knowledge and wisdom. ¹⁶When you have multiplied and increased in the land, in those days — declares the LORD — they will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' It will not come to mind, they will not remember it, they will not miss it, and it will not be made again. ¹⁷At that time they will call Jerusalem 'the throne of the LORD,' and all nations will gather to it — to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. They will no longer walk in the stubbornness of their evil hearts. ¹⁸In those days the house of Judah will walk together with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of the north to the land that I gave as an inheritance to your ancestors. ¹⁹I myself said, 'How gladly I would set you among my children and give you a desirable land — the most beautiful inheritance among the nations!' I said, 'You will call me "My Father" and never turn away from following me.' ²⁰But just as a wife betrays her husband, so you have betrayed me, O house of Israel, declares the LORD.

²¹A voice is heard on the barren heights —
the weeping and pleading of the children of Israel,
for they have twisted their path;
they have forgotten the LORD their God.

²²"Return, unfaithful children —
I will heal your faithlessness."
"Here we are — we come to you,
for you are the LORD our God.

²³Truly, the hills are a delusion,
the commotion on the mountains is a lie.
Truly, in the LORD our God
is the salvation of Israel.

24The shameful thing has devoured the labor of our ancestors since our youth — their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters.

25Let us lie down in our shame;
let our disgrace cover us.
For we have sinned against the LORD our God —
we and our ancestors,
from our youth until this very day.
We have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verse invokes the law of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which prohibits a man from remarrying a wife who has married another. The rhetorical question expects the answer 'no' — yet God's final statement overturns the expected conclusion. The verb *zanit* ('you have prostituted yourself') is graphic and deliberate, not merely 'played the harlot' as in the KJV. The phrase *re'im rabbim* ('many lovers') intensifies the indictment — this is not a single lapse but serial unfaithfulness.
2. The word *shefayim* ('barren heights, bare hills') refers to the high places where idolatrous worship — including cult prostitution — took place. The comparison to an *aravi* ('Arabian, desert nomad') lying in wait beside the road likens Judah to a bandit or a roadside prostitute eagerly seeking partners. The word *shugalt* ('you were lain with') is a strong sexual term indicating violation or debasement, not merely 'lying with.' The defilement (*chanaf*) of the land echoes the Deuteronomic warning that sexual sin and idolatry pollute the land itself.
3. The withholding of rain is covenant-curse language (Deuteronomy 28:23-24) — drought is not random weather but divine judgment. The phrase *metsach islah zonah* ('forehead of a prostitute-woman') indicates shamelessness — a brazen, unembarrassed demeanor. The verb *me'ant hikkelem* ('you refused to be ashamed') indicates not inability but deliberate refusal to feel shame. The *malkosh* ('spring rain, latter rain') was the late rain critical for the grain harvest — its absence meant famine.
4. The word *avi* ('my father') is an intimate address — the people appeal to God as a child to a parent, seeking tenderness. The word *alluph* ('companion, guide, intimate friend') comes from the same root as the word used for the 'gentle' lamb in 11:19, here meaning a trusted, familiar companion. The phrase *ne'urai* ('my youth') refers to the early period of the covenant relationship, the 'honeymoon' at Sinai. The question is whether this appeal is genuine repentance or manipulative language — God's response in verse 5 suggests the latter.
5. The people's words in the first half are self-serving — they assume God's anger must eventually pass, regardless of their behavior. The devastating reply in the second half exposes the gap between their pious words and their actions: 'you have done every evil you could' (*vattukali*, 'and you prevailed' — you succeeded in doing all the evil possible). The verb *tukali* implies mastery — they have become experts at wickedness.
6. The word *meshuvah* ('faithless, apostate, backsliding') is formed from *shuv* — literally 'turned-away Israel.' The phrase 'every high hill and every spreading tree' is a standard formula for Canaanite worship sites (cf. Deuteronomy 12:2, 1 Kings 14:23, 2 Kings 17:10). The historical setting in Josiah's reign (640-609 BCE) places this oracle during the reform period when the full extent of Israel's idolatry was being uncovered.
7. God's expectation — 'she will return' (*tashuv*) — uses the same verb *shuv* yet again, now expressing divine hope met with disappointment. The word *bagodah* ('treacherous') describes Judah, who is about to be shown as worse than Israel. The sisterhood metaphor (Israel and Judah as sisters) appears also in Ezekiel 16 and 23, where the metaphor is developed at much greater length.
8. The *sefer kerituteyha* ('certificate of divorce') is the legal document prescribed in Deuteronomy 24:1. God is depicted as having formally divorced northern Israel — the Assyrian exile of 722 BCE is framed as marital dissolution. The devastating point is that Judah watched her sister's destruction and learned nothing from it. The word *ni'afah* ('committed adultery') is the technical term for marital infidelity, maintaining the marriage metaphor.
9. The phrase 'stone and wood' refers to the materials of idol worship — stone pillars (*matstsebot*) and wooden Asherah poles, or carved stone and wooden images. The irony of 'committing adultery with stone and wood' is biting — Judah has abandoned the living God for lifeless materials. The verb *chanaf* ('defile, pollute') echoes verse 2 and indicates that the land itself is contaminated by idolatry.
10. The phrase *besheqer* ('in falsehood, in pretense') likely refers to Josiah's reforms — which were genuine on the king's part but superficial among the people. The outward destruction of idols did not correspond to inward transformation. The failure to return 'with her whole heart' (*bekhol libbah*) echoes the great Shema command of Deuteronomy 6:5. Judah's repentance was performative, not genuine.
11. The verb *tsiddeqah* ('has justified herself, has shown herself righteous') is a stunning comparison — not that Israel was righteous, but that she is more righteous by comparison with Judah. Judah had the advantage of watching Israel's destruction and still refused to learn. The comparative judgment — the worse sin belongs to the one who had more warning — is a principle Jesus applies in Matthew 11:20-24.
12. The direction *tsafonah* ('toward the north') is toward Assyria, where the northern tribes were exiled in 722 BCE. The call *shuvah meshuvah yisra'el* ('return, faithless Israel') creates an untranslatable wordplay — the verb *shuv* ('return') is addressed to *meshuvah* ('turned-away') Israel, using the same root for both the command and the condition. The adjective *chasid* ('merciful, faithful in love') is rendered 'faithful in love' to connect it to *chesed*, the signature covenant term.

13. The verb *pasha't* ('you have rebelled, transgressed') denotes willful rebellion, not accidental failure. The phrase 'scattered your ways to strangers' (*tefarezri et derakhayikh lazzarim*) is a sexual metaphor — distributing her favors indiscriminately, like a promiscuous woman. The shift from feminine singular (*de'i*, 'acknowledge') to masculine plural (*shema'tem*, 'you obeyed') in the same verse reflects the fluid movement between the personified woman and the actual community.
14. The phrase *ba'alti vakhem* is profoundly ambiguous — *ba'al* means both 'husband/master' and 'to marry/to own.' God simultaneously claims marital authority and ownership. The wordplay *shuvu banim shovavim* ('return, turning-away children') again exploits the *shuv* root. The numbers 'one from a city, two from a clan' indicate that restoration will begin with a small remnant, not a mass return — even individual faithful ones matter to God.
15. The word *ro'im* ('shepherds, pastors') refers to leaders — kings, priests, and prophets who guide the people. The phrase *kellibbi* ('according to my heart') echoes the description of David (1 Samuel 13:14, 'a man after God's own heart'). The future leaders will not merely rule but 'tend' (*ra'u*) the people — the shepherd metaphor implies care, feeding, and protection. The pairing *de'ah vehaskeil* ('knowledge and wisdom') indicates competent, discerning leadership.
16. The fourfold negation is emphatic: (1) they will not say its name, (2) it will not come to mind (*lo ya'aleh al lev*), (3) they will not remember it, (4) they will not miss it (*lo yifqodu* — 'they will not visit/attend to it'). The ark of the covenant was already lost or hidden by Jeremiah's time (its fate is unknown after the Babylonian destruction), but this oracle goes further — it declares that the ark will not even be rebuilt. The covenant relationship will transcend its physical symbols.
17. Jerusalem replaces the ark as the locus of God's presence — the entire city becomes his 'throne' (*kisse*'), not just the mercy seat between the cherubim. The gathering of all nations (*kol haggoyim*) expands the vision beyond Israel to a universal scope. The phrase *sheriyut libbam hara'* ('stubbornness of their evil heart') is the characteristic Jeremiah phrase for settled rebellion (cf. 7:24, 9:13, 11:8, 13:10).
18. The reunification of Judah and Israel — divided since Solomon's death (1 Kings 12) — is a recurring prophetic hope (cf. Ezekiel 37:15-28, Hosea 1:11). The 'land of the north' (*erets tsafon*) refers to the direction of exile (both Assyria and Babylon lie northeast of Israel, but the approach route is from the north). The word *hinachalti* ('I gave as inheritance') uses the root *nachal*, indicating permanent, ancestral possession — the land is not a rental but a family inheritance.
19. God's inner deliberation is poignant — the phrase *eikh ashitek* ('how shall I set you') expresses the desire to include Israel among the children, but the question implies difficulty. The land is described as *erets chemdah* ('a desirable land') and *nachalat tsevi* ('an inheritance of beauty/splendor'), piling up terms of loveliness. The hope 'you will call me *avi* (My Father)' echoes verse 4, but here it is God's wish rather than the people's manipulative appeal. The verb *tashuvi* ('you will turn away') is yet another *shuv* occurrence — the hope that the cycle of turning away will finally end.
20. The verse functions as a devastating pivot — after the tender vision of verses 14-19, God returns to the reality of betrayal. The word *bagdah* ('she has betrayed, dealt treacherously') is the same root used for 'treacherous Judah' (*bogdah*) in verses 7-11, now applied back to Israel. The comparison to a wife leaving her husband (*ishah mere'ah*) sustains the marriage metaphor through the chapter.
21. The *shefayim* ('barren heights') where Israel once prostituted herself (v. 2) now become the place of her weeping — the same locations associated with sin are now associated with repentance. The verb *he'ewu* ('they have twisted, perverted') from the root '*awah*' indicates their path has become crooked and distorted. The forgetting of God (*shakhekhu*) is not mere forgetfulness but willful abandonment of the covenant relationship.
22. This verse contains another concentrated *shuv* wordplay: *shuvu* ('return'), *shovavim* ('turning-away ones'), and *meshuvotekhem* ('your apostasies') are all from the same root. No English can reproduce this — the command to turn-back is addressed to those who have turned-away, promising to heal their turning-away. The response of the people begins the communal confession that runs through verse 25. The transition from divine speech to communal response happens without narrative introduction.
23. The 'hills' and 'mountains' are references to the high places where idols were worshipped — the noisy festivals (*hamon*, 'commotion, tumult') on the mountains produced nothing. The word *lasheqer* ('in vain, falsely, a lie') condemns the entire cult-worship system as deception. The contrast with the final line — *teshu'at yisra'el* ('the salvation of Israel') — sets the false worship against the true God who alone can save.
24. The word *habbosheth* ('the shame, the shameful thing') is likely a dysphemism for Baal, as in 11:13 — the scribal tradition replaces the god's name with 'shame.' The verb *akhelah* ('has devoured, consumed') casts Baal worship as a devouring force that consumed not only livestock (sacrificed to idols) but children (possibly referencing child sacrifice, cf. 7:31, 19:5, 32:35). The confession acknowledges that idolatry has been generational — 'since our youth' (*minne'ureinu*).
25. The communal confession closes with total acknowledgment — sin from youth until the present, spanning generations. The verbs *nishkevah* ('let us lie down') and *tekhassenu* ('let it cover us') depict shame as a physical weight that presses down and covers over. The word *chatanu* ('we have sinned') uses the general term for sin (*chet*, 'missing the mark'). The final clause — 'we have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God' — directly answers the covenant demand of verse 13 and echoes the covenant formula of 11:4, 7. The confession is genuine, unlike the pretense condemned in verse 10.

4

Summary: *Jeremiah 4 moves from the possibility of return to the certainty of judgment. It opens with a conditional promise — if Israel returns genuinely, blessing will follow — but quickly pivots to an urgent warning: blow the trumpet, flee to the fortified cities, for disaster is coming from the north. The chapter reaches its astonishing climax in verses 23-26, where Jeremiah describes a vision of total cosmic undoing — the earth formless and void, the heavens without light, the mountains quaking, every person gone, every bird fled. This is creation running backward, Genesis 1 in reverse, and it stands as one of the most extraordinary poetic passages in all prophetic literature.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The creation-reversal vision of verses 23-26 is unique in the Hebrew Bible. Jeremiah uses the exact phrase *tohu vavohu* ('formless and void') from Genesis 1:2 — a phrase that appears only in these two places in all of Scripture (and in a variant form in Isaiah 34:11). The prophet sees not merely destruction but de-creation: the undoing of light, land, life, and order in precisely the reverse sequence of Genesis 1. This is not hyperbole but theological statement — sin has so corrupted the created order that God's judgment constitutes a return to primordial chaos. The command to 'circumcise your hearts' (v. 4) introduces an interior demand that anticipates Deuteronomy 30:6 and the new covenant of 31:31-34. We rendered the vision sequence with deliberate echoes of Genesis 1 to help readers hear what Hebrew readers would hear immediately.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase *tohu vavohu* required careful handling — we preserved the traditional 'formless and void' because no modern paraphrase captures the primordial resonance as effectively, and the Genesis 1:2 echo must be recognizable. The verb *mul* ('circumcise') in verse 4 is literal surgical language applied metaphorically to the heart, and we retained 'circumcise' rather than softening to 'open' or 'cleanse' because the physicality of the metaphor is theologically significant. The rapid shifts between divine speech, prophetic speech, and the prophet's personal anguish (especially vv. 19-22) required careful attribution. The chapter oscillates between conditional hope (vv. 1-2) and unconditional doom (vv. 5-31) in a way that resists smooth harmonization.*

Connections: *Tohu vavohu (v. 23) connects directly to Genesis 1:2, making this the only passage outside Genesis to use the exact phrase. 'Circumcise your hearts' (v. 4) connects to Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6, and Romans 2:29. The 'lion from the thicket' (v. 7) connects to Jeremiah 5:6 and 49:19. The approaching army from the north connects to 1:13-15 and 6:1, 22. Jeremiah's anguish in verses 19-21 anticipates the confessions of 11:18-12:6, 15:10-21, and 20:7-18. The 'daughter of my people' (*bat ammi*, v. 11) is a recurring Jeremiah phrase (6:26, 8:11, 8:19, 8:21-22, 9:1). The cosmic judgment language resonates with Isaiah 24 (the 'Isaiah Apocalypse') and anticipates the new heavens and new earth of Isaiah 65:17.*

1If you return, O Israel — declares the LORD —
return to me.

If you remove your detestable things from my presence
and do not waver,

2and if you swear, 'As the LORD lives,'
in truth, in justice, and in righteousness —
then the nations will bless themselves through him,
and in him they will boast.

3For this is what the LORD says to the people of Judah and to Jerusalem:
Break up your unplowed ground;
do not sow among thorns.

⁴Circumcise yourselves to the LORD
and remove the foreskin of your hearts,
O people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem —
or my wrath will break out like fire
and burn with no one to quench it,
because of the evil of your deeds.

⁵Announce it in Judah! Proclaim it in Jerusalem!
Sound the trumpet throughout the land!
Cry out and say:
'Gather together! Let us go into the fortified cities!'

⁶Raise the signal flag toward Zion!
Flee for safety — do not stand still!
For I am bringing disaster from the north,
and great destruction.

⁷A lion has come up from his thicket;
a destroyer of nations has set out.
He has left his place
to make your land a desolation.
Your cities will be laid waste,
left without an inhabitant.

⁸For this, put on sackcloth;
mourn and wail,
for the burning anger of the LORD
has not turned back from us.

⁹On that day — declares the LORD — the courage of the king will fail, and the courage of the officials. The priests will be horrified, and the prophets will be stunned. ¹⁰Then I said, "O Lord GOD! You have surely deceived this people and Jerusalem by saying, 'You will have peace,' when the sword reaches the throat!" ¹¹At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem: A scorching wind from the barren heights in the wilderness blows toward the daughter of my people — not to winnow and not to cleanse, ¹²a wind too strong for that comes at my command. Now I myself will pronounce judgments against them.

¹³Look — he advances like storm clouds;
his chariots come like the whirlwind.
His horses are swifter than eagles.
Woe to us, for we are ruined!

¹⁴Wash the evil from your heart, O Jerusalem,
so that you may be saved.
How long will you harbor
wicked schemes within you?

¹⁵For a voice announces from Dan
and proclaims disaster from the hill country of Ephraim.

¹⁶Warn the nations — look!
Proclaim it against Jerusalem:
Besiegers are coming from a distant land;
they raise their war cry against the cities of Judah.

¹⁷They surround her like guards around a field,
because she has rebelled against me, declares the LORD.

¹⁸Your ways and your deeds have brought this upon you.
This is your punishment — how bitter it is!
It has reached your very heart.

¹⁹My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain!
The walls of my heart!
My heart pounds within me — I cannot keep silent,
for I hear the sound of the trumpet,
the alarm of war!

²⁰Disaster upon disaster is announced,
for the whole land is devastated.
Suddenly my tents are destroyed,
my tent curtains in an instant.

²¹How long must I see the battle flag
and hear the sound of the trumpet?

²²"For my people are foolish —
they do not know me.
They are senseless children
without understanding.
They are skilled at doing evil,
but they do not know how to do good."

²³I looked at the earth,
and it was formless and void.
I looked at the heavens,
and their light was gone.

²⁴I looked at the mountains,
and they were quaking.
All the hills swayed back and forth.

²⁵I looked, and there was no human being.
All the birds of the sky had fled.

²⁶I looked, and the fertile land was a wilderness.
All its cities were torn down
before the LORD,
before his burning anger.

²⁷For this is what the LORD says:
The whole land will be desolate,
but I will not make a complete end of it.

²⁸For this the earth will mourn
and the heavens above grow dark,
because I have spoken and I have purposed it.
I will not relent,
and I will not turn back from it.

²⁹At the sound of horsemen and archers
every city takes flight.
They go into the thickets;
they climb up among the rocks.
Every city is abandoned —
not a single person remains in them.

³⁰And you, O devastated one —
what will you do?
Though you dress in scarlet,
though you adorn yourself with gold jewelry,
though you enlarge your eyes with paint —
you beautify yourself for nothing.
Your lovers despise you;
they seek your life.

³¹For I hear a cry like a woman in labor,
anguish like one bearing her first child —
the voice of the daughter of Zion, gasping for breath,
stretching out her hands:
"Woe is me!
I am fainting before the killers!"

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The conditional 'if' (im) governs the entire opening — the promise of verses 1-2 depends on genuine return. The verb shuv appears twice: 'if you return... return to me,' emphasizing that the turning must be directed specifically toward God, not merely away from sin. The word shiqqucs ('detestable things, abominations') refers to idols — objects of worship that God finds repulsive. The verb tanud ('waver, stray, wander') indicates that the return must be stable, not another temporary swing between loyalty and apostasy.
2. The oath formula chai-YHWH ('as the LORD lives') was commonly invoked but here God demands it be spoken be'emet ('in truth') — not as an empty formula but as a genuine commitment. The three qualities — emet ('truth, faithfulness'), mishpat ('justice, right judgment'), tsedaqah ('righteousness') — describe the character of a properly ordered covenant community. The phrase vehitbarekhu vo goyim ('the nations will bless themselves in him') echoes the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:3, 22:18), tying Israel's return to God's universal purpose.
3. The agricultural metaphor niru lakhem nir ('plow for yourselves plowing,' i.e., break up your fallow ground) demands genuine preparation before planting. Fallow ground — hardened by neglect — cannot receive seed. The command not to sow among thorns warns against superficial reform that leaves the roots of idolatry in place. Hosea 10:12 uses identical language: 'Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD.' The metaphor anticipates the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23).
4. The phrase arlot levavkhem ('foreskins of your hearts') is strikingly physical — the metaphor transfers surgical removal of flesh to the spiritual removal of resistance and hardness from the inner life. The warning pen tets'e' ka'esh chamati ('lest my wrath go forth like fire') uses pen ('lest') to indicate that judgment is still avoidable at this point — but barely. The phrase me'in mekhabe'h ('with no one to quench') indicates that once God's wrath ignites, no power can extinguish it.

5. The tone shifts abruptly from conditional hope (vv. 1-4) to urgent alarm. The shofar ('trumpet, ram's horn') was the emergency signal for invasion — its blast meant war. The cascade of imperatives — haggidu, hashmi'u, imru, tiq'u, qir'u, mal'u — creates a sense of panicked urgency. The flight to arei hamivtsar ('fortified cities') indicates that the open countryside is no longer safe.
6. The nes ('signal flag, standard, banner') was raised to direct fleeing civilians toward a rally point. The direction mitstsafon ('from the north') echoes 1:13-15, where God first revealed to Jeremiah that judgment would come from the north — the approach route of Mesopotamian armies into Israel. The word shever ('destruction, breaking, shattering') implies total structural collapse.
7. The aryeh ('lion') is a metaphor for the invading king — likely Nebuchadnezzar, though the image is deliberately unspecific at this point. The phrase mashchit goyim ('destroyer of nations') indicates this is not a local threat but an empire-destroying force. The lion emerging from the subbeke ('thicket, lair') combines animal ferocity with military planning. The result — shammah ('desolation') and cities me'ein yoshev ('without inhabitant') — is total depopulation.
8. Sackcloth (saqqim) was the garment of mourning and lamentation — coarse goat hair worn against the skin as a sign of grief. The verb shuv appears again (lo shav, 'has not turned back') — the irony is that Israel has not 'turned back' to God (v. 1), and now God's anger has not 'turned back' from them. The same verb that could have described repentance now describes unrelenting divine wrath.
9. The word lev ('heart') here means courage and resolve, not emotion — when the heart 'perishes' (yo'vad), it means the will to lead collapses. The four leadership groups — king, officials (sarim), priests, and prophets — represent every pillar of Judean society. All four will be paralyzed. The verb nashammu ('will be horrified, desolate') for the priests and yitmahu ('will be astounded, stunned') for the prophets describe leaders too shocked to function.
10. Jeremiah's outcry ahah Adonai YHWH ('O Lord GOD!') is an expression of anguish and near-accusation. The verb hishe'ta ('you have deceived') is extraordinarily bold — Jeremiah accuses God of deception, foreshadowing the even more intense accusation in 20:7 (pittitani, 'you seduced/deceived me'). The 'peace' (shalom) that was promised may refer to the false prophets' message that Jeremiah attributes (here, in his shock) to God himself. The phrase ad hannafesh ('to the throat/life') means the sword has reached the point of death.
11. The ruach tsach ('scorching wind, dry wind') from the desert is the sirocco — the hot east wind that desiccates everything it touches. This wind comes not for the normal agricultural purpose of winnowing (lizrot) or cleaning grain (leharar) but for destruction. The phrase bat ammi ('daughter of my people') is an intimate, grieving designation — God speaks of Judah as his own daughter even while announcing her destruction.
12. The phrase ruach male' me'eloh ('a wind fuller/stronger than those') means this wind exceeds any natural storm — it is God's instrument of judgment, not merely weather. The verb adabber mishpatim ('I will speak judgments') shifts from meteorological metaphor to legal declaration — God is both storm-sender and judge. The word mishpatim ('judgments, legal sentences') is the language of the courtroom.
13. The invader is compared to unstoppable natural forces — clouds (covering the sky), a whirlwind (destroying everything in its path), and eagles (the fastest creatures known). The three comparisons escalate from visual threat (clouds) to kinetic force (whirlwind) to terrifying speed (eagles). The cry oy lanu ki shuddadnu ('woe to us, for we are ruined!') is the people's own voice breaking into the oracle — the transition from warning to lament.
14. The verb kabbesi ('wash') is the technical term for laundering cloth — scrubbing stains out of fabric. Applied to the heart, it demands thorough cleansing, not a surface rinse. The word machshevot ('schemes, thoughts, plans') combined with onekh ('your wickedness, iniquity') indicates that the problem is not merely sinful actions but sinful planning — the heart itself generates evil. The question 'how long?' (ad matai) implies that delay is no longer possible.
15. Dan was the northernmost city of Israel — the first point of contact for an invading army from the north. Mount Ephraim (har Efrayim) lies between Dan and Jerusalem. The progression Dan Ephraim Jerusalem traces the invader's route southward. The voice (qol) announcing disaster is that of the advance warning runners who would relay news of the army's approach from station to station.
16. The word notserim ('watchers, besiegers, guards') can mean those who watch over a city in siege — surrounding it to prevent escape. The phrase erets hammerchaq ('a distant land') keeps the invader's identity ambiguous while emphasizing the vast distance they have traveled to bring judgment. The verb yittenu qolam ('they give their voice') refers to the war cry — the terrifying shout of an attacking army.
17. The simile compares the besieging army to shomerei sadai ('field guards') — workers who surround a cultivated field to keep animals out. The image is one of total encirclement. The reason for the siege is stated directly: ki oti maratah ('because she has rebelled against me'). The verb marah ('to rebel, to be contentious') makes the invasion not a geopolitical event but a covenant consequence.
18. The verse places responsibility squarely on the people: darkekh uma'alalayikh ('your ways and your deeds') have caused the invasion. The word mar ('bitter') describes the taste of judgment — not merely painful but nauseating. The phrase naga' ad libbek ('it has reached your heart') echoes the earlier command to circumcise the heart (v. 4) — the heart they refused to open to God is now pierced by judgment.
19. This is Jeremiah's personal eruption into the oracle — the prophet's own body responds to the vision of destruction. The word me'ai ('my bowels, my inward parts') refers to the visceral, gut-level pain — the deepest physical reaction to emotional trauma. The phrase qirot libbi ('walls of my heart') is unique — as if the heart itself has walls that are shaking. The verb ochilah ('I writhe, I am in pain') describes the convulsions of anguish. This is the beginning of the personal prophetic lament that marks Jeremiah's unique contribution to prophetic literature.
20. The phrase shever al shever ('disaster upon disaster, breaking upon breaking') conveys cascading catastrophe — each wave of destruction followed immediately by another. The 'tents' (ohalai) and 'tent curtains' (yeri'otai) represent homes and personal shelter. The words pit'om ('suddenly') and rega' ('in an instant') emphasize the speed of the collapse — there is no gradual decline, only instant obliteration.

- 21.** The nes ('banner, signal flag') and shofar ('trumpet') are the instruments of war — the visual and auditory signals of battle. Jeremiah's question 'how long?' (ad matai) is both a lament and an accusation — he is forced to witness destruction he cannot prevent. This echoes the psalms of lament (Psalm 13:1-2, 'How long, O LORD?').
- 22.** God answers Jeremiah's lament with a devastating character assessment. The word evil ('foolish') describes not intellectual deficiency but moral stupidity — willful ignorance of God. The contrast chakhamim hemah lehara' ('they are wise at evil') with uleheitiv lo yada'u ('but doing good they do not know') is bitterly ironic — their expertise is in wrongdoing, their incompetence is in righteousness. The word sekhalim ('senseless, stupid') is harsher than evil — it implies thick-headed obtuseness.
- 23.** We preserved 'formless and void' — the traditional rendering of tohu vavohu — specifically because the Genesis 1:2 echo must be immediately recognizable to English readers familiar with creation language. Any paraphrase ('chaotic wasteland,' 'empty desolation') would lose the intertextual connection. The fourfold 'I looked' sequence (ra'iti... v. 23, 24, 25, 26) structures the vision as a systematic survey of de-creation: earth, heavens, mountains, living creatures — each domain of Genesis 1 undone in order.
- 24.** The mountains — symbols of permanence and stability in Hebrew thought (Psalm 125:1-2) — are ro'ashim ('quaking, trembling'). The verb hitqalqelu ('they swayed, moved to and fro') for the hills suggests violent oscillation. In Genesis 1, God separated the waters and let dry land appear (Genesis 1:9-10); here the solid ground itself becomes unstable. The creation-reversal sequence continues: after earth and light (v. 23), the stability of the terrain (v. 24).
- 25.** The word ha'adam ('the human, humanity') echoes Genesis 1:26-27, where God created ha'adam. Now ha'adam is gone — de-creation has reversed the sixth day. The birds of the sky (of hashamayim) were created on the fifth day (Genesis 1:20-21); they too have fled. The sequence precisely reverses Genesis: light gone (v. 23 = Day 1 reversed), land unstable (v. 24 = Day 3 reversed), humans gone (v. 25a = Day 6 reversed), birds gone (v. 25b = Day 5 reversed). The Hebrew ein ('there was not') has the absolute finality of absence.
- 26.** The karmel ('fertile land, orchard, garden land') has become midbar ('wilderness, desert') — the cultivated abundance of Genesis 1:11-12 (vegetation) and 1:29 (seed-bearing plants) is reversed. The cities — the pinnacle of human civilization — are nittsetsu ('torn down, demolished'). The cause is stated twice for emphasis: mipenei YHWH, mipenei charon appo ('before the LORD, before his burning anger'). The vision has now completed its survey: cosmos (v. 23), terrain (v. 24), life (v. 25), civilization (v. 26) — all undone.
- 27.** After the total de-creation vision of verses 23-26, this verse introduces a stunning qualification: vekhalah lo e'eseh ('but a complete end I will not make'). The judgment, however cosmic in its imagery, will not be final — a thread of hope persists even in the most absolute destruction oracle. The word shemamah ('desolation, horror') describes a landscape so devastated that it causes shuddering in anyone who sees it.
- 28.** The earth mourns (te'eval) and the heavens darken (qaderu) — creation itself responds to God's judgment with grief. The verb zammoti ('I have purposed, I have planned') indicates deliberate intent, not impulsive rage. The double negation lo nichamti ('I will not relent') and lo ashuv ('I will not turn back') uses shuv once more — God will not 'turn back' from judgment, just as the people would not 'turn back' to him. The irony of shuv continues to the end.
- 29.** The panic is universal — kol ha'ir ('every city') flees. The flight into thickets (ba'avim) and up onto rocks (bakkefim) depicts civilians scrambling for any hiding place. The word azuvah ('abandoned, deserted, forsaken') carries emotional weight — the cities are not just empty but forsaken, like a wife abandoned by her husband (cf. Isaiah 54:6), connecting back to the marital metaphor of chapter 3.
- 30.** Jerusalem is personified as a woman trying to make herself attractive to her former lovers (the foreign allies she courted through political treaties and religious syncretism). The scarlet clothing (shani), gold jewelry (adi zahav), and eye paint (pukh) are the trappings of seduction. The bitter irony: the lovers she adorns herself for now want to kill her (nafshekh yevaqueshu, 'they seek your life'). The word ma'asu ('they despise, reject') means her allies have turned into her destroyers.
- 31.** The chapter closes with a devastating image: bat Tsiyon ('the daughter of Zion') is compared to a woman in her first labor (kemavkirah) — the most painful and terrifying birth experience, compounded by inexperience. The verb tityappeach ('she gasps, she pants') describes the ragged breathing of extreme pain or terror. The stretching out of hands (tefaresh kappeha) is the gesture of desperate supplication — reaching for help that will not come. Her final cry — ki ayfah nafshi lehoregim ('my soul faints before the killers') — ends the chapter with the voice of a dying city.

5

Summary: *Jeremiah 5 intensifies the indictment of Jerusalem with a divine challenge: search the city for even one person who acts justly and seeks truth, and God will pardon it. The search proves futile — from the poorest to the greatest, all have broken the yoke and shattered the bonds of covenant. The chapter catalogs the nation's sins: adultery and idolatry, willful spiritual blindness, false prophets who prophesy lies, and a people who love it so. God announces that a distant, ancient nation will come as the instrument of judgment — a terrifying army that devours harvest, flocks, sons, daughters, and fortified cities.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The opening challenge to find one righteous person echoes Abraham's negotiation with God over Sodom (Genesis 18:22-33), but with a devastating reduction — Abraham bargained God down to ten righteous, while here God asks for only one and finds none. The language of verses 20-25 presents a striking courtroom theology: creation itself obeys God's boundaries (the sea stays within its shore), but Israel refuses every boundary God has set. The false prophecy motif appears for the first time with the phrase 'wind and there is no word in them' (v. 13), and the condemnation of prophets and priests in verses 30-31 anticipates the 'shalom shalom' crisis of chapter 6. The 'ancient nation' of verse 15 is Babylon, though never named here — the anonymity increases the dread.*

Translation Friction: *The verb zannah ('commit adultery/prostitution') in verse 7 carries both literal sexual and metaphorical idolatrous meaning, and we rendered it to preserve this dual register. The word me'anah ('they have refused') in verse 3 uses the same root as Pharaoh's refusal in Exodus, creating an ironic reversal — Israel now acts like Egypt. In verse 22, the rhetorical question 'Do you not fear me?' (ha-oti lo tira'u) contains a wordplay between yir'ah ('fear/reverence') and ra'ah ('see'), both of which the people have abandoned. The phrase 'eternal statutes' (choq olam) for the sea boundary in verse 22 required an expanded_ rendering to capture the cosmological weight of olam in this creation context.*

Connections: *The search for one righteous person connects to Genesis 18:22-33 (Abraham and Sodom), Ezekiel 22:30 (God seeking someone to stand in the gap), and Isaiah 59:16 (God astonished that there was no intercessor). The 'enemy from the north' theme begun in 1:14-15 develops here into a specific military threat (vv. 15-17). The creation theology of verses 22-24 — God who set the sand as boundary for the sea — connects to Job 38:8-11 and Psalm 104:9. The false prophecy condemnation anticipates the full-scale confrontation with false prophets in chapters 23, 27-28. The closing question 'What will you do when the end comes?' (v. 31) reverberates through Ezekiel 7 and into apocalyptic literature.*

1Go through the streets of Jerusalem — look and take note. Search in her public squares: can you find even one person who acts justly and seeks faithfulness? If so, I will pardon the city. 2Even when they say, 'As the LORD lives,' they are swearing falsely. 3LORD, do your eyes not look for faithfulness? You have struck them, but they felt no pain. You have crushed them, but they refused to accept correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to turn back. 4Then I said: These are only the poor — they are foolish because they do not know the way of the LORD or the justice their God requires. 5Let me go to the leaders and speak with them, for they know the way of the LORD and the justice their God requires. But they too had broken the yoke entirely and snapped the restraints. 6Therefore a lion from the forest will strike them down, a wolf of the desert will ravage them, a leopard will prowl at their cities — everyone who goes out will be torn apart. For their rebellions are many and their acts of faithlessness are countless. 7How can I pardon you for this? Your children have abandoned me and sworn oaths by what are not gods. When I satisfied them with plenty, they committed adultery and crowded into the house of the prostitute. 8They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each one neighing after his neighbor's wife. 9Should I not punish them for these things? — declares the LORD. Should I not avenge myself against a nation such as this? 10Go up through her vine rows and destroy — but do not make a complete end. Strip away her branches, for they do not belong to the LORD. 11For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have been utterly faithless toward me, declares the LORD. 12They have denied the LORD and said, 'He will do nothing. No disaster will come upon us; we will never see sword or famine.' 13The prophets are nothing but wind — there is no word in them. What they threaten will happen to

them instead! ¹⁴Therefore, this is what the LORD, the God of Hosts, says: Because you have spoken this way, I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people will be the wood, and the fire will consume them. ¹⁵I am bringing a nation against you from far away, O house of Israel — declares the LORD. It is an enduring nation, an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, whose speech you cannot understand. ¹⁶Their quiver is like an open grave — they are all warriors. ¹⁷They will devour your harvest and your food. They will devour your sons and your daughters. They will devour your flocks and your herds. They will devour your vines and your fig trees. They will shatter your fortified cities in which you trust — by the sword. ¹⁸Yet even in those days — declares the LORD — I will not make a complete end of you. ¹⁹When they ask, 'Why has the LORD our God done all this to us?' — you will tell them: Just as you abandoned me and served foreign gods in your own land, so you will serve foreigners in a land that is not yours. ²⁰Declare this in the house of Jacob and proclaim it in Judah: ²¹Hear this, you senseless people, who have no understanding — who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear! ²²Do you not fear me? — declares the LORD. Do you not tremble before me? I set the sand as a boundary for the sea, an eternal limit it cannot cross. Though its waves surge, they cannot prevail; though they roar, they cannot pass beyond it. ²³But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart — they have turned aside and gone away. ²⁴They do not say in their hearts, 'Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives the rain — the autumn and spring rains in their season — who keeps for us the appointed weeks of the harvest.' ²⁵Your iniquities have turned these things away, and your sins have kept good things from you. ²⁶For wicked people are found among my people. They lie in wait like fowlers crouching down; they set traps — they catch human beings. ²⁷As a cage is full of birds, so their houses are full of treachery. That is how they have grown powerful and rich. ²⁸They have grown fat and sleek. They surpass even the deeds of the wicked. They do not defend the rights of the fatherless — yet they prosper — and they do not uphold the justice due to the poor. ²⁹Should I not punish them for these things? — declares the LORD. Should I not avenge myself against a nation such as this? ³⁰An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: ³¹The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction — and my people love it this way! But what will you do when the end comes?

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The imperative shotetu ('go about, roam, search') suggests a thorough, street-by-street investigation. The challenge echoes Abraham's negotiation for Sodom in Genesis 18:22-33, but reduces the threshold from ten righteous to one — and still none is found. The word emunah ('faithfulness') from the root aleph-mem-nun ('to be firm') goes beyond mere truthfulness to covenantal reliability.
2. The oath formula 'As the LORD lives' (chai YHWH) was the most solemn declaration in Israelite culture. Using God's name in a false oath compounds the sin — it is not just dishonesty but profanation of the divine name, violating the third commandment (Exodus 20:7).
3. The phrase me'anu lashov ('they refused to return') uses the key Jeremican verb shuv, which carries the double meaning of repentance and physical turning. The image of faces harder than rock (sela) suggests willful imperviousness — not inability to change but adamant refusal. The word musar ('correction, discipline') implies God's previous punishments were intended as instructive, not merely punitive.
4. Jeremiah initially excuses the common people (dallim, 'poor, lowly'), attributing their disobedience to ignorance rather than malice. The assumption is that the educated leaders would know better — an assumption the next verse destroys. The word no'alu ('they are foolish') implies senselessness, not mere lack of education.
5. The 'great ones' (gedolim) are the ruling class — priests, prophets, royal officials. The yoke (ol) and restraints (moserot) are metaphors for covenant obligations. 'Breaking the yoke' describes willful rejection of God's authority, not mere drift. The word yachdav ('together, altogether') emphasizes that this was collective, unanimous rebellion — not a few individuals but the entire leadership class.
6. Three predators — lion, wolf, leopard — represent escalating danger from every direction. The phrase ze'ev aravot ('wolf of the desert/steppe') describes wolves from the barren wastelands, desperate and aggressive. The word meshuvotehem ('their turnings away, backslidings') uses the same root shuv — they have turned away from God so often that judgment now stalks them like wild predators. The word peshah'ehem ('their rebellions') denotes willful transgression, not accidental sin.
7. The verb na'afu ('they committed adultery') operates on two levels simultaneously: literal sexual immorality and metaphorical worship of foreign gods. The phrase 'sworn by what are not gods' (lo elohim) echoes Deuteronomy 32:21 — they provoke God with 'no-gods.' The word va'asbia ('I satisfied them') shares a root with sheva ('oath/seven/fullness'), creating a wordplay: God fulfilled his oath of abundance, and they used that abundance for debauchery.
8. The image is deliberately crude: susim meyuzzanim ('well-fed stallions') compares the men of Jerusalem to stud horses in heat. The verb yitshalu ('they neigh') is the sound a stallion makes when pursuing a mare — applied to human beings, it strips away all pretense of dignity. This is not subtle prophetic metaphor; it is designed to shame.

9. This rhetorical refrain appears three times in the chapter (vv. 9, 29), framing the indictment. The verb *paqad* ('visit, attend to, punish') is the same word used for God's 'visiting' Egypt with plagues — now directed at his own people. The phrase *titnaqqem nafshi* ('shall my soul/self be avenged') attributes deep personal feeling to God — this is not detached judicial action but a wronged party's righteous anger.
10. The metaphor shifts to viticulture: *sharoteyha* ('her vine rows/terraces') and *netishoteha* ('her branches/tendrils') depict Judah as a vineyard (cf. Isaiah 5:1-7). The command to destroy but not completely (*kalah al ta'asu*) preserves the remnant theology — God's judgment is severe but not annihilating. The branches that do not belong to the LORD are the idolatrous elements that have infiltrated the covenant people.
11. The emphatic infinitive absolute *bagod bagdu* ('they have utterly betrayed') stresses the completeness of the treachery. The verb *bagod* carries the sense of marital betrayal — faithlessness within a committed relationship, not violation by a stranger but betrayal by a spouse. Both kingdoms are indicted together.
12. The verb *kichashu* ('they have denied, lied about') goes beyond mere unbelief — it is an active denial of God's relevance. Their statement *lo hu* ('not he' or 'it is not so') effectively dismisses God as a factor in their national life. This is not atheism but functional deism — acknowledging God's existence while denying his active involvement and his power to punish.
13. The people dismiss the true prophets as *ruach* ('wind') — empty air with no substance. The wordplay is sharp: *ruach* means both 'wind' and 'spirit,' and the prophets claim to speak by the Spirit (*ruach*) of God. The people reduce divine spirit to empty bluster. The phrase *haddiber en bahem* ('the word is not in them') denies that these prophets carry any genuine divine message. The final clause turns their dismissal back on them — what they call empty threats will become their reality.
14. God responds to the people's dismissal of the prophets by intensifying the prophetic word — the message they called empty wind will become consuming fire. The metaphor is devastatingly simple: if the people are wood, the word of God is fire, and fire consumes wood. The address shifts to Jeremiah personally ('your mouth'), affirming him as the authentic bearer of the divine word the people have rejected.
15. Babylon is described without being named — the anonymity heightens the terror. The word *eitan* ('enduring, mighty, permanent') suggests a power that will not be easily dislodged. The phrase *goy me'olam* ('a nation from ancient times') emphasizes Babylon's deep historical roots. The language barrier — 'you will not understand what they say' — strips away any possibility of negotiation or appeal. The invader is utterly alien.
16. The simile is chilling: a quiver (*ashpato*) compared to an open grave (*qever patuach*) means that every arrow is a death sentence. The grave stands open, waiting for the bodies that these arrows will produce. The phrase *kullam gibborim* ('all of them warriors') eliminates any hope of finding weakness in the invading force.
17. The fivefold repetition of the verb *akhal* ('devour, eat, consume') creates a devastating catalogue of total consumption: crops, children, livestock, orchards, and cities. The verb is the same for all — the enemy consumes everything with the same indiscriminate appetite. The list moves from agricultural goods to human beings to permanent infrastructure, showing that nothing will remain. The word *boteach* ('trusting') in reference to fortified cities implies misplaced confidence in military defenses rather than in God.
18. A sudden note of restraint in the midst of devastating judgment. The phrase *lo e'eseh kalah* ('I will not make a complete end') preserves remnant theology — God's judgment, however severe, will not be total annihilation. This mirrors verse 10's command to destroy but not completely.
19. The principle of measure-for-measure justice (*middah keneged middah*) operates here: they served foreign gods in their own land, so they will serve foreign people in a foreign land. The wordplay between *elohei nekhar* ('foreign gods') and *zarim* ('foreigners/strangers') ties idolatry directly to exile — the punishment mirrors the crime. The phrase *eret lo lakhem* ('a land not yours') reverses the promise of the land flowing with milk and honey.
20. The use of 'Jacob' alongside 'Judah' reaches back to the patriarchal name, reminding the people of their identity as descendants of the man who wrestled with God. The parallel between declaring (*haggidu*) and proclaiming (*hashmi'uha*) emphasizes that this is a public announcement, not a private revelation.
21. The phrase *am sakhal ve'en lev* ('senseless people without heart') combines two deficiencies: *sakhal* ('foolish, senseless') and the lack of *lev* ('heart'), which in Hebrew is the organ of understanding and will, not emotion. The parallel of unseeing eyes and unhearing ears echoes Isaiah 6:9-10 and Ezekiel 12:2. Jesus quotes this tradition in Mark 8:18 when confronting his own disciples' incomprehension.
22. The creation theology here echoes Job 38:8-11 and Psalm 104:9 — God's sovereign control over the sea as evidence of cosmic authority. The rhetorical force is devastating: the mindless sea obeys God's boundary, but rational Israel does not. The word *chol* ('sand') as boundary for the sea emphasizes that even the most apparently fragile barrier holds firm when God establishes it. The implied contrast is between creation's obedience and Israel's rebellion.
23. The phrase *lev sorer umoreh* ('a stubborn and rebellious heart') uses the same pair of adjectives applied to the 'stubborn and rebellious son' in Deuteronomy 21:18-21, who was subject to the death penalty. The legal implication is severe: Israel is behaving like the incorrigible son of covenant law. The verbs *saru vayelexhu* ('they turned aside and went away') describe departure from the covenant path.
24. The 'former rain' (*yoreh*) falls in October-November to soften the ground for plowing; the 'latter rain' (*malqosh*) falls in March-April to fill the grain before harvest. Both are essential to the agricultural cycle, and both come from God. The 'appointed weeks of harvest' (*shevuot chuqqot qatsir*) refers to the reliable seven-week period between Passover and Shavuot (the Feast of Weeks). The point is that God's faithful provision of agricultural rhythms should have taught Israel to trust and obey him.

25. The two words for wrongdoing — *avonoteikhem* ('your iniquities,' from the root meaning 'to twist, distort') and *chattoteikhem* ('your sins,' from the root meaning 'to miss the mark') — represent different dimensions of moral failure. Iniquity twists what should be straight; sin misses what should be hit. Together they have disrupted the natural order — even the rains that God appointed have been withheld because of the people's corruption.
26. The imagery is of bird-trappers (*yoqushim*) who crouch hidden and set snares (*mashchit*) — but instead of birds, they catch human beings. The word *yashur* ('he watches, peers') describes the patient, concealed observation of a hunter waiting for prey. The metaphor exposes the predatory nature of the wicked within Israel — they exploit their own people as a hunter exploits helpless birds.
27. The *kelub* ('cage, basket') full of captured birds parallels houses full of *mirmah* ('deceit, treachery'). Their wealth is not earned but trapped — accumulated through predatory deception of vulnerable people. The verbs *gadelu* ('they have grown great') and *ya'ashiru* ('they have grown rich') are presented as consequences of fraud, not blessing.
28. The verbs *shamenu* ('they have grown fat') and *ashtu* ('they are sleek, smooth') describe the physical prosperity of the corrupt — their bodies testify to their unjust wealth. The specific accusation is failure to defend the *yatom* ('orphan, fatherless') and the *evyon* ('poor, needy') — the two most vulnerable categories in Israelite social law. The prophets consistently identify justice for the vulnerable as the litmus test of covenant faithfulness (cf. Isaiah 1:17, Amos 2:6-7).
29. This refrain repeats verbatim from verse 9, creating a literary frame around the expanded indictment. The repetition signals that the case has been fully presented and the verdict is now inescapable. The question is rhetorical — of course God must act.
30. The pair *shammah veshaararurah* ('appalling and horrible') intensifies the shock. The word *shammah* means 'desolation, horror' — something that causes onlookers to gasp. The word *shaararurah* ('horrible thing') is extremely rare in Hebrew and appears only in Jeremiah (here and 23:14) and Hosea 6:10, always describing something within Israel that provokes divine disgust.
31. The triad of corruption — prophets, priests, and people — forms a closed system of mutual reinforcement. The prophets prophesy *basheqer* ('with falsehood'), the priests *yirdu al yedechem* ('rule at their side/direction'), and the people *ahavu ken* ('love it this way'). The most devastating element is the last: the people are not deceived against their will — they prefer the deception. The closing question *umah ta'asu le'acharitah* ('what will you do at its end?') is left unanswered, hanging in the air as an invitation to self-examination that the text knows will go unheeded.

6

Summary: Jeremiah 6 closes the opening cycle of oracles (chapters 1-6) with an urgent call to flee Jerusalem before the approaching enemy arrives. The Babylonian army is depicted as shepherds camping around the city, as workers building siege ramps, and as grape-harvesters stripping the vine bare. At the center of the chapter stands one of the most celebrated verses in the prophetic canon: 'Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths' (v. 16). The chapter contains the devastating 'Peace, peace!' indictment (v. 14) — false prophets and priests heal the wound of God's people superficially, crying 'Shalom! Shalom!' when there is no shalom. The chapter concludes with the refiner's fire metaphor: God has tested his people like a metalworker testing ore, and found them to be refuse silver — impurities that cannot be separated out.

What Makes This Remarkable: Verse 14 introduces the phrase that will become the signature indictment of false prophecy in the entire book: *shalom shalom ve'en shalom* ('Peace, peace — but there is no peace'). It is repeated verbatim in 8:11. Verse 16 — 'Stand at the crossroads and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is' — has become one of the most widely quoted prophetic texts in any tradition, but its context is often lost: the people's response is 'We will not walk in it.' The refiner's metaphor in verses 27-30 is significant because it fails — normally in prophetic literature, refining produces purified metal (cf. Malachi 3:2-3), but here the refining process cannot extract any silver because the corruption is too deep. The people are declared 'rejected silver' (*kesef nim'as*). This chapter marks the end of Jeremiah's initial preaching before the temple sermon of chapter 7.

Translation Friction: The verb *tsaraph* ('to refine, smelt') in verses 27-29 required careful handling because the metaphor inverts the expected outcome — refining here fails rather than succeeds. The phrase *derekh hatov* ('the good way') in verse 16 had to be rendered without importing later Christian readings of 'the way' while preserving the full weight of the Hebrew. The word *mabtsur* ('fortification') versus *batsar* ('to cut off grapes') in verses 6-9 creates a wordplay between siege warfare and grape harvesting that cannot be replicated in English and required a translator note. The cry *shalom shalom* in verse 14 was rendered as 'Peace, peace!' to preserve the hollow repetition — a single 'peace' would lose the desperate, formulaic quality of the false assurance.

Connections: The 'Peace, peace!' cry connects forward to 8:11 (verbatim repetition), 14:13 (false prophets promising peace), 23:17, 28:9, and Ezekiel 13:10-16 (prophets who whitewash with plaster). The 'ancient paths' of verse 16 connect to Deuteronomy's emphasis on walking in God's ways (Deuteronomy 5:33, 10:12). The refiner's metaphor connects to Isaiah 1:22-25 (dross), Ezekiel 22:18-22 (furnace), Zechariah 13:9, and Malachi 3:2-3 (refiner's fire). The enemy-from-the-north theme reaches its fullest pre-siege expression here, begun in 1:14-15 and continued in 4:5-8 and 5:15-17. The call to flee Judah's territory (v. 1) anticipates Jesus's warning to flee Jerusalem in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:16).

¹Take refuge, sons of Benjamin, away from the heart of Jerusalem! Blow the trumpet in Tekoa and raise a signal fire over Beth-hakkerem — for disaster looms from the north, and great destruction. ²The beautiful and pampered one — I will destroy the daughter of Zion. ³Shepherds will come against her with their flocks. They will pitch their tents all around her; each one will graze his own portion. ⁴Consecrate war against her! Rise up — let us attack at noon! 'Woe to us, for the day is fading and the evening shadows are stretching long!' ⁵Rise up — let us attack in the night and demolish her fortresses!' ⁶For this is what the LORD of Hosts says: Cut down her trees and build a siege ramp against Jerusalem. This is the city that must be punished — she is filled with nothing but oppression. ⁷As a well keeps its water fresh, so she keeps her wickedness fresh. Violence and destruction echo through her; sickness and wounds are constantly before me. ⁸Accept discipline, O Jerusalem, or I will turn away from you in disgust. I will make you a desolation — a land where no one lives. ⁹This is what the LORD of Hosts says: They will glean what remains of Israel thoroughly, like a vine. Pass your hand again over the branches, like a grape-harvester. ¹⁰To whom can I speak and give warning so they will listen? Look — their ears are uncircumcised; they cannot pay attention. The word of the LORD has become an object of scorn to them; they take no pleasure in it. ¹¹But I am filled with the wrath of the LORD — I am exhausted from holding it in. Pour it out on the children in the streets and on the gatherings of young men alike! For both husband and wife will be seized, the elderly along with the very old. ¹²Their houses will be handed over to others, their fields and their wives alike — for I will stretch out my hand against the inhabitants of the land, declares the LORD. ¹³For from the least to the greatest, every one of them pursues dishonest profit. From prophet to priest, every one of them practices fraud. ¹⁴They have treated the wound of my people as though it were nothing, saying, 'Peace, peace!' — but there is no peace. ¹⁵Are they ashamed of the detestable things they have done? They are not ashamed at all — they do not even know how to blush. Therefore they will fall among the fallen. When I punish them, they will stumble, says the LORD. ¹⁶This is what the LORD says: Stand at the crossroads and look. Ask for the ancient paths — where the good way is — and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.' ¹⁷And I raised up watchmen over you, saying, 'Listen for the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, 'We will not listen.' ¹⁸Therefore hear, you nations, and take note, O assembly, of what is happening among them. ¹⁹Listen, O earth! I am bringing disaster upon this people — the fruit of their own schemes — because they have not listened to my words and have rejected my instruction. ²⁰What use to me is frankincense from Sheba or fragrant cane from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, and your sacrifices do not please me. ²¹Therefore, this is what the LORD says: I am going to place stumbling blocks before this people, and they will stumble over them — fathers and sons together, neighbors and friends will perish. ²²This is what the LORD says: A people is coming from the land of the north — a great nation is stirring from the farthest reaches of the earth. ²³They grasp bow and javelin. They are cruel and show no mercy. Their sound roars like the sea. They ride on horses, drawn up for battle like a single warrior — against you, O daughter of Zion. ²⁴We have heard the report of them — our hands hang limp. Anguish has seized us, pain like a woman in labor. ²⁵Do not go out into the field or walk along the road, for the enemy has a sword — there is terror on every side. ²⁶O daughter of my people, put on sackcloth and roll in ashes. Mourn as for an only child — with the most bitter lamentation — for the destroyer will come upon us suddenly. ²⁷I have made you a tester among my people, a refiner — so that you may know and examine their ways. ²⁸All of them are hardened rebels, going about as slanderers. They are bronze and iron — all of them are corrupt. ²⁹The bellows blow fiercely — the lead is consumed by the fire. The refining goes on in vain, for the wicked impurities cannot be separated out. ³⁰They are called 'rejected silver,' for the LORD has rejected them.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The wordplay between Tekoa (teqoa) and 'blow' (tiq'u) is characteristic of Jeremiah's rhetorical style — the name of the town sounds like the command to blow the trumpet. Beth-hakkerem ('house of the vineyard') was a hilltop south of Jerusalem suitable for signal fires. The 'sons of Benjamin' are addressed because Jeremiah himself was from Benjaminite territory (Anathoth), and Benjamin's tribal land lay immediately north of Jerusalem — the direction from which the enemy approaches. The verb nishqefah ('looks out, peers down') personifies the disaster as an enemy scanning from the northern heights.
2. The Hebrew is ambiguous: damiti can derive from either damah ('to be like, compare') or damah ('to destroy, silence'). The KJV follows the first reading ('I have likened'), but many scholars and modern translations follow the second ('I will destroy/silence'). The juxtaposition of beauty (na'avah, 'lovely') and destruction creates a deliberate shock — the delicate, beautiful city is about to be devastated. We follow the destruction reading as it better fits the threatening context.
3. The 'shepherds' (ro'im) with their 'flocks' (edreihem) is a double metaphor: the enemy commanders are shepherds, their armies are flocks, and Jerusalem is the pasture they will consume. The phrase ra'u ish et yado ('each grazes his own portion') depicts a methodical, orderly siege — each unit assigned its section of the wall to attack. The pastoral imagery masks military brutality.
4. The verb qaddushu ('consecrate, sanctify') applied to war reveals the ancient Near Eastern concept of warfare as a sacred act requiring ritual preparation. The enemy's eagerness is so fierce that they lament the coming of evening — they cannot wait until morning to resume the attack. The dialogue format dramatizes the invader's impatience.
5. The enemy's resolve overrides normal military caution — night attacks were rare and dangerous in the ancient world. The word armenoteyha ('her palaces, fortresses') targets the centers of royal and military power. The urgency continues from verse 4: unable to wait for daylight, they attack through the darkness.
6. The siege ramp (solelah) was built by cutting trees and piling earth and timber against the city wall until attackers could scale it. The word hofqad ('must be punished, visited') uses the judicial verb paqad — the divine visitation is punitive. The phrase kulah osheq beqirbah ('all of her is oppression within her') depicts a city whose internal character is entirely corrupt — oppression is not an occasional failing but the defining quality of Jerusalem's social life.
7. The comparison of Jerusalem to a bor ('cistern, well') that keeps its water flowing is inverted — instead of fresh water, the city produces a constant flow of fresh wickedness. The word hamas ('violence') is the same word used in Genesis 6:11 to describe the corruption that prompted the flood. The pairing of choli ('sickness') and makkah ('wounds, blows') depicts Jerusalem as a battered, diseased body — her social corruption manifests as physical affliction.
8. The verb tiqqa ('will be torn away, wrenched away') describes God's own soul (nafshi) being violently separated from Jerusalem — not a calm departure but a wrenching away in revulsion. The word shemamah ('desolation, wasteland') describes not just emptiness but a horror that appalls onlookers. The phrase erets lo noshavah ('a land not inhabited') is the ultimate reversal of the promised land — the land flowing with milk and honey becomes a land where no one can live.
9. The gleaning metaphor (olel ye'olelu) describes a second pass through the vineyard to collect every last grape — nothing will be left. The word she'erit ('remnant') here does not carry its positive theological sense (the surviving faithful) but describes what little remains of Israel after the initial devastation. The salsillot ('branches, tendrils') must be stripped bare — a thorough, methodical destruction.
10. The phrase arelah oznam ('their ear is uncircumcised') is a striking metaphor: just as uncircumcised flesh marks someone as outside the covenant, uncircumcised ears indicate hearts closed to God's word. The concept of 'circumcised ears' appears also in Acts 7:51. The progression from inability ('they cannot pay attention') to unwillingness ('they take no pleasure in it') shows both cognitive and volitional rejection. Jeremiah's frustration as a prophet who cannot find a receptive audience echoes throughout his confessions.
11. Jeremiah experiences God's wrath physically — he is 'filled' (male'ti) with it and 'exhausted' (nil'eti) from containing it. The prophetic experience is not detached proclamation but embodied suffering. The inclusivity of judgment is total: children (olal), young men (bachurim), married couples (ish im ishah), and the elderly (zaqen im mele yamim) — no age or status is exempt.
12. The loss of houses, fields, and wives inverts the covenant blessings of Deuteronomy 28:3-6 and fulfills the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28:30 ('You will build a house but not live in it; you will plant a vineyard but not enjoy its fruit; your wife will be taken by another'). The phrase atteh et yadi ('I will stretch out my hand') echoes God's outstretched hand against Egypt in the Exodus — now the same hand strikes his own people.
13. The phrase botse'a batsa ('pursuing dishonest gain') describes systematic economic exploitation — not occasional greed but a way of life. The parallel between 'least to greatest' (social hierarchy) and 'prophet to priest' (religious leadership) means the entire society, both civil and sacred, is corrupt. The word sheqer ('falsehood, fraud') applied to both prophet and priest means the religious establishment has become a machine for producing lies.
14. This is one of the most famous verses in Jeremiah, repeated verbatim in 8:11. The verb rappu ('they have healed') is used with al neqallah ('superficially, lightly') — they have treated a catastrophic wound (shever, 'fracture, break, shattering') as if it were trivial. The doubling shalom shalom is emphatic — 'total peace, complete peace!' — making the lie even more egregious. The final ve'en shalom ('but there is no peace') delivers the prophet's devastating verdict in three Hebrew words.

15. The to'evah ('abomination, detestable thing') is a technical term for practices that violate the covenant's holiness standards, especially idolatry and social injustice. The phrase bosh lo yevoshu ('they are utterly unashamed') uses the emphatic infinitive absolute. The lost capacity for shame (hakhlim lo yada'u, 'they do not know how to blush') describes a moral sensibility so deadened that the normal human response to wrongdoing has been extinguished.
16. This is one of the most celebrated verses in prophetic literature. The derekh hatov ('the good way') is singular — there is one right path, not many options. The netivot olam ('ancient paths') are not merely historical traditions but the covenant way of life God established. The word margo'a ('rest') for the nafshekhem ('your souls/selves') echoes the Sabbath rest theology. The devastating conclusion — vayomeru lo neleq ('But they said: We will not walk in it') — transforms what could be an inspiring invitation into a tragedy of refusal.
17. The tsofim ('watchmen') are the prophets — sentinels stationed on the wall to warn of approaching danger (cf. Ezekiel 3:17, 33:7). The shofar ('trumpet, ram's horn') was the warning signal for imminent military attack. The people's response — lo naqshiv ('we will not listen') — directly echoes their refusal to walk in the ancient paths (v. 16). The pattern of refusal is now established: they will not walk, they will not listen.
18. God summons the nations (goyim) as witnesses to Israel's trial — a covenant lawsuit (riv) convention in which heaven and earth or the surrounding nations serve as witnesses to covenant violation (cf. Deuteronomy 32:1, Isaiah 1:2, Micah 6:1-2). The word edah ('assembly, congregation') may refer either to the nations assembled or to Israel's own community witnessing its own indictment.
19. The earth itself is called as witness. The phrase peri machshevotam ('the fruit of their schemes/thoughts') applies agricultural imagery to moral causation — they have planted wickedness and will now harvest its produce. The word torah ('instruction, law') here carries its broad Jeremianic sense of God's total covenantal instruction, not merely the written Torah scroll. The verb ma'asu ('they rejected') is the same verb used for God's rejection of Saul's kingship in 1 Samuel 15:23.
20. The rhetoric strips religious ritual of its supposed value. Levonah ('frankincense') from Sheba (southern Arabia) and qaneh hatov ('fragrant cane,' likely calamus or sugarcane) were expensive imports used in temple worship. God declares that lavish ritual expenditure without covenant obedience is worthless — a theme echoed in Isaiah 1:11-17, Amos 5:21-24, and Micah 6:6-8. The word ratson ('acceptable, favorable') is the technical term for a sacrifice that God receives with pleasure; here it is negated.
21. The miksholot ('stumbling blocks') are obstacles God deliberately places in their path — the judgment is not random but intentional. The comprehensiveness of the destruction — avot uvanim ('fathers and sons'), shakhen vere'o ('neighbor and friend') — means that normal bonds of family and community will not protect anyone. The relational language emphasizes that the social fabric itself will be torn apart.
22. The enemy-from-the-north motif reaches its most developed form in this chapter. The phrase me'erets tsafon ('from the land of the north') identifies the direction of approach — Babylon lay east of Judah, but its armies approached from the north through the Fertile Crescent because the Syrian desert was impassable. The phrase yarketei erets ('the farthest reaches of the earth') emphasizes the vast distance this enemy will travel — their commitment to conquest is implacable.
23. The portrait of the enemy emphasizes five qualities: armed (qeshet vekhidon, 'bow and javelin'), merciless (akhzari, 'cruel'), terrifying in sound (qolam kayyam yehemeh, 'their voice roars like the sea'), mounted (al susim yirkavu), and disciplined (arukh ke'ish lamilchamah, 'arranged like one man for battle'). The phrase bat tsiyon ('daughter of Zion') personifies Jerusalem as a vulnerable woman facing this overwhelming military force — the contrast between the delicate daughter and the roaring army is deliberate.
24. The voice shifts to the people's terrified response. The phrase rafu yadenu ('our hands hang limp') describes the paralysis of fear — the inability to fight or flee. The comparison to chil kayyoleadah ('pain like a woman in labor') is a stock prophetic image for inescapable, overwhelming agony (cf. Isaiah 13:8, Micah 4:9-10). The image implies both suffering and inevitability — labor pains cannot be stopped once they begin.
25. The phrase magor missaviv ('terror on every side') becomes one of Jeremiah's signature phrases — so characteristic that his enemies use it as a mocking nickname for him (20:3, 20:10). The restriction against going into fields or roads describes the conditions of siege — the countryside is controlled by the enemy, and only the walled city offers any safety. Even that safety is temporary.
26. The mourning customs described — saq ('sackcloth,' coarse goat-hair cloth) and efer ('ashes') — were the most extreme expressions of grief in Israelite culture. The phrase evel yachid ('mourning for an only child') describes the most devastating possible loss — the death of a sole heir, ending the family line. The word tamrurim ('bitter things, bitter weeping') intensifies the grief to its maximum. Jeremiah identifies himself with the people: 'upon us' (aleinu), not 'upon you.'
27. God addresses Jeremiah directly, assigning him the role of bachon ('tester, assayer') — the metalworker who tests the purity of ore. The word mivtsar is difficult and may mean 'fortress' or relate to the refining process ('one who tests by cutting off'). We follow the refining interpretation because it matches the metallurgical metaphor that dominates the rest of the chapter (vv. 28-30). Jeremiah's prophetic ministry is recast as an assay — he is testing the people's metal to determine its quality.
28. The phrase sarei sorerim ('stubbornly rebellious') doubles the root sur ('to turn aside') for emphasis. The metallurgical metaphor identifies the people as nechoshet uvarzel ('bronze and iron') — base metals rather than precious silver or gold. In ancient smelting, bronze and iron were the impurities that contaminated silver ore. The word mashchitim ('corrupt ones, destroyers') derives from the same root as the corruption that provoked the flood (Genesis 6:12).
29. The smelting process has failed. The mappuach ('bellows') has been pumped until scorched, the oferet ('lead') — used as a flux to absorb impurities in the refining of silver — has been consumed, and still the impurities remain. The verb nittaqu ('separated, torn away') indicates that the wicked

elements are so thoroughly fused with the metal that no amount of refining can extract them. This is a failed refining — unlike Malachi 3:2-3, where the refiner succeeds, here the ore is beyond purification.

30. The verdict is delivered in metallurgical terms: *kesef nim'as* ('rejected silver, refuse silver') — ore that has been tested, refined, and found to contain no recoverable silver. The verb *ma'as* ('to reject, refuse, despise') is the same word used for Saul's rejection from kingship (1 Samuel 15:23, 26) and Israel's rejection of God in 1 Samuel 8:7. The chapter that began with the search for one righteous person ends with the entire people declared worthless — unrefinable, beyond purification, rejected.

7

Summary: *Jeremiah 7 contains the Temple Sermon — the prophet's most provocative public address. Standing at the gate of the LORD's house, Jeremiah confronts the people's false confidence that the Temple's presence guarantees Jerusalem's safety. The threefold repetition 'The temple of the LORD' (v. 4) mocks a popular slogan. God demands moral reform, not ritual attendance (vv. 5-7), and invokes the destruction of Shiloh as proof that he will abandon even his own sanctuary when the people corrupt it (vv. 12-14). The chapter escalates to a prohibition against intercessory prayer (v. 16), describes the Queen of Heaven cult (vv. 17-19), and culminates in God's declaration that he never commanded sacrifice — he commanded obedience (vv. 21-23). The chapter closes with the abomination of child sacrifice in the Valley of Hinnom (vv. 30-34).*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is the sermon that nearly got Jeremiah killed (the aftermath appears in chapter 26). The threefold 'temple of the LORD' in verse 4 is not emphasis but mockery — Jeremiah is imitating and ridiculing a liturgical chant the people used as a talisman. The Shiloh reference (vv. 12-14) is devastating: Shiloh was where the tabernacle stood for centuries before its destruction, proving that God's presence can be withdrawn from a sacred site. The statement 'I did not speak to your ancestors or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices' (v. 22) is one of the most radical claims in the Hebrew Bible — not that sacrifice is wrong, but that obedience was always the primary demand. The Valley of Ben-Hinnom (Ge-Hinnom, v. 31) becomes the source of the Greek Gehenna, the New Testament's primary image for final judgment.*

Translation Friction: *The verb *batach* ('trust') in verse 4 required careful handling — the people are not trusting God but trusting in the Temple building as a magical guarantee. We rendered *divrei hasheqer* as 'deceptive words' rather than 'lying words' to capture the self-deception involved. The phrase 'the Queen of Heaven' (*melekhet hashamayim*, v. 18) is historically debated — likely Ishtar/Astarte — but we retain the Hebrew designation without identifying a specific deity, as the text does not. The controversial verse 22 ('I did not command... concerning burnt offerings') must be rendered without either softening it into irrelevance or overstating it as an absolute rejection of all sacrifice — the contrast is between ritual mechanics and covenantal obedience.*

Connections: *The Temple Sermon parallels Micah 3:11-12 (Zion will be plowed as a field). The Shiloh reference connects to the ark narrative of 1 Samuel 4 and Psalm 78:60. The prohibition against intercession reprises the theme from 11:14 and 14:11. The 'Queen of Heaven' cult reappears in 44:15-19 among the Egyptian refugees. The Valley of Hinnom connects to 2 Kings 23:10 (Josiah's reform) and becomes Gehenna in Matthew 5:22 and Mark 9:43. The obedience-over-sacrifice principle echoes 1 Samuel 15:22 and Hosea 6:6, and is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 9:13.*

¹The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²Stand at the gate of the LORD's house and proclaim this message there. Say: Hear the word of the LORD, all of Judah who enter through these gates to worship the LORD. ³This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your deeds, and I will let you continue to dwell in this place. ⁴Do not trust in deceptive words, chanting: 'The temple of the LORD! The temple of the LORD! The temple of the LORD!' ⁵For if you truly reform your ways and your deeds — if you truly practice justice between one person and another, ⁶if you do not oppress the foreigner, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and do not follow other gods to your own harm — ⁷then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your ancestors from age to age. ⁸Look — you are trusting in deceptive words that accomplish nothing. ⁹Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and follow other gods that you have not known — ¹⁰and then come and stand before me in this house that bears my

name, and say, 'We are safe!' — only to go on doing all these abominations? ¹¹Has this house that bears my name become a den of criminals in your eyes? I too have seen it, declares the LORD. ¹²Go now to my place at Shiloh, where I first made my name dwell, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel. ¹³And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD — and though I spoke to you persistently, you did not listen, and though I called you, you did not answer — ¹⁴I will do to this house that bears my name — the one you are trusting in — and to the place I gave to you and your ancestors, what I did to Shiloh. ¹⁵I will throw you out of my presence, just as I threw out all your kinsmen — all the descendants of Ephraim. ¹⁶As for you — do not pray for this people. Do not lift up cry or prayer on their behalf, and do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you. ¹⁷Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? ¹⁸The children gather wood, the fathers light the fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for the Queen of Heaven, and they pour out drink offerings to other gods — provoking me to anger. ¹⁹Is it me they are provoking? declares the LORD. Is it not rather themselves, to their own shame? ²⁰Therefore, this is what the Lord GOD says: My anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place — on human and animal, on the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground. It will burn and will not be quenched. ²¹This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves! ²²For I did not speak to your ancestors, nor did I command them on the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. ²³Rather, this is what I commanded them: Obey my voice, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in every way that I command you, so that it may go well for you. ²⁴But they did not listen or incline their ear. They walked according to the schemes and stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward, not forward. ²⁵From the day your ancestors came out of the land of Egypt until this very day, I have sent to you all my servants the prophets — sending them persistently, day after day. ²⁶But they did not listen to me or incline their ear. They stiffened their neck and did worse than their ancestors. ²⁷You will speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You will call out to them, but they will not answer you. ²⁸Then say to them: This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the LORD their God and refused correction. Faithfulness has perished — it has been cut off from their lips. ²⁹Cut off your hair and throw it away! Raise a lament on the barren heights, for the LORD has rejected and abandoned the generation that provoked his wrath. ³⁰For the people of Judah have done what is evil in my sight, declares the LORD. They have placed their detestable idols in the house that bears my name, defiling it. ³¹They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire — something I never commanded, and which never entered my mind. ³²Therefore, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when it will no longer be called Topheth or the Valley of Ben-Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter. They will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room. ³³The corpses of this people will become food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth, and no one will drive them away. ³⁴I will silence in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, for the land will become a wasteland.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The standard prophetic reception formula. The Hebrew *le'mor* ('saying') functions as a speech-introduction marker and is rendered as a colon rather than as an additional English word.
2. The location is critical — Jeremiah is told to stand at the Temple gate itself, confronting worshippers as they arrive. The verb *hishtachavot* ('to bow down, worship') indicates prostration before God. The irony is that these are people coming to worship who will be told their worship is worthless without moral reform.
3. The verb *heitivu* ('make good, reform') demands active moral change, not mere ritual adjustment. The conditional promise — 'I will let you dwell' — implies that continued residence in the land is not guaranteed. The phrase 'this place' (*hammaqom hazzeh*) refers ambiguously to both the Temple and the land, a deliberate doubling.
4. The verb *batach* ('to trust, rely on') indicates the people are placing their security in the Temple as a talisman rather than in the God who dwells there. The triple repetition *hekhhal YHWH* ('temple of the LORD') imitates a liturgical chant — Jeremiah is quoting and ridiculing a popular slogan. The word *sheqer* ('falsehood, deception') is one of Jeremiah's most frequent words, characterizing the entire spiritual culture of his day.
5. The infinitive absolute construction *heitev teitivu* ('truly reform') intensifies the demand — superficial adjustment will not suffice. The word *mishpat* ('justice') here means fair dealing in legal and social disputes, not abstract righteousness. Jeremiah begins a catalogue of specific moral requirements.

6. The triad *ger-yatom-almanah* ('foreigner, orphan, widow') represents the most vulnerable members of Israelite society. Their protection is a covenant obligation (Deuteronomy 24:17-22). The phrase 'to your own harm' (*lera lakhem*) is striking — idolatry harms not God but the worshippers themselves.
7. The phrase *lemin olam ve'ad olam* ('from age to age') expresses perpetuity. The conditional structure is complete: moral reform (vv. 5-6) would secure continued dwelling. The land promise to the ancestors is real but conditional on covenant faithfulness — this is the core tension of Deuteronomic theology.
8. The accusation resumes from verse 4. The phrase *levilti ho'il* ('without benefit, to no profit') declares the Temple-slogan theology not just false but useless — it provides no actual protection. The verb *batach* ('trust') again highlights misplaced confidence.
9. This catalogue echoes the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21). Stealing, murder, adultery, and false oaths violate commandments 6-9, while Baal worship and following other gods violate commandments 1-2. Jeremiah compresses the Decalogue into a single accusatory question. The infinitive absolute construction (*ganov, ratsoach, na'of*) gives the list a staccato, relentless rhythm.
10. The phrase *niqra shemi alav* ('my name is called upon it') means the Temple bears God's name — it belongs to him. The people's cry *nitsalnu* ('we are delivered, saved, safe') exposes their theology: they believe Temple attendance functions as a magical protection spell that permits continued sin. The word *to'evot* ('abominations') is the strongest term for covenant violations.
11. The phrase *me'arat paritsim* ('cave/den of violent ones') is quoted by Jesus when he cleanses the Temple (Matthew 21:13, Mark 11:17, Luke 19:46). *Paritsim* are not merely thieves but violent breakers — robbers who use force. The Temple has become a hideout where criminals come to feel safe after committing their crimes. God's 'I too have seen it' is ominous — he is not fooled by their ritual performance.
12. Shiloh, in the territory of Ephraim, was the central sanctuary before the monarchy — the tabernacle stood there for centuries (Joshua 18:1; 1 Samuel 1-4). Its destruction (referenced in Psalm 78:60) demonstrated that God would abandon even his own sacred site when the people corrupted it. The parallel is unmistakable: what happened to Shiloh can happen to Jerusalem's Temple.
13. The idiom *hashkem vedabber* ('rising early and speaking') is the same persistence formula seen in 11:7. God's repeated, tireless efforts to communicate are met with silence. The double failure — 'did not listen... did not answer' — establishes the legal basis for judgment: the defendant was warned and given every opportunity to respond.
14. The sentence structure deliberately parallels the Temple ('this house') with the land ('the place I gave you') — both are at risk. The verb *botechim* ('trusting') echoes verse 4 and 8: their trust is in the building, not in God. The Shiloh comparison is the climax of the argument — if God destroyed his first sanctuary, he will destroy his second.
15. Ephraim represents the northern kingdom of Israel, destroyed by Assyria in 722 BCE. God has already expelled the ten northern tribes. Judah is not exempt from the same fate. The verb *hishlakhti* ('I threw out, cast away') is violent — not a gentle sending away but a forceful ejection from God's presence.
16. This prohibition against prophetic intercession is devastating. A prophet's core function included standing before God on behalf of the people (as Moses did repeatedly, Exodus 32:11-14; Numbers 14:13-19). God is shutting down the last channel of mercy. The verb *tifga* ('press upon, plead, intercede') is stronger than ordinary prayer — it implies urgent, pressing petition. Even that will not be heard.
17. God directs Jeremiah's attention to what is happening in plain sight. The question is rhetorical — the prophet can see the idolatry everywhere. The shift to second person singular addresses Jeremiah personally, pulling him into the evidence for why intercession is pointless.
18. The whole family participates in the idolatrous ritual — children, fathers, and women each have a role. The phrase *melekhet hashamayim* ('Queen of Heaven') likely refers to the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar or the Canaanite Astarte. The *kavvanim* ('cakes') were probably shaped in the goddess's image or stamped with her symbol. This cult reappears in 44:15-19, where the women defend their worship. The verb *hakh'iseni* ('to provoke me') attributes genuine anger to God — the idolatry is personally offensive.
19. A remarkable theological statement: God declares that idolatry ultimately harms the idolaters, not God. The word *bosheth* ('shame') appears again (cf. 11:13 where it substitutes for Baal). The rhetorical question structure implies that God's sovereignty is not threatened by their worship of other gods — but they are destroying themselves.
20. The double divine title *Adonai YHWH* ('Lord GOD') adds solemnity. The verb *nittekhet* ('poured out') depicts wrath as a liquid — molten anger that flows over everything. The judgment is comprehensive, affecting all creation: humans, animals, vegetation, and crops. The cosmic scope echoes the uncreation themes found elsewhere in the prophets. The phrase 'will not be quenched' (*lo tikhbeh*) indicates irreversible judgment.
21. This is biting sarcasm. Burnt offerings (*olot*) were entirely consumed on the altar — none of the meat went to the worshipper. God says: go ahead and eat even those. The whole sacrificial system has become so meaningless that the distinction between sacrifices for God and meals for the people is irrelevant. The imperative 'eat flesh' dismisses the sacrificial system as mere meat consumption.
22. This is one of the most provocative statements in the Hebrew Bible. Taken at face value, it appears to contradict the extensive sacrificial legislation in Exodus and Leviticus. The interpretive key is the phrase 'on the day I brought them out' — God's first words at Sinai were the Ten Commandments, which concern moral obedience, not ritual. The sacrificial system came later. Jeremiah's point is not that sacrifice is illegitimate but that it was never the primary demand — obedience was.

23. The covenant formula — 'I will be your God and you will be my people' — returns (cf. 11:4). The substance of the original covenant demand is relational obedience (*shim'u beqoli*, 'obey my voice'), not ritual performance. The promise *lema'an yitav lakhem* ('so that it may go well for you') frames obedience as being for the people's own benefit, not God's.
24. The phrase *sheririut libbam hara* ('stubbornness of their evil heart') is Jeremiah's signature expression (cf. 3:17, 9:13, 11:8, 13:10, 16:12, 18:12, 23:17). The spatial metaphor 'backward, not forward' captures the tragedy — Israel should have been advancing toward God's purposes but instead regressed.
25. The persistence idiom *hashkem veshaloch* ('rising early and sending') recurs throughout Jeremiah (cf. 11:7, 25:4, 26:5, 29:19, 35:15, 44:4). God's prophetic warnings span the entire history from Exodus to the present — this is not a sudden intervention but a sustained, centuries-long effort.
26. The phrase *vayyaqshu et orfam* ('they stiffened their neck') depicts stubborn resistance using the image of an ox that resists the yoke by going rigid. The final clause is devastating: each generation surpassed the previous one in wickedness. The trajectory is not static rebellion but escalating corruption.
27. God warns Jeremiah in advance that his preaching will fail. This is one of the most painful aspects of prophetic calling — the prophet is sent knowing his audience will not respond. The double prediction ('will not listen... will not answer') mirrors the people's treatment of God himself (v. 13).
28. The word *emunah* here is rendered 'faithfulness' rather than 'truth' (KJV) because the Hebrew encompasses more than factual accuracy — it is covenantal reliability, trustworthiness, and loyalty. The metaphor of *emunah* being 'cut off from their mouth' (*nikhretah mippihem*) suggests it has been severed like a living thing — faithfulness is dead in their public speech and commitment.
29. The command to cut hair (*gozzi nizrekh*) is a mourning ritual — the uncut hair was a sign of consecration (the word *nezer* can mean 'consecrated hair' as with the Nazirite vow). Jerusalem, personified as a woman, is told to sever the sign of her consecration because the relationship is over. The 'barren heights' (*shefayim*) are the same high places associated with idolatrous worship — now they become places for mourning.
30. The *shiqquts* ('detestable thing, idol') is stronger than *to'evah* — it refers specifically to idolatrous objects placed inside the Temple itself. This is not merely worshipping foreign gods elsewhere but installing them in the LORD's own house. The defilement (*tame'*) is ritual contamination that makes the Temple unfit for God's presence. This likely refers to the practices described in 2 Kings 21:4-7 and 23:4-14.
31. Topheth (from a root meaning 'fireplace' or 'drum' — drums may have been beaten to drown out screams) was the site of child sacrifice in the valley south of Jerusalem. The phrase 'never entered my mind' (*lo aletah al libbi*) is God's strongest possible denial — he not only did not command this practice but could not even conceive of it. The Valley of Ben-Hinnom (Ge-Hinnom) later becomes Gehenna in Greek, the New Testament's primary image of final judgment.
32. The renaming from 'Valley of Ben-Hinnom' to 'Valley of Slaughter' (*Ge ha-Haregah*) reverses the site's function — where children were killed as sacrifices, now the sacrificers themselves will be killed and buried. The grimly ironic justice: the place of murder becomes the mass grave of the murderers. 'Until there is no more room' indicates catastrophic death on a scale that overwhelms burial capacity.
33. Exposure of corpses to scavengers was the ultimate degradation in the ancient Near East — denial of proper burial was a curse-fulfillment (Deuteronomy 28:26). The phrase 'no one will drive them away' (*ein macharid*) means there will be no living person left to shoo the scavengers from the dead. This is the Deuteronomic covenant-curse enacted literally.
34. The fourfold 'sound/voice' (*qol*) creates a litany of silencing — joy, gladness, bridegroom, bride. These represent the sounds of a thriving society: celebration and marriage. Their cessation means the death of normal life. This formula of silenced celebration recurs in 16:9, 25:10, and 33:11 (where it is reversed in restoration). The final word — 'wasteland' (*chorbah*) — is the chapter's verdict.

8

Summary: *Jeremiah 8 continues the judgment oracle begun in chapter 7 with a grim image of exhumed bones spread before the astral deities the dead had worshipped (vv. 1-3). The chapter then indicts Judah's refusal to return to God, contrasting the people's stubbornness with the instinctive faithfulness of migratory birds (vv. 4-7). The scribes who falsify God's instruction are condemned (v. 8), and the false prophets who cry 'Peace, peace!' are exposed again (v. 11, reprising 6:14). The chapter's emotional center is Jeremiah's lament over the harvest that has passed and the summer that has ended while the people remain unsaved (v. 20), culminating in the famous question: 'Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no healer there?' (v. 22).*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Verse 8 contains one of the most explosive claims in the prophetic literature: the scribes' pen has turned God's torah into a lie. This is an indictment not of ordinary people but of the professional class responsible for preserving and transmitting divine instruction. Verse 7 employs the extraordinary argument that storks, turtledoves, swifts, and cranes are more faithful to their appointed times than God's own people — animals obey their Creator's order while Israel does not. The closing lament (vv. 18-22) is among the most emotionally devastating passages in the*

Hebrew Bible, with Jeremiah's grief becoming almost indistinguishable from God's own. The 'balm in Gilead' question (v. 22) has entered the world's literary and musical vocabulary, particularly through African American spirituals that transformed the unanswered question into an affirmation.

Translation Friction: *The boundaries between divine speech, prophetic speech, and narrative voice blur repeatedly in this chapter — particularly in vv. 18-22, where it is unclear whether God or Jeremiah is the speaker. We have not forced a resolution where the Hebrew is ambiguous. The word torah in verse 8 could mean 'the Law' (Mosaic Torah) or 'instruction' more broadly — we rendered 'instruction of the LORD' to preserve the ambiguity. The rare birds in verse 7 (sus, agur) present identification challenges; we followed the best available ornithological scholarship. The phrase 'the pen of the scribes has made it into a lie' (v. 8) is rendered to preserve the radical claim without softening it.*

Connections: *The 'Peace, peace!' cry of 8:11 directly reprises 6:14. The indictment of scribes (8:8) anticipates Jesus's conflicts with the scribes and Pharisees. The migratory birds argument (8:7) connects to Isaiah 1:3 ('The ox knows its owner... but Israel does not know'). The balm of Gilead (8:22) is referenced in Genesis 37:25 and 43:11, and the question enters the New Testament interpretive tradition. The harvest-past lament (8:20) becomes proverbial. The 'daughter of my people' (bat ammi) refrain connects to Lamentations.*

¹At that time, declares the LORD, they will bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of its officials, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem from their graves. ²They will spread them out before the sun, the moon, and all the host of heaven — which they loved, served, followed, consulted, and worshipped. The bones will not be gathered or reburied; they will be like dung on the surface of the ground. ³Death will be preferred over life by all the survivors who remain from this evil family, in every place where I have driven them, declares the LORD of Hosts. ⁴Say to them: This is what the LORD says — Do people fall and never get up? Does someone turn away and never turn back? ⁵Why then has this people — Jerusalem — turned aside in perpetual rebellion? They cling to deceit; they refuse to turn back. ⁶I have listened carefully and heard — they do not speak honestly. No one repents of his wickedness, saying, 'What have I done?' Each one charges ahead on his own course, like a horse plunging into battle. ⁷Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons; the turtledove, the swift, and the crane keep the time of their migration. But my people do not know the requirements of the LORD. ⁸How can you say, 'We are wise, and the instruction of the LORD is with us'? In truth, the lying pen of the scribes has turned it into a lie. ⁹The wise are put to shame; they are dismayed and trapped. They have rejected the word of the LORD — so what kind of wisdom do they have? ¹⁰Therefore I will give their wives to others and their fields to new owners, for from the least to the greatest, all of them chase after dishonest gain. From prophet to priest, every one of them practices fraud. ¹¹They dress the wound of the daughter of my people as if it were nothing, saying, 'Peace, peace!' — when there is no peace. ¹²Are they ashamed of committing abominations? They are not ashamed at all — they do not even know how to blush! Therefore they will fall among the fallen; in the time of their punishment they will stumble, says the LORD. ¹³I will bring their harvest to an end, declares the LORD. There are no grapes on the vine, no figs on the fig tree, and the leaves have withered. What I gave them will be taken from them. ¹⁴Why are we sitting here? Gather together — let us flee to the fortified cities and perish there, for the LORD our God has doomed us. He has given us poisoned water to drink because we have sinned against the LORD. ¹⁵We hoped for peace, but nothing good came; for a time of healing, but there was only terror. ¹⁶From Dan the snorting of his horses can be heard; at the sound of the neighing of his stallions the whole land trembles. They come and devour the land and everything in it — the city and all who live there. ¹⁷For I am sending among you venomous snakes — vipers that cannot be charmed — and they will bite you, declares the LORD. ¹⁸My grief is beyond healing; my heart within me is sick. ¹⁹Listen — the cry of the daughter of my people from a distant land: 'Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not within her?' Why have they provoked me with their carved images, with their worthless foreign idols? ²⁰The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved. ²¹Because of the wound of the daughter of my people, I am wounded. I am in mourning; horror has seized me. ²²Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no healer there? Why then has the healing of the daughter of my people not come?

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The fivefold repetition of *atsmot* ('bones') creates a drumbeat of desecration. Every class of society is named — kings, officials (*sarim*, not merely 'princes'), priests, prophets, and ordinary citizens. No rank provides protection. The exhumation of bones was both a military humiliation and a search for burial goods.
2. The fivefold description of devotion — 'loved, served, followed, consulted, worshipped' — catalogs the full vocabulary of worship now directed at astral deities. The bitter irony: the bones are spread before the very celestial objects the dead had worshipped, but those gods cannot protect even their worshippers' remains. The comparison to *domen* ('dung, manure') is deliberately degrading — the honored dead become fertilizer.
3. The Hebrew *nivchar mavet mechayim* ('death is chosen over life') inverts the Deuteronomic call to 'choose life' (Deuteronomy 30:19). The survivors' suffering in exile will be so severe that they will wish they had died. The word *mishpachah* ('family, clan') applied to the whole nation personalizes the judgment — this is a family ruined by its own choices.
4. The verb *shuv* ('turn, return') carries its double meaning with full force here — Israel has 'turned away' from God, but they refuse to 'turn back.' The rhetorical questions appeal to common sense: falling implies rising, departure implies return. But Israel defies this natural logic.
5. The Hebrew plays on the *shuv* root three times: *shovevah* ('has turned aside'), *meshuvah* ('rebellion/turning'), and *lashuv* ('to return'). The word *nitsachat* ('perpetual, enduring') makes the rebellion permanent — this is not a temporary lapse but an established way of life. They 'cling to' (*hechziq*) deceit as a drowning person clings to a branch.
6. God has been listening for any voice of repentance and hears none. The expected question of moral self-examination — 'What have I done?' (*meh asiti*) — never comes. The horse metaphor (*sus shotef bammilchamah*) depicts mindless, headlong momentum: a warhorse in full charge cannot stop itself. The people are running toward destruction with the same unstoppable force.
7. This is a devastating argument from nature: migratory birds instinctively know and obey their God-given cycles, but Israel — created with reason and given direct revelation — ignores the LORD's *mishpat* ('requirements, ordinances'). The *chasadah* ('stork,' from the root *chesed*, 'faithful love') is itself named for loyalty. The identification of *sis* and *agur* is debated; 'swift' and 'crane' follow the best available ornithological consensus. The contrast echoes Isaiah 1:3, where the ox and donkey know their master but Israel does not.
8. This is one of the most radical statements in prophetic literature. The *soferim* ('scribes') — the professional class responsible for copying, preserving, and interpreting God's *torah* — have falsified it. The word *sheqer* ('lie, falsehood') appears twice for emphasis. The charge is not that the *torah* itself is false but that the scribes' handling of it has perverted it into something deceptive. The word *torah* here could mean the Mosaic Law specifically or divine 'instruction' more broadly — we render 'instruction' to preserve the Hebrew range.
9. The question *chokhmat meh lahem* ('what wisdom is to them?') is devastating: wisdom that rejects God's word is no wisdom at all. The verb *ma'asu* ('rejected') is the same used for rejecting a king (1 Samuel 8:7) or a foundation stone (Psalm 118:22) — it implies deliberate refusal, not ignorance. The three verbs — 'shamed, dismayed, trapped' — describe the progressive collapse of false confidence.
10. This verse closely parallels 6:12-13. The phrase *botse'a batsa* ('chasing dishonest gain') uses the same root twice for emphasis — greed is universal, spanning every social class. The indictment of both prophet and priest (*navi* and *kohen*) as practitioners of *sheqer* ('fraud, falsehood') condemns the entire religious leadership.
11. This verse reprises 6:14 almost verbatim. The phrase *al neqallah* ('lightly, superficially') describes a doctor who bandages a deep wound without treating it — cosmetic care that masks a fatal condition. The metaphor *shever bat ammi* ('the fracture of the daughter of my people') treats the nation as a person with a broken body. The double *shalom shalom* is the false prophets' signature cry, directly contradicting Jeremiah's message of judgment.
12. This verse also reprises 6:15. The inability to blush (*hakhlim lo yada'u*) indicates a conscience so deadened that shame itself has become impossible. The word *to'evah* ('abomination') describes acts fundamentally offensive to the covenant order. Falling 'among the fallen' (*bannophelim*) means they will join the mass of the condemned — their immunity is an illusion.
13. The Hebrew *asoph asiphem* is difficult — it could mean 'I will surely gather them (for judgment)' or 'I will bring their harvest to an end.' The agricultural imagery — no grapes, no figs, withered leaves — depicts a land under covenant curse (cf. Deuteronomy 28:38-42). The fig tree and vine are symbols of covenant prosperity (1 Kings 4:25; Micah 4:4). Their barrenness signals covenant nullification. Jesus's cursing of the barren fig tree (Mark 11:12-14) draws on this prophetic tradition.
14. The people's speech shifts from paralysis to desperate flight. The verb *niddamah* ('let us be silent/perish') carries the double sense of silence and destruction — they expect to die in the fortified cities. The phrase *mei rosh* ('water of poison/gall') refers to a bitter, toxic plant. The people's self-awareness is remarkable: they acknowledge their sin against the LORD even as they flee.
15. The verb *qavveh* ('we hoped, waited for') expresses sustained expectation — the people waited for the *shalom* the false prophets promised. The contrast 'healing... terror' (*marpe... be'atah*) is sharp: where they expected restoration they found dread. This verse is nearly identical to 14:19, creating a recurring refrain of disappointed hope.
16. Dan, in the extreme north of Israel, is the first point of entry for an invading army from Mesopotamia. The approaching enemy is heard before it is seen — the sound of war horses precedes the army. The word *abbirim* ('stallions, mighty ones') emphasizes the military power of the cavalry. The verb 'devour' (*yokhelu*) treats the invasion as a consuming force that swallows the land.

17. The *nechashim tsif'onim* ('serpents, vipers') are probably a metaphor for the Babylonian army, though the literal image is terrifying in its own right. The phrase 'cannot be charmed' (*ein lahem lachash*) means no amount of diplomacy, appeasement, or ritual manipulation will stop the coming judgment. The snake charmer's art represents any human attempt to control or deflect divine punishment.
18. This verse begins the great lament of 8:18-22, one of the most emotionally devastating passages in the Hebrew Bible. The speaker could be Jeremiah or God — the Hebrew does not specify, and the ambiguity may be intentional: the prophet's grief mirrors God's own. The word *davvai* ('sick, faint') describes a heart weakened by sorrow to the point of physical illness.
19. The dialogue structure is remarkable: the exiled people cry out asking if the LORD is still in Zion, and God interrupts with his own counter-question about their idolatry. The phrase *havlei nekhar* ('worthless foreign things') uses *hevel* ('vapor, emptiness') — the same word Ecclesiastes uses for 'vanity.' The idols are literally nothing. The term *bat ammi* ('daughter of my people') personalizes the nation as a beloved child in distress.
20. This verse has become proverbial. The agricultural metaphor captures irreversible loss: the harvest season had a fixed window, and once it passed, no amount of effort could recover the crop. The word *nosha'nu* ('we are saved') uses the passive of *yasha* ('to save, deliver') — salvation was expected but never came. The brevity of the Hebrew — only seven words — amplifies the devastation through understatement.
21. The verb *hushbarti* ('I am broken') shares the root with *shever* ('fracture, wound') — the prophet/God is broken by the brokenness of the people. The word *qadarti* ('I am dark/in mourning') refers to the darkened face of grief. The phrase *shammah hecheziqatni* ('horror has seized me') depicts grief as a physical force that grips and will not release.
22. Gilead, east of the Jordan, was famous for its medicinal resin (*tsori*, a balsam or balm) — referenced in Genesis 37:25 and 43:11 as a valuable trade commodity. The questions are anguished, not rhetorical in the simple sense: the balm exists, the healer exists, yet the wound remains open. The implication is that the people have refused the cure. The word *arukhat* ('healing, restoration') comes from a root meaning 'to grow new flesh over a wound.' The passage has entered world literature, especially through the African American spiritual 'There Is a Balm in Gilead,' which transforms the unanswered question into an affirmation.

9

Summary: *Jeremiah 9 opens with the prophet's anguished wish that his head were a spring of water and his eyes a fountain of tears so he could weep endlessly for the slain of his people. God indicts Judah for a society saturated with deceit — neighbor deceives neighbor, tongue is bent like a bow for lies, and no one speaks truth. Judgment is decreed: Jerusalem will be reduced to rubble, the land made desolate. The chapter reaches its theological summit in verses 23-24, where the LORD declares that the only legitimate ground for boasting is knowing God — who exercises faithful love, justice, and righteousness. The chapter closes with a warning about circumcision of the flesh without circumcision of the heart, placing Judah alongside Egypt, Edom, Ammon, and Moab as nations circumcised in body but uncircumcised in heart.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains two of Jeremiah's most quoted passages. The 'fountain of tears' opening (v. 1) gave Jeremiah his enduring title as the 'weeping prophet' — yet the tears are not sentimental but the response of a man who sees clearly that destruction is inevitable and irreversible. Verses 23-24 represent one of the Hebrew Bible's most concentrated statements on what God values: not human strength, wisdom, or wealth, but the knowledge of God expressed through *chesed*, *mishpat*, and *tsedaqah*. Paul quotes this passage in 1 Corinthians 1:31 and 2 Corinthians 10:17. The circumcision passage (vv. 25-26) anticipates Jeremiah's later 'new covenant' theology (31:31-34) where torah is written on hearts rather than enforced through external marks. The sustained indictment of deception as the society's core sin (vv. 2-9) reveals a culture where language itself has become weaponized — every word is a potential trap, every neighbor a potential betrayer.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew versification differs from English: what English Bibles number as 9:1 is 8:23 in the Hebrew (MT), and what English Bibles number as 9:2 is Hebrew 9:1. We follow English versification (9:1-26) since this is the system readers expect, but note the discrepancy. The verb *ramah* in verse 8 ('deceit') required careful distinction from other Hebrew deception words (*sheqer*, *kazav*, *mirmah*). The phrase *mul arlat levavkhem* ('circumcise the foreskin of your heart') in related Deuteronomy passages underlies the circumcision theology here, though Jeremiah uses different vocabulary. The dirge-calling for 'skilled women' mourners (v. 17) uses the term *chakamot*, literally 'wise women' — professional mourners whose craft was considered a form of wisdom.*

Connections: The weeping-prophet imagery connects to Lamentations, traditionally attributed to Jeremiah. The boasting passage (vv. 23-24) is quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:31 and 2 Corinthians 10:17. The circumcision-of-heart theme links to Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6, and forward to Romans 2:28-29 and Jeremiah's own new covenant oracle in 31:31-34. The desolation imagery connects to Jeremiah's temple sermon (ch. 7) and the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28. The professional mourners connect to the later mourning traditions visible in 2 Chronicles 35:25. The chesed-mishpat-tsedakah triad echoes Micah 6:8 and Hosea 6:6.

¹If only my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears — then I would weep day and night for the slain of my people. ²If only I had a traveler's shelter in the wilderness — then I would abandon my people and walk away from them! For all of them are adulterers, a band of traitors. ³They bend their tongues like a bow for falsehood. It is not for faithfulness that they have grown strong in the land, for they go from one evil to another, and they do not know me, declares the LORD. ⁴Be on guard, each of you, against your neighbor, and do not trust any brother — for every brother is a deceiver like Jacob, and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer. ⁵Each person mocks his neighbor, and no one speaks the truth. They have trained their tongues to speak lies; they exhaust themselves doing wrong. ⁶You live in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know me, declares the LORD. ⁷Therefore, this is what the LORD of Hosts says: I am going to refine them and test them — for what else can I do because of my people? ⁸Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceit. With his mouth a person speaks peace to his neighbor, but inwardly he sets an ambush for him. ⁹Should I not punish them for these things? declares the LORD. Should I not avenge myself against a nation such as this? ¹⁰Over the mountains I will raise weeping and wailing, and over the wilderness pastures a lament, for they are scorched and no one passes through. The sound of livestock is not heard. The birds of the sky and the animals have all fled — they are gone. ¹¹I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals, and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation, without an inhabitant. ¹²Who is wise enough to understand this? To whom has the mouth of the LORD spoken, that he might explain it? Why has the land perished, scorched like a wilderness with no one passing through? ¹³The LORD said: Because they have abandoned my instruction that I set before them — they have not obeyed my voice or walked according to it, ¹⁴but they have followed the stubbornness of their own hearts and the Baals, as their ancestors taught them — ¹⁵Therefore, this is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: I am going to feed this people with wormwood and give them poisoned water to drink. ¹⁶I will scatter them among nations that neither they nor their ancestors have known, and I will send the sword after them until I have consumed them. ¹⁷This is what the LORD of Hosts says: Take note! Call for the mourning women — let them come. Send for the skilled women — let them come. ¹⁸Let them hurry and raise a wailing over us, so that our eyes may overflow with tears and our eyelids stream with water. ¹⁹For the sound of wailing is heard from Zion: 'How we are ruined! We are utterly shamed! For we have left the land; they have torn down our dwellings.' ²⁰Hear the word of the LORD, you women! Let your ears receive the word of his mouth. Teach your daughters to wail and each woman her neighbor to lament. ²¹For death has climbed through our windows and entered our fortresses, cutting off children from the streets and young men from the public squares. ²²Speak: This is what the LORD declares — The corpses of the people will fall like dung on the open field, like cut grain behind the reaper, with no one to gather them. ²³This is what the LORD says: Let not the wise boast in his wisdom, let not the strong boast in his strength, let not the wealthy boast in his wealth. ²⁴Rather, let the one who boasts boast in this: that he understands and knows me — that I am the LORD who acts with faithful love, justice, and righteousness on the earth, for in these things I delight, declares the LORD. ²⁵The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh — ²⁶Egypt, Judah, Edom, the Ammonites, Moab, and all who clip the hair at their temples who live in the wilderness — for all these nations are uncircumcised, and the entire house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Hebrew *mi yitten* ('who will give?') is an idiomatic wish formula meaning 'if only' or 'would that.' We render it as 'if only' rather than the KJV's 'Oh that' to avoid archaic phrasing.
1. In the Hebrew Bible (MT), this verse is numbered 8:23 rather than 9:1. English versification follows the chapter division tradition that places this verse as the opening of chapter 9. We follow English numbering for reader familiarity.

1. The phrase bat-ammi ('daughter of my people') is a collective personification of the nation, not a reference to a literal daughter. It is rendered simply as 'my people' to convey the collective sense.
2. The same wish formula *mi yitten* opens this verse. The prophet's grief now flips to revulsion — he wants to flee into the desert rather than remain among such people. The word *mena'afim* ('adulterers') likely carries both literal and metaphorical force: sexual infidelity and covenant unfaithfulness toward God.
2. The word *bogdim* ('traitors, treacherous ones') is from the root *b-g-d*, meaning to act faithlessly or deal treacherously. Combined with *atseret* ('assembly, gathering'), the image is of an organized group of covenant-breakers.
3. The metaphor of the tongue as a drawn bow is vivid — they load lies like arrows and fire them. The word *sheqer* ('falsehood, lie') is Jeremiah's characteristic term for the deception pervading Judah's culture. The phrase *ve'oti lo yada'u* ('and me they do not know') is the theological root of the problem — the absence of genuine knowledge of God (cf. 9:24).
4. The Hebrew contains a devastating wordplay: *aqov ya'aqov* ('utterly supplants/deceives') echoes the name *Ya'aqov* (Jacob), who was named for grasping the heel (Genesis 25:26) and whose name became synonymous with deception (Genesis 27:36). Every brother is, literally, a 'Jacob' — a heel-grabber, a supplanter. We render 'deceiver like Jacob' to preserve this wordplay for English readers.
4. The word *rakhil* ('slanderer, tale-bearer') describes someone who peddles gossip and false reports. The social fabric has completely disintegrated — neither family bonds nor neighborly trust can be relied upon.
5. The verb *yehattellu* ('they mock, deceive') emphasizes deliberate mockery and deception as a social norm. The phrase *limmedu leshonam* ('they have trained their tongues') portrays lying as a practiced skill, not a momentary lapse — they have disciplined their speech toward falsehood the way a craftsman trains in his trade.
5. The final clause *ha'veh nil'u* ('they are weary of doing wrong' or 'they exhaust themselves doing wrong') captures the irony that sin itself is exhausting labor — they pour enormous energy into their corruption.
6. The word *mirmah* ('deceit, treachery') appears twice in this short verse, framing the entire social environment. Deceit is both the medium they inhabit and the means by which they reject God. The phrase *me'anu da'at-oti* ('they refuse to know me') uses the same root *y-d-'* ('know') from verse 3 — the refusal to know God is not ignorance but willful rejection.
7. The verb *tsorefam* ('I will refine them') uses smelting imagery — God will put Judah through the furnace to purify them. The verb *bechantim* ('and test them') adds the dimension of examination. Together they picture judgment as a purification process, not mere punishment.
7. The question 'what else can I do?' reveals God's anguished restraint — this is not eager punishment but reluctant necessity. The question echoes Isaiah 5:4, 'What more could I have done for my vineyard?'
8. The metaphor shifts from the bow (v. 3) to the arrow — the tongue is now a sharpened, lethal projectile. The word *shochet* ('slaying, deadly') makes the arrow explicitly murderous. The contrast between outward *shalom* and inward *orbo* ('ambush') is the core of Judah's social corruption: friendly words conceal predatory intent.
9. This rhetorical question formula appears also in 5:9 and 5:29 — it is a recurring refrain of judgment. The verb *efqod* ('visit, punish') carries the sense of a formal inspection followed by judicial action. The word *napshi* ('my soul/self') indicates that God is personally aggrieved — this is not detached justice but the response of a betrayed covenant partner.
10. It is ambiguous whether the speaker is Jeremiah or God — the Hebrew does not specify, and this ambiguity may be intentional, as the voices of prophet and God merge in shared grief. The word *nitsetsu* ('scorched, burned') describes devastation so complete that the land is depopulated of both humans and animals. The catalog of absence — no traveler, no livestock, no birds, no animals — builds a portrait of total ecological collapse.
11. The word *tannim* (KJV 'dragons') refers to jackals — scavenging animals that inhabit ruins. Jackals in an abandoned city are a standard prophetic image of complete desolation (cf. Isaiah 13:22, 34:13). The word *gallim* ('heaps') pictures Jerusalem reduced to mounds of rubble. This verse shifts to unambiguously divine speech — God himself declares the coming destruction.
12. This verse poses a theological challenge to the 'wise' (*chakam*) — a term that in Jeremiah's context includes the scribal and court advisers who claimed to have wisdom but missed the meaning of the catastrophe. The rhetorical question demands an explanation for the land's devastation, and the following verses provide God's answer.
13. The word *torah* here is rendered 'instruction' rather than 'law' to capture the broader Hebrew meaning — *torah* encompasses teaching, guidance, and divine direction, not merely legal statutes. The three-fold indictment — abandoning *torah*, not obeying God's voice, not walking in it — represents a total failure of covenantal obedience.
14. The Jeremican formula *sheririt libbam* ('stubbornness of their hearts') recurs from 7:24, 9:13 (this verse), 11:8, 13:10, and elsewhere — it is a signature phrase describing the settled, calcified posture of rebellion. The word *ha-be'alim* ('the Baals') is plural, indicating multiple local manifestations of Baal worship at various high places. The detail that their 'ancestors taught them' makes apostasy a transmitted cultural inheritance, not merely individual sin.
15. *La'anah* ('wormwood') is a bitter, toxic plant (*Artemisia*) used metaphorically for suffering and bitterness. *Mei-rosh* ('water of gall/poison') refers to a poisonous liquid — the exact plant is debated (possibly hemlock or poppy). Together they form a judgment-meal of bitterness and death, inverting the covenant blessings of abundance and nourishment.

- 16.** The scattering among unknown nations reverses the Exodus — God brought them out from a foreign land into their own, and now he will drive them from their own land into foreign ones. The phrase 'nations they have not known' emphasizes the alienation and disorientation of exile. The sword pursuing them 'until consumed' indicates that exile itself will not be the end of judgment.
- 17.** The meqonenot ('mourning women') were professional female mourners hired to lead communal lament — a recognized vocation in the ancient Near East. The chakamot ('skilled/wise women') uses the same root as 'wise man' in verse 12, but here applied to the craft of lamentation. Their skill was considered a form of wisdom — the ability to channel communal grief into structured lament.
- 18.** The urgency — 'let them hurry' — indicates the disaster is imminent or already underway. The goal of professional mourning was to catalyze communal grief, to help the community express sorrow too deep for individuals to process alone. The physical imagery of overflowing eyes and streaming eyelids echoes the fountain-of-tears wish in verse 1.
- 19.** The cry comes from Zion itself — the sacred center of the nation. The word shuddadnu ('we are ruined, plundered') conveys violent devastation. The phrase 'we have left the land' ('azavnu erets) uses the same verb 'azav ('abandon') that verse 13 used for abandoning God's instruction — they abandoned torah and now they must abandon the land.
- 20.** Women are addressed directly — they are commissioned to transmit the art of mourning to the next generation. The verbs lammednah ('teach') and tiqqach ('receive') frame mourning as a learned discipline requiring skill and practice. This is a grim inversion of the usual transmission of culture: instead of teaching songs of joy, mothers must teach songs of death.
- 21.** Death personified as an intruder who climbs through windows draws on Canaanite mythology, where Mot (Death) was a deity who invaded homes. The Hebrew Bible subverts the mythology but retains the image: death is not a god but a force under the LORD's sovereign control. The pairing of olal ('children, infants') and bachurim ('young men') indicates that death takes all generations.
- 22.** The two similes are agricultural but horrifying: human bodies compared to dung spread on fields (used as fertilizer) and to sheaves of grain left ungathered after harvest. The phrase 've'ain me'assef' ('and no one gathers') means the dead will receive no burial — the ultimate dishonor in ancient Israelite culture (cf. Deuteronomy 28:26). The harvest imagery inverts the blessing of abundance into a harvest of death.
- 23.** The verb yithallel ('boast, glory, praise oneself') from the root h-l-l is used three times in parallel, creating a rhythmic demolition of human pretensions. The three categories — wisdom (chokmah), strength (gevurah), and wealth (osher) — represent everything human cultures typically value and celebrate. God systematically disqualifies all three as grounds for self-glory.
- 23.** Paul quotes this verse in 1 Corinthians 1:31 and 2 Corinthians 10:17 to argue that the only legitimate boasting is in the Lord.
- 24.** The phrase haskel veyado'a oti ('to understand and know me') uses two verbs: haskel (to have insight, to act wisely) and yado'a (to know relationally, intimately). This is not intellectual knowledge about God but experiential, covenantal knowledge of God's character. The triad chesed-mishpat-tsedaqah appears also in Hosea 2:19 and Micah 6:8 as the essential divine attributes that God desires his people to embody.
- 24.** The declaration ki be'elohim chafatsti ('for in these I delight') reveals God's deepest preference — not sacrifice, not ritual, not theological sophistication, but faithful love, justice, and righteousness practiced on the earth.
- 25.** The phrase mul be'orlah ('circumcised in foreskin' or 'circumcised yet uncircumcised') is paradoxical: those who bear the physical mark of the covenant but lack its inner reality. We render the meaning plainly as 'circumcised only in the flesh' to make the paradox clear. This anticipates the new-covenant theology of 31:31-34, where God will write the covenant on hearts. Paul develops this distinction extensively in Romans 2:25-29.
- 26.** The devastating climax: Judah is listed alongside pagan nations. Despite physical circumcision, Israel is grouped with the uncircumcised because their hearts remain uncut — unchanged by covenant commitment. The phrase arle-lev ('uncircumcised of heart') means the inner person has not been marked by the covenant, regardless of the body's mark.
- 26.** The phrase qetsutsé fe'ah ('those who clip the corners [of their hair]') refers to certain Arabian desert tribes who practiced a distinctive hair-cutting ritual. This practice was forbidden to Israelites in Leviticus 19:27. Egypt practiced circumcision, as did some of the other nations listed — the point is that physical circumcision without heart-transformation is meaningless.

10

Summary: Jeremiah 10 opens with a direct command not to learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by signs in the sky. The chapter then launches into one of the Hebrew Bible's most vivid satires on idol-making: a craftsman cuts a tree from the forest, shapes it with tools, decorates it with silver and gold, and fastens it so it will not topple — yet the finished product cannot speak, cannot walk, and must be carried because it has no power. Against this ridicule, the prophet exalts the living God as the true King of the nations, the maker of heaven and earth by his power and wisdom. The chapter closes with Jeremiah's personal prayer: a lament over the coming destruction, an acknowledgment that human beings cannot direct their own steps, and a plea for God to discipline with justice rather than anger.

What Makes This Remarkable: *The idol-making satire (vv. 2-5) parallels Isaiah 40:18-20 and 44:9-20 but with Jeremiah's distinctive sharpness — the comparison of idols to scarecrows in a cucumber field (v. 5) is unique to Jeremiah and unforgettable in its absurdity. The theological contrast between dead idols and the living God reaches its peak in verse 10: 'The LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King.' The phrase Elohim emet ('true God') appears only here in the Hebrew Bible. The closing prayer (vv. 23-25) shifts from prophetic oracle to personal petition, revealing Jeremiah's inner life: he knows he cannot control his own path and asks God for measured correction rather than destructive wrath. Verse 23 ('I know, LORD, that a person's way is not his own') is one of the most honest theological statements in Scripture about human limitation.*

Translation Friction: *Verses 11 is the only verse in Jeremiah written in Aramaic rather than Hebrew — a striking linguistic shift that may reflect the verse being composed as a message to be delivered to Aramaic-speaking nations. We note this anomaly. The phrase kemikshat qishshu'im ('like a scarecrow in a cucumber field') in verse 5 uses rare vocabulary — miqshah appears only here in the Hebrew Bible, and its exact meaning has been debated (scarecrow, palm-trunk pillar, or stiff upright figure). We render 'scarecrow in a cucumber patch' as the most vivid and contextually appropriate reading. The theological claim that the nations' gods are 'nothing' (hevel, 'vapor, breath') required careful translation — hevel is the same word used in Ecclesiastes for 'vanity' and carries the sense of insubstantiality rather than non-existence.*

Connections: *The idol-satire connects to Isaiah 40:18-20 and 44:9-20 (the extended mockery of idol-makers), Psalm 115:4-8 and 135:15-18 (idols have mouths but cannot speak), and Habakkuk 2:18-19. The 'signs in the sky' warning (v. 2) addresses Babylonian astral religion, which was the dominant religious competitor in Jeremiah's era. The living-God declaration (v. 10) links to Deuteronomy 5:26 and Joshua 3:10. The prayer of verse 23 connects to Proverbs 16:9 and 20:24 on human inability to direct one's own steps. The closing imprecation against nations that 'devour Jacob' (v. 25) is quoted nearly verbatim in Psalm 79:6-7. The hevel ('vapor') designation for idols connects to the Ecclesiastes vocabulary and 2 Kings 17:15.*

¹Hear the word that the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel. ²This is what the LORD says: Do not learn the ways of the nations, and do not be terrified by signs in the sky, even though the nations are terrified by them. ³For the practices of the peoples are vapor — a tree is cut from the forest, shaped by the hands of a craftsman with a chisel. ⁴They overlay it with silver and gold; they fasten it with nails and hammers so it will not topple. ⁵They are like scarecrows in a cucumber patch — they cannot speak. They must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them — they can do no harm, and they have no power to do good either. ⁶There is no one like you, LORD. You are great, and your name is great in power. ⁷Who would not revere you, O King of the nations? For this is your due. Among all the wise of the nations and in all their kingdoms, there is no one like you. ⁸But they are all senseless and foolish — the instruction of idols is nothing but wood. ⁹Hammered silver is brought from Tarshish and gold from Uphaz — the work of a craftsman and the hands of a metalsmith. Their clothing is violet and purple. They are all the product of skilled workers. ¹⁰But the LORD is the true God. He is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth trembles, and the nations cannot endure his indignation. ¹¹This is what you shall say to them: The gods that did not make the heavens and the earth — they will perish from the earth and from under these heavens. ¹²He made the earth by his power, established the world by his wisdom, and stretched out the heavens by his understanding. ¹³When he thunders, the waters in the heavens roar. He raises clouds from the ends of the earth, makes lightning for the rain, and brings out the wind from his storehouses. ¹⁴Every person is senseless, devoid of knowledge. Every metalsmith is put to shame by his idol, for his cast image is a lie — there is no breath in them. ¹⁵They are vapor, a work of mockery. In the time of their punishment, they will perish. ¹⁶The Portion of Jacob is not like these, for he is the one who formed all things, and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance. The LORD of Hosts is his name. ¹⁷Gather up your bundle from the ground, you who live under siege. ¹⁸For this is what the LORD says: At this time I am going to hurl out the inhabitants of the land, and I will bring distress upon them so that they will feel it. ¹⁹Woe to me because of my wound! My injury is severe. But I said, This is my sickness, and I must bear it. ²⁰My tent is destroyed and all my ropes are snapped. My children have gone from me — they are no more. There is no one left to pitch my tent or set up my curtains. ²¹For the shepherds have become senseless and have not sought the LORD. Therefore they have not prospered, and all their flock is scattered. ²²Listen! A report is coming — a great upheaval from the land of the north — to make the cities of Judah a desolation, a haunt of jackals.

²³I know, LORD, that a person's way is not his own — it is not for anyone to direct his own steps as he walks. ²⁴Discipline me, LORD — but with justice, not in your anger, or you will reduce me to nothing. ²⁵Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not know you and on the peoples that do not call on your name, for they have devoured Jacob — devoured him and consumed him and laid waste his homeland.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The address is to 'house of Israel' — a term that in Jeremiah's context typically encompasses all of God's covenant people, though the northern kingdom had already fallen. The imperative *shim'u* ('hear') carries the force of 'listen and obey,' not merely 'perceive audibly.'
2. The 'signs in the sky' (*otot ha-shamayim*) refer to celestial phenomena — eclipses, comets, unusual planetary alignments — which the Babylonians interpreted as omens through elaborate astrological systems. The verb *techattu* ('be terrified, shattered') is stronger than mere worry; it describes being psychologically broken by fear. God's people are not to let the heavens dominate them because the God who made the heavens governs them.
3. The word *hevel* ('vapor, breath, vanity') is the same word that dominates Ecclesiastes — it denotes something insubstantial, fleeting, without lasting weight. We render it as 'vapor' rather than the KJV's 'vain' to preserve the concrete physical image: the nations' religious practices are as substantial as a puff of breath. The idol-making process is described step by step to expose its absurdity — it begins with a tree, the most ordinary raw material.
4. The irony is surgical: the idol must be nailed down because it would fall over on its own. A god that cannot even stand upright without human engineering is no god. The verb *yeyappehu* ('they beautify it') from the root *y-p-h* means to make beautiful or adorn — the idol's appearance is entirely the craftsman's work, not any inherent divine quality.
5. The phrase *ketomer miqshah* is one of the most debated in Jeremiah. *Tomer* can mean 'palm tree' or 'scarecrow' (from a root meaning stiff, upright). *Miqshah* may mean 'cucumber field' or refer to a hammered/beaten form. The reading 'scarecrow in a cucumber patch' — an immobile, lifeless figure propped up to frighten birds — is the most devastating possible comparison for a deity and has strong support from context and from the Septuagint tradition. The four negations — cannot speak, cannot walk, cannot harm, cannot help — systematically strip the idol of every attribute of a living god.
6. The pivot from idol mockery to divine praise is abrupt and deliberate — the contrast could not be sharper. The word *gevurah* ('might, power, strength') is the same word used in 9:23 where human strength is disqualified as a ground for boasting. God's power is the only legitimate power; the idols' impotence exposes all human might as derivative.
7. The title *Melekh ha-goyim* ('King of the nations') asserts universal sovereignty — not just Israel's God but the ruler of all peoples. The verb *yira'akha* ('fear/revere you') carries the double sense of awe and reverent submission. The word *ya'atah* ('it is fitting, it belongs to you') declares that reverence is God's rightful due, not an optional response.
8. The word *yiv'aru* ('they are brutish, senseless') from the root *b-'-r* means to be like an animal — lacking rational thought. The phrase *musar havalim ets hu* ('the instruction of vapors/idols is wood') delivers the punch: whatever 'teaching' the idols offer reduces to the material they are made of — wood. The word *havalim* (plural of *hevel*) echoes verse 3.
9. *Tarshish* (possibly Tartessus in Spain or a general term for distant western trading ports) and *Uphaz* (location uncertain, possibly related to Ophir) represent the most expensive imported materials. The detail of *tekhelet* ('violet/blue') and *argaman* ('purple') fabrics — the most costly dyes in the ancient world — emphasizes the enormous expense lavished on objects that cannot move, speak, or act. The final verdict — 'they are all the work of skilled workers' — reduces every idol to its human origin.
10. Three titles appear in rapid succession: *Elohim emet* ('true God'), *Elohim chayyim* ('living God'), and *Melekh olam* ('everlasting King'). Each directly contradicts the idol-portrait of verses 3-9: the idols are false, dead, and temporary; God is true, alive, and eternal. The verb *tir'ash* ('trembles') describes seismic response to divine anger — the earth itself recoils from God's wrath.
11. This verse is unique in Jeremiah: it is written in Aramaic, not Hebrew. This is one of only a few Aramaic passages in the Hebrew Bible (the others being Daniel 2:4b-7:28, Ezra 4:8-6:18 and 7:12-26, and Genesis 31:47). The Aramaic may indicate this was a formulaic response that Israelites were to speak to foreign, Aramaic-speaking peoples — a declaration in the international language. The wordplay *ye'badu/avadu* ('perish'/'made') is vivid: the gods who did not make will themselves be unmade.
12. Three divine attributes are paired with three creative acts: *koach* ('power') made the earth, *chokmah* ('wisdom') established the habitable world, and *tevanah* ('understanding, discernment') stretched out the heavens. This verse echoes Proverbs 3:19-20, where wisdom, understanding, and knowledge are the instruments of creation. The same verse reappears nearly verbatim in 51:15, framing the book's oracle against Babylon.
13. The phrase *leqol titto* ('at the sound of his giving') is rendered 'when he thunders' — God's voice manifests as thunder, a common biblical image (cf. Psalm 29). The word *otserotav* ('his storehouses, treasuries') pictures God as having cosmic warehouses from which he draws wind, rain, and storm. This is not primitive meteorology but theological poetry: every weather event is God's direct activity, contrasting with Baal, who was supposed to be the storm-god.
14. The word *niv'ar* ('brutish, senseless') echoes verse 8. The phrase *midda'at* can mean 'from knowledge' (i.e., lacking knowledge) or 'by knowledge' (i.e., made senseless despite having knowledge). We render 'devoid of knowledge' for clarity. The word *sheqer* ('lie, falsehood') — Jeremiah's characteristic term — here applies to the idol itself: the molten image is a lie because it promises divine presence but delivers nothing. The phrase *lo ruach bam* ('there is no breath/spirit in them') is the ultimate indictment: without *ruach*, they are dead matter.

15. Hevel ('vapor') again — the idols are insubstantial. The word ta'tu'im ('mockery, delusion, ridicule') from the root t-'-l' suggests both that the idols are objects of ridicule and that they delude their worshipers. The phrase be'et pequddatam ('in the time of their visitation/punishment') uses the same vocabulary as 11:23 — a time of divine reckoning when the idols will be exposed and destroyed.
16. The title Cheleq Ya'aqov ('the Portion of Jacob') designates God as Israel's allotted share — just as each tribe received a portion of the land, Israel's true portion is God himself (cf. Psalm 73:26, 'God is the portion of my heart'). The phrase yotser ha-kol ('he who formed all things') returns to the creator-theme of verse 12. Shevet nachalato ('the tribe of his inheritance') indicates that Israel belongs to God as his special possession. This verse reappears nearly identically in 51:19.
17. The abrupt shift signals the approach of judgment. The word kin'atek ('your bundle, your goods') refers to possessions hastily gathered for flight — the urgency of evacuation. The yoshebet ba-matsor ('inhabitant of the siege/fortress') is Jerusalem herself, addressed as a woman preparing to flee the besieged city.
18. The verb qole'a ('hurling, slinging') is vivid — God will sling the people out of the land like a stone from a sling. The phrase lema'an yimtsa'u ('so that they will find/feel/experience it') means they will experience the full weight of the judgment that their behavior has brought upon them. The word bappa'am hazzot ('at this time') indicates that this is the decisive moment — previous warnings have passed; now the action comes.
19. The speaker shifts to Jeremiah (or personified Zion — the ambiguity may be intentional). The words shivri ('my breaking'), makkati ('my wound'), and cholyi ('my sickness') describe the nation's destruction as a personal bodily injury. The resignation — 'I must bear it' — is not passive acceptance but the recognition that the suffering is deserved and must be endured.
20. The tent metaphor pictures the complete collapse of domestic life — the tent (oholi) is the home, the ropes (metaray) hold it together, and the children (banay) represent the future. All are gone. The phrase ve'ainam ('and they are not') is the starkest possible Hebrew expression for absence — total disappearance. The image of a collapsed tent with no one to re-erect it is a picture of irreversible desolation.
21. The ro'im ('shepherds') are Judah's leaders — kings, priests, and prophets — not literal herders. The metaphor of rulers as shepherds was universal in the ancient Near East. The word niv'aru ('became senseless') is the same root as verses 8 and 14 — the leaders are as senseless as the idol-worshipers. The verb nafotsah ('scattered') anticipates the exile: the flock-people are dispersed because the shepherd-leaders failed.
22. The 'land of the north' (erets tsafon) is Babylon — though geographically east of Judah, the Babylonian armies approached via the northern route through Syria. The word ra'ash ('upheaval, earthquake, commotion') describes the tremor of approaching armies. The phrase me'on tannim ('haunt of jackals') repeats from 9:11, forming a refrain of desolation.
23. Jeremiah's prayer begins with a confession of human limitation. The word darko ('his way, his path') refers to the course of life. The verb hakhin ('to establish, direct, prepare') indicates that humans lack the ability to determine their own destiny. This is not fatalism but theological realism — a recognition that only God can rightly order a life. The verse connects to Proverbs 16:9 ('A person plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps') and Proverbs 20:24.
24. The verb yassreni ('discipline me, correct me') accepts the necessity of divine correction but pleads for measured judgment. The word mishpat ('justice, right measure') here means proportionate discipline — correction that reforms rather than destroys. The contrast is between mishpat (measured justice) and af ('anger, fury'). The verb tam'iteni ('diminish me, reduce me') means to make small, to reduce to nothing — Jeremiah fears that divine wrath without restraint would be annihilating.
25. This verse is quoted nearly verbatim in Psalm 79:6-7, and scholars debate which text is original. The prayer asks God to redirect his fury from Israel to the nations that have destroyed Israel. The triple repetition — akhelu ('they ate'), akhaluhu ('they devoured him'), wayekhalluhu ('they consumed him') — uses near-synonyms to intensify the image of total consumption. The word navehu ('his pasture, homeland, dwelling place') connects back to the tent and shepherd imagery of verses 20-21.

11

Summary: Jeremiah 11 opens with a direct divine command to proclaim the words of the covenant to Judah and Jerusalem. God recalls the covenant made at the Exodus — the 'iron furnace' of Egypt — and declares that the people have broken it through persistent disobedience and idolatry. The chapter turns sharply personal in its second half: Jeremiah discovers that the men of his own hometown, Anathoth, are plotting to kill him to silence his prophecy. God responds with a judgment oracle against Anathoth, marking the beginning of Jeremiah's 'confessions' — the raw, personal laments that distinguish this book from all other prophetic literature.

What Makes This Remarkable: This chapter bridges two of Jeremiah's major themes — the broken covenant and the suffering prophet — within a single literary unit. The covenant language in verses 1-8 echoes Deuteronomy almost verbatim, establishing Jeremiah as a prophet in the Mosaic tradition. The phrase 'iron furnace' (kur ha-barzel, v. 4) for Egypt appears only here and in Deuteronomy 4:20 and 1 Kings 8:51, linking Jeremiah's message directly to the oldest covenant traditions. The conspiracy from

Anathoth is especially bitter because Anathoth was a Levitical priestly city — Jeremiah's own priestly kinsmen want him dead. The metaphor of the 'lamb led to slaughter' (v. 19) reappears in Isaiah 53:7 applied to the Suffering Servant, creating one of the most significant intertextual connections between the prophets. We rendered the covenant-curse formula precisely because Jeremiah is not improvising — he is quoting the Deuteronomic curse tradition word for word.

Translation Friction: The verb shama ('hear, obey') appears repeatedly in verses 2-8, and we had to determine when it means 'hear' (auditory) versus 'obey' (covenantal compliance) — context guided each decision. The word arur ('cursed') in verse 3 is formal covenant-curse language, and we preserved the stark 'Cursed' rather than softening it. The phrase 'I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter' (v. 19) uses the rare Hebrew keves alluph, where alluph means 'tame, trusting' — we rendered this as 'a gentle lamb' rather than 'a docile lamb' to capture the innocence rather than mere passivity. The plotting language in verses 18-23 shifts from third-person report to first-person divine speech without explicit transition, requiring careful handling.

Connections: The covenant-curse language connects directly to Deuteronomy 27:26 and 28:15-68. The 'iron furnace' metaphor links to Deuteronomy 4:20 and 1 Kings 8:51. The 'lamb led to slaughter' image connects forward to Isaiah 53:7 and is applied by early Christians to Jesus. The conspiracy from Jeremiah's hometown anticipates Jesus's rejection at Nazareth (Luke 4:24-29). The divine command 'Do not pray for this people' (v. 14) reprises the prohibition from 7:16 and anticipates 14:11. Anathoth's judgment connects to the broader theme of priestly failure running through Jeremiah 1-20.

¹The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²Hear the words of this covenant, and speak them to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ³Say to them: This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says — Cursed is the one who does not obey the words of this covenant, ⁴which I commanded your ancestors on the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the iron furnace, saying: Obey my voice and do all that I command you, and you will be my people and I will be your God — ⁵in order to fulfill the oath I swore to your ancestors — to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as it is today." Then I answered and said, "Amen, LORD." ⁶Then the LORD said to me: Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying — Hear the words of this covenant and do them. ⁷For I solemnly warned your ancestors from the day I brought them up out of the land of Egypt until this very day, warning them persistently: Obey my voice. ⁸But they did not obey or incline their ear. Each one walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart. So I brought upon them all the words of this covenant which I commanded them to do — but they did not do them. ⁹Then the LORD said to me: A conspiracy has been found among the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁰They have turned back to the iniquities of their earliest ancestors, who refused to hear my words, and they have gone after other gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant that I made with their ancestors. ¹¹Therefore, this is what the LORD says: I am about to bring disaster upon them that they will not be able to escape. When they cry out to me, I will not listen to them. ¹²Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods to whom they burn incense — but those gods will never save them in the time of their disaster. ¹³For your gods have become as numerous as your cities, O Judah, and the altars you have set up to that shameful thing — altars to burn incense to Baal — are as many as the streets of Jerusalem. ¹⁴As for you — do not pray for this people. Do not lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their disaster. ¹⁵What right has my beloved in my house when she practices her schemes with many? Can the holy flesh remove your guilt from you? For when you do evil, then you rejoice. ¹⁶A flourishing olive tree, beautiful with fine fruit — that is what the LORD once called you. But with the roar of a great storm he has set it ablaze, and its branches are broken. ¹⁷For the LORD of Hosts, who planted you, has decreed disaster against you because of the evil that the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done, provoking me to anger by burning incense to Baal. ¹⁸The LORD made it known to me, and I knew. Then you showed me their deeds. ¹⁹But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. I did not know that they had plotted schemes against me: 'Let us destroy the tree with its fruit. Let us cut him off from the land of the living, so that his name will be remembered no more.' ²⁰But, O LORD of Hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the mind and the heart — let me see your vengeance on them, for to you I have committed my cause. ²¹Therefore, this is what the LORD says concerning the men of Anathoth who are seeking your life and saying, 'Do not prophesy in the

name of the LORD, or you will die by our hand' — ²²Therefore, this is what the LORD of Hosts says: I am about to punish them. Their young men will die by the sword; their sons and daughters will die by famine. ²³No remnant will be left to them, for I will bring disaster upon the men of Anathoth in the year of their punishment.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The standard prophetic reception formula. The Hebrew *le'mor* ('saying') introduces direct speech and is rendered as a colon rather than retained as a redundant English word.
2. The command is directed first to Jeremiah himself — 'hear' — and then he must relay the covenant words. The word *berit* ('covenant') immediately establishes that Jeremiah's message concerns the Sinai agreement, not a new revelation.
3. The formula *koh amar YHWH* ('Thus says the LORD') is rendered throughout the project as 'This is what the LORD says.' The covenant-curse *arur* directly quotes the ceremony prescribed in Deuteronomy 27:15-26, where the people themselves said 'Amen' to each curse. Jeremiah is reminding them of their own sworn agreement.
4. The covenant formula 'you will be my people and I will be your God' is the bilateral core of the Sinai relationship (Exodus 6:7, Leviticus 26:12, Deuteronomy 26:17-18). The word 'ancestors' replaces the KJV's 'fathers' as standard TCR modernization. The iron furnace metaphor is deliberately archaic within the text itself — Jeremiah is reaching back to the oldest covenant language.
5. Jeremiah responds with 'Amen' — the liturgical affirmation of covenant acceptance. This is the same response the people were supposed to give at the covenant-curse ceremony in Deuteronomy 27. The prophet personally affirms the covenant that his people have broken.
6. The verb *qara* ('proclaim, call out') indicates public declaration, not private study. Jeremiah is sent as a herald of the covenant into the public squares. The command 'do them' (*wa'asitem otam*) echoes the standard Deuteronomic formula for covenant obedience.
7. The Hebrew construction *ha'ed he'edoti* is an emphatic infinitive absolute — 'I solemnly, solemnly warned.' The idiom *hashkem* ('rising early') appears frequently in Jeremiah as shorthand for God's persistent, repeated effort to warn Israel through the prophets (cf. 7:13, 7:25, 25:3, 25:4, 26:5, 29:19, 32:33, 35:14-15, 44:4).
8. The phrase *sheririut libbam hara* ('stubbornness of their evil heart') is a Jeremican formula that recurs throughout the book (3:17, 7:24, 9:13, 13:10, 16:12, 18:12, 23:17). It describes not a single act of rebellion but a settled disposition — the heart has hardened into a fixed posture of resistance. The covenant curses are not arbitrary punishments but the sworn consequences the people accepted at Sinai.
9. The word *qesher* ('conspiracy') is striking — it is the same word used for Absalom's conspiracy against David (2 Samuel 15:12) and Jehu's coup (2 Kings 9:14). God characterizes covenant-breaking not as mere negligence but as active conspiracy against himself.
10. The verb *heferu* ('they have broken, violated') is the technical term for covenant annulment. The word *karati* ('I cut') reminds the reader that covenants in the ancient world were 'cut' — ratified by cutting animals in half (cf. Genesis 15). Both kingdoms, Israel and Judah, are indicted together, even though the northern kingdom had already fallen by Jeremiah's time.
11. The word *ra'ah* ('evil, disaster, calamity') here means disaster as covenant consequence, not moral evil. God's refusal to listen inverts the covenant formula — they would not listen to God (v. 8), so God will not listen to them. The inescapability emphasizes that this is not a threat to be negotiated but a sentence already passed.
12. The bitter irony is explicit: the gods they chose over the LORD will be powerless to help them. The verb *meqatterim* ('burning incense') indicates active, ongoing worship of foreign deities — this is not a past failing but a present practice.
13. The rhetoric of abundance — gods matching cities, altars matching streets — depicts total saturation of idolatry. Every urban space has been claimed for false worship. The word *bosheth* ('shame, shameful thing') is used as a pejorative replacement for Ba'al's name, a practice also visible in the textual history of names like Mephibosheth (originally Merib-baal).
14. This prohibition against prophetic intercession is one of the most disturbing commands in the book (cf. 7:16, 14:11). The prophet's primary role included interceding for the people before God (as Moses did in Exodus 32:11-14), and God is now cutting off that channel. The situation has passed the point where intercession can help.
15. This verse is notoriously difficult in Hebrew. The 'beloved' (*yedidi*, feminine) is Judah personified as a once-beloved woman now practicing wickedness. 'Holy flesh' likely refers to sacrificial offerings — the people believe that ritual sacrifice can cover their moral corruption. The verse's grammar is disrupted, possibly reflecting the emotional intensity of the speech.
16. The olive tree metaphor for Israel appears also in Hosea 14:6 and Romans 11:17-24. The name God gave — 'flourishing olive tree' — expressed promise and beauty, but the tree is now being consumed by fire. The shift from beauty to burning is abrupt and devastating.
17. The same God who planted the olive tree now burns it — the Gardener destroys his own planting because the tree has become corrupt. The phrase *YHWH tseva'ot* ('the LORD of Hosts') emphasizes God's sovereign power over all heavenly and earthly forces. Both kingdoms are again named together in shared guilt.

- 18.** This verse marks a dramatic shift — the beginning of Jeremiah's first 'confession' or personal lament (11:18-23). The prophet was unaware of the conspiracy against him until God revealed it. The simplicity of the Hebrew ('he made known, and I knew') captures the moment of sudden, devastating awareness.
- 19.** The phrase 'destroy the tree with its fruit' (literally 'with its bread/food') is their plan to eliminate Jeremiah completely — person and legacy. 'Cut off from the land of the living' means killed. 'His name remembered no more' means total obliteration of memory. The conspirators want not just Jeremiah's death but his erasure. The irony is acute: Jeremiah is the most personally documented prophet in the Hebrew Bible.
- 20.** The appeal to God as righteous judge who examines kelayot ('kidneys/inner thoughts') and lev ('heart') reflects the ancient Israelite understanding of the kidneys as the seat of the deepest emotions and the heart as the seat of the will and intellect. Jeremiah does not take revenge himself but commits his riv ('legal case, cause') to God.
- 21.** Anathoth was a Levitical city about three miles northeast of Jerusalem, Jeremiah's hometown (1:1). These are not foreigners or pagans threatening the prophet — they are his priestly kinsmen, his own community. Their demand — 'Do not prophesy' — attempts to silence the covenant-enforcement message. The threat is explicit: death.
- 22.** The verb poqed ('punish, visit upon') indicates judicial action — God will formally hold Anathoth accountable. The double death — sword and famine — covers military violence and siege conditions. Those who threatened Jeremiah's life will lose their own children's lives.
- 23.** The 'year of their punishment' (shenat pequddatam) indicates an appointed time of divine reckoning. The absence of any remnant (she'erit) is the most severe judgment possible — in prophetic theology, even catastrophic judgment usually leaves a remnant. Anathoth's conspiracy against God's prophet will be met with total destruction.

12

Summary: *Jeremiah 12 continues the prophet's first confession with a bold legal complaint against God: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? God's answer is not comfort but warning — if running with footmen has exhausted Jeremiah, how will he compete with horses? The chapter then shifts to an oracle of judgment against Judah's 'evil neighbors' who have seized the LORD's inheritance, followed by a surprising promise that even these pagan nations will be restored if they learn to swear by the LORD's name.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains one of the most stunningly honest prayers in the Bible — a prophet bringing a legal case against God himself. The verb tsadeq ('righteous') in verse 1 is judicial: Jeremiah concedes God's righteousness in advance but still demands an explanation. God's response in verse 5 is one of the harshest divine answers in Scripture — not an explanation but a warning that things will get worse. The 'horses' metaphor has become proverbial for spiritual endurance: if the easy trials defeat you, the hard ones will destroy you. The final oracle (vv. 14-17) is remarkable for its universalism — pagan nations that learn the LORD's ways will be 'built up' among God's people, a promise that anticipates the prophetic vision of gentile inclusion.*

Translation Friction: *The word mishpatim ('judgments, cases') in verse 1 forced a decision between legal and moral senses — we chose the judicial reading because Jeremiah is explicitly bringing a riv ('case') before God. The phrase 'the thickets of the Jordan' (ga'on ha-Yarden, v. 5) literally means 'the pride/swelling of the Jordan' — a reference to the dense, dangerous jungle that lined the Jordan's banks where lions lived. We rendered this as 'the thickets of the Jordan' to preserve the geographical reference while noting the Hebrew. The shift from personal lament (vv. 1-6) to national oracle (vv. 7-13) to international promise (vv. 14-17) required careful tone transitions.*

Connections: *The 'why do the wicked prosper' question connects to Job 21:7-15, Psalm 73, and Habakkuk 1:13. God's response about horses anticipates the escalating suffering Jeremiah will endure in chapters 20, 26, 37-38. The vineyard/inheritance language (vv. 7-13) echoes Isaiah 5:1-7 and anticipates Jesus's parable of the wicked tenants (Matthew 21:33-41). The promise to pagan nations (vv. 14-17) connects to Isaiah 19:23-25 and the eventual inclusion of gentiles in the covenant community.*

¹You are righteous, O LORD, when I bring my case before you. Yet I would plead my case with you: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the treacherous thrive? ²You have planted them, and they have taken root. They grow and even bear fruit. You are near in their mouth but far from their heart. ³But you, O LORD — you know me. You see me and test my heart toward you. Drag them out like sheep for the slaughter, and set them apart for the day of killing. ⁴How long will the

land mourn and the grass of every field wither? Because of the wickedness of those who dwell in it, the animals and birds are swept away — for they say, 'He will not see our end.' ⁵If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how will you compete with horses? If you stumble in a land of peace, what will you do in the thickets of the Jordan? ⁶For even your brothers and your father's house — even they have betrayed you. Even they have raised a full cry against you. Do not trust them, though they speak kindly to you. ⁷I have abandoned my house. I have forsaken my inheritance. I have given the beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies. ⁸My inheritance has become to me like a lion in the forest. She has roared against me; therefore I have turned against her. ⁹Is my inheritance to me like a speckled bird of prey, with birds of prey circling against her on every side? Go, gather all the wild beasts — bring them to devour. ¹⁰Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard. They have trampled my portion underfoot. They have turned my cherished portion into a desolate wilderness. ¹¹They have made it desolate. It mourns before me in its desolation. The whole land is made desolate, because no one takes it to heart. ¹²Over all the barren heights in the wilderness, destroyers have come, for the sword of the LORD devours from one end of the land to the other. There is no peace for any living thing. ¹³They have sown wheat but reaped thorns. They have exhausted themselves for no profit. Be ashamed of your harvests because of the fierce anger of the LORD. ¹⁴This is what the LORD says concerning all my evil neighbors who seize the inheritance I gave my people Israel to possess: I am about to uproot them from their land, and I will uproot the house of Judah from among them. ¹⁵And after I have uprooted them, I will again have compassion on them, and I will restore each one to his inheritance and each one to his land. ¹⁶And if they diligently learn the ways of my people — to swear by my name, 'As the LORD lives,' just as they once taught my people to swear by Baal — then they will be built up in the midst of my people. ¹⁷But if they will not obey, then I will utterly uproot and destroy that nation, declares the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The opening *tsaddiq atтах* ('righteous are you') is a concession, not a praise hymn — Jeremiah acknowledges God's justice before challenging it. The word *bogdei* ('treacherous ones') implies deliberate betrayal — not mere sinners but covenant-violators who have profited from their disloyalty. This is the biblical locus classicus for the problem of theodicy.
2. The plant metaphor echoes the olive tree of 11:16 — God planted them, they flourish, yet their devotion is only verbal. 'Near in their mouth but far from their kidneys' (*kilyoteihem*, literally 'kidneys' — the seat of deep emotions) describes superficial religion. We render *kilyot* as 'heart' here because the mouth/heart contrast communicates the hypocrisy more naturally to modern readers.
3. Jeremiah contrasts himself with the hypocrites of verse 2: they are far from God in their inner being, but God knows and tests Jeremiah's heart. The phrase *haqdishshem* ('set them apart, consecrate them') uses sacrificial language with bitter irony — the wicked are 'consecrated' not for worship but for slaughter. The prayer for vengeance is raw and unfiltered.
4. The land itself mourns — creation suffers because of human sin, a theme that connects to Genesis 3:17 and Romans 8:22. The final clause is ambiguous: 'He will not see our end' could mean the wicked believe God does not see their fate, or that Jeremiah will not see their downfall. Most interpreters take it as the wicked's arrogant dismissal of prophetic warnings.
5. This is God's answer to Jeremiah's complaint — and it is not the answer the prophet wanted. Instead of explaining why the wicked prosper, God warns that the suffering will intensify. The footmen/horses contrast has become proverbial: small trials prepare for greater ones. The 'thickets of the Jordan' was the most dangerous terrain in the land, home to predators and flooding.
6. God reveals the full extent of the betrayal: it is not strangers but Jeremiah's own family who have turned against him. The warning 'do not trust them though they speak kindly' indicates that the family's hostility is masked by friendly words — a deeper treachery than open opposition. This family betrayal intensifies the Anathoth conspiracy of chapter 11.
7. The speaker shifts abruptly to God himself — 'my house,' 'my inheritance,' 'the beloved of my soul.' The threefold 'I have' (*azavti, natashti, natati*) hammers home that God is the one performing the abandonment, and it costs him deeply. The word *nachalah* ('inheritance') applied to Israel means they are God's personal, treasured possession.
8. The startling image: Israel, God's treasured inheritance, has become like a wild lion roaring defiance at its owner. The word *sne'tiha* ('I hated her') is covenant-termination language — not an emotion but a legal declaration of the relationship's end (cf. the use of 'hate' in divorce contexts, Malachi 2:16). We rendered it as 'turned against her' to capture the covenantal rather than emotional sense.
9. The 'speckled bird of prey' (*ayit tsavua*) is an unusual bird that attracts attack from other birds — Israel's syncretistic religion has made her a target. The command to gather beasts for devouring is addressed to the nations, whom God summons as instruments of judgment. The imagery is of a carcass attracting predators.

10. The 'shepherds' (ro'im) are foreign rulers or invading armies whom God has permitted to ravage the land. 'My vineyard' (karimi) echoes Isaiah 5:1-7 where Israel is God's vineyard. The phrase chelqat chemdati ('my cherished portion') uses the language of a landowner surveying his devastated estate. God grieves the destruction even as he permits it.
11. The threefold repetition of shemamah ('desolation') creates a drumbeat of devastation. The land itself mourns — personified creation grieving its abuse. The final clause ('no one takes it to heart') indicts not just the invaders but the people of Judah who are indifferent to the destruction of God's land.
12. The 'sword of the LORD' (cherev la-YHWH) makes explicit that the invaders are God's instrument — the destruction is divinely directed. The phrase 'no peace for any living thing' (ein shalom lekhoh basar) is total: not even animals are spared. The word shalom here means safety, security, well-being — all of it gone.
13. The wheat-and-thorns proverb inverts the expected agricultural cycle — labor produces only futility. This echoes the curse of Genesis 3:18 ('thorns and thistles') and anticipates the futility curses of Deuteronomy 28:38-40. The 'fierce anger of the LORD' (charon af YHWH) is the heat of divine wrath that has scorched the land's productivity.
14. The oracle shifts to address the surrounding nations — 'evil neighbors' (shekhenim hara'im) who have seized portions of Israel's land. God will uproot both the pagan nations and Judah from the land — a shared exile. The verb notesham ('uproot') uses agricultural imagery consistent with the planting/vineyard theme of the chapter.
15. The promise of restoration follows judgment — a pattern characteristic of Jeremiah's theology. The verb richamtim ('I will have compassion on them') shares the root rechem ('womb'), suggesting the deepest maternal tenderness. Remarkably, this compassion extends even to the pagan nations, not only to Judah.
16. This verse is remarkably universalist for its context: pagan nations that adopt the worship of the LORD will be incorporated into God's people. The condition is genuine conversion — learning God's ways, swearing by his name. The ironic reversal is pointed: these nations taught Israel idolatry, and now they themselves must learn Israel's faith. The verb nivnu ('be built up') implies permanent establishment, not mere toleration.
17. The alternative to conversion is total destruction — there is no neutral ground. The emphatic infinitive absolute natosh venatasht ('utterly uproot') doubles the verb for intensity. The chapter ends with ne'um YHWH ('declares the LORD'), the prophetic attestation formula that seals the oracle as divine speech.

13

Summary: *Jeremiah 13 opens with the dramatic sign-act of the linen belt (ezor): God commands Jeremiah to buy a belt, wear it, then bury it by the Euphrates. When he retrieves it, the belt is ruined — a parable of how God bound Judah to himself in intimate covenant relationship, but the people's pride and idolatry have made them worthless. The chapter then delivers oracles about wine jars filled to bursting (divine judgment disguised as abundance), a warning about the exile ('carried beyond the Euphrates'), and a searing indictment of Jerusalem's shamelessness, ending with the haunting question: 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The linen belt sign-act is one of Jeremiah's most vivid prophetic demonstrations. The ezor (linen waistcloth or belt) was the garment worn closest to the body — the metaphor is about intimacy, not decoration. Just as a belt clings to a person's waist, so God bound Israel to himself (v. 11). The ruined belt is therefore not just a picture of judgment but of broken intimacy. The question about the Ethiopian and leopard (v. 23) has become proverbial in English, but its original force is theological: Judah's sin has become so ingrained that repentance is as unlikely as a biological impossibility. The wine-jar oracle (vv. 12-14) uses the image of drunkenness not for pleasure but for the staggering, helpless confusion God will inflict as judgment. We preserved the sign-act narrative in prose without line breaks, consistent with our rendering of prophetic narrative sections.*

Translation Friction: *The location of the belt burial is debated: the Hebrew reads Perat, which normally means Euphrates, but some scholars propose a nearby wadi Parah (modern Ain Farah) since a round trip to the Euphrates would be extraordinary. We translated 'Euphrates' because the symbolic connection to Babylon and exile is central to the sign-act's meaning. The phrase 'uncover your skirts over your face' (v. 26) uses language of sexual exposure as a metaphor for the public shaming of conquest — we rendered it directly because euphemizing it would diminish the severity of the prophetic indictment. The word sheririut ('stubbornness') in verse 10 continues the Jeremic formula from 11:8.*

Connections: The linen belt sign-act connects to Jeremiah's other sign-acts: the potter's wheel (ch. 18), the broken flask (ch. 19), the yoke (ch. 27-28). The Euphrates location foreshadows the Babylonian exile. The Ethiopian/leopard proverb connects to Jeremiah's broader theme that the heart is incurable (17:9). The 'scattering like chaff' image (v. 24) connects to Psalm 1:4 and Matthew 3:12. The exposure/shame language connects to Hosea 2:3, Nahum 3:5, and Ezekiel 16:37.

¹This is what the LORD said to me: Go and buy yourself a linen belt, and put it around your waist, but do not put it in water. ²So I bought the belt according to the word of the LORD and put it around my waist. ³Then the word of the LORD came to me a second time: ⁴Take the belt that you bought, the one around your waist, and go to the Euphrates. Hide it there in a crevice of the rock. ⁵So I went and hid it by the Euphrates, as the LORD commanded me. ⁶After many days, the LORD said to me: Go to the Euphrates and retrieve the belt I commanded you to hide there. ⁷So I went to the Euphrates, dug, and retrieved the belt from the place where I had hidden it. And there it was — the belt was ruined, good for nothing. ⁸Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁹This is what the LORD says: In this same way I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. ¹⁰This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who walk in the stubbornness of their heart, and who have gone after other gods to serve and worship them — they will become like this belt, good for nothing. ¹¹For just as a belt clings to a person's waist, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the LORD — to be my people, for a name, for praise, and for glory. But they would not listen. ¹²You shall also speak this word to them: This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says — Every jar will be filled with wine. And they will say to you, 'Do we not know perfectly well that every jar will be filled with wine?' ¹³Then say to them: This is what the LORD says — I am about to fill all the inhabitants of this land — the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem — with drunkenness. ¹⁴And I will smash them one against another, fathers and sons together, declares the LORD. I will not pity, I will not spare, I will not show compassion — I will destroy them.

¹⁵Hear and give ear — do not be proud,
for the LORD has spoken.

¹⁶Give glory to the LORD your God
before he brings darkness,
before your feet stumble
on the mountains at twilight.
You will hope for light,
but he will turn it to deep shadow
and make it thick darkness.

¹⁷But if you will not listen,
my soul will weep in secret
because of your pride.
My eyes will weep bitterly
and run down with tears,
for the LORD's flock has been taken captive.

¹⁸Say to the king and to the queen mother:
Come down from your thrones and sit low,
for your glorious crown has fallen from your head.

¹⁹The cities of the Negev are shut up, with no one to open them. All of Judah is carried into exile — completely carried away.
²⁰Lift up your eyes and see those coming from the north.
Where is the flock entrusted to you —
your beautiful flock?

²¹What will you say when he sets over you as head those you yourself trained as allies? Will not anguish seize you like a woman in labor? ²²And if you say in your heart, 'Why has this happened to me?' — it is because of the greatness of your iniquity that your skirts are stripped away and your body exposed.

²³Can a Cushite change his skin,
or a leopard its spots?
Then perhaps you also could do good —
you who are trained in evil.

²⁴Therefore I will scatter them like chaff
driven by the desert wind.

²⁵This is your lot,
the portion I have measured out for you, declares the LORD,
because you forgot me
and trusted in falsehood.

²⁶So I myself will strip your skirts over your face,
and your shame will be exposed.

²⁷Your adulteries, your lustful neighings,
your shameless prostitution on the hills and in the fields —
I have seen your detestable acts.
Woe to you, O Jerusalem!
How long will you remain unclean?

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The *ezor pishtim* ('linen belt/waistcloth') was the innermost garment, worn directly against the skin. The instruction not to wash it is significant — it must retain the intimate contact, the body's imprint. Linen was also priestly fabric (Exodus 28:42), connecting the belt to Jeremiah's priestly identity.
2. Jeremiah's immediate obedience is narrated without comment — the prophet simply does what God commands. The simplicity of the prose contrasts with the symbolic weight of the action.
3. The second divine command introduces the next phase of the sign-act. The narrative structure — command, obedience, second command, obedience, interpretation — is the standard pattern for prophetic sign-acts.
4. The Hebrew *Peratah* means 'to the Euphrates.' Whether Jeremiah literally traveled to the Euphrates River (a journey of several hundred miles each way) or to a local wadi Parah is debated. We render 'Euphrates' because the symbolic identification with Babylon and exile is the theological point of the sign-act. The belt that clung to Jeremiah's body is now hidden in foreign territory.
5. Again, simple obedience narrated without elaboration. The journey itself — if literal — would have been an extraordinary prophetic demonstration visible to many.
6. The 'many days' allow time for the belt to decay — the passage of time is essential to the sign-act's meaning. The belt that was once intimately close is now distant and deteriorating.
7. The climax of the sign-act: the belt that once clung intimately to the prophet's body is now *nishchat* ('ruined, spoiled, corrupted'). The word *lo yitslach lakkol* ('good for nothing, useless for anything') is emphatic — total worthlessness. The once-beautiful priestly linen is decomposed beyond use.
8. The interpretation formula — God now explains the sign-act's meaning.
9. The verb *ashchit* ('I will ruin') is the same root as *nishchat* ('was ruined') describing the belt — the parallel is exact. Just as the belt was ruined, so God will ruin Judah's *ga'on* ('pride, arrogance, excellence'). The word *ga'on* can mean either 'pride' (negative) or 'excellence/majesty' (positive) — here it is the arrogance that has separated Judah from God.
10. The interpretation makes the parallel explicit: the people are the belt. The phrase *sheririt libbam* ('stubbornness of their heart') recurs from 11:8 as Jeremiah's standard diagnosis. The triple indictment — refusing to hear, walking in stubbornness, pursuing other gods — is the complete covenant violation. The climax 'good for nothing' (*lo yitslach lakkol*) applies the belt's condition to the nation.

11. The fourfold purpose — 'people, name, praise, glory' — echoes Deuteronomy 26:19. God's intention was that Israel would be his intimate possession, his reputation on earth, his praise among the nations. The final 'but they would not listen' (velo shame'u) is devastating in its brevity — all that divine purpose, refused. The belt metaphor reaches its full meaning here: God wrapped a nation around himself like a garment, and they rotted away.
12. The oracle begins with what sounds like a promise of abundance — every nevel ('jar, jug, wineskin') filled with wine. The people's dismissive response ('obviously!') shows they hear only the surface meaning. But the 'wine' is divine judgment — God will fill them with staggering confusion, not celebration. The wordplay depends on nevel meaning both 'wine jar' and sounding like naval ('fool').
13. The meaning is now revealed: the 'wine' is shikkaron ('drunkenness, intoxication') — not celebration but the staggering confusion of divine judgment. Every social class is listed — kings, priests, prophets, common people — no one is exempt. The drunkenness metaphor appears also in Isaiah 29:9 and Jeremiah 25:15-29 (the cup of God's wrath).
14. The jar metaphor continues — the jars filled with wine are now smashed against each other. The image is of ceramic vessels shattering on impact. The threefold negation — no pity, no sparing, no compassion — is the most comprehensive statement of judgment's finality. Even the family bond (fathers and sons) will not prevent destruction.
15. The shift to poetry is marked by parallelism. The imperative 'do not be proud' (al tighahu) directly addresses the ga'on ('pride') theme from verse 9. The statement 'the LORD has spoken' is both authentication and warning — the decree is final.
16. The imagery of darkness overtaking travelers on mountain paths is vivid — once twilight falls in the mountains, the path becomes lethal. The word tsalmaveth ('deep shadow, death-shadow') combines tsel ('shadow') with maveth ('death') — the same word appears in Psalm 23:4. The progression from hope for light to deep darkness to thick gloom is a three-stage descent into judgment.
17. One of the most tender verses in Jeremiah — the 'weeping prophet' title originates from passages like this. The prophet weeps in secret (bemistarim), not publicly — this is private grief, not performance. The phrase 'the LORD's flock' (eder YHWH) shifts to pastoral imagery: the nation is not just a political entity but God's personally tended flock, now seized by predators.
18. The gevirah ('queen mother') held significant political power in the Judean court — likely a reference to Nehushta, mother of King Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:8). The command to 'sit low' (hashpilu shevu) means to descend from the throne to the ground — the posture of mourning and humiliation. The crown falling symbolizes the end of royal authority.
19. The Negev cities, the southern gateway to Judah, are sealed — invasion from the south has closed every escape route. The emphatic 'all of Judah' (kullah) and 'completely' (shelomim, literally 'wholly, in entirety') stress the totality of the exile. No partial judgment, no remnant left behind.
20. Jerusalem is addressed as a shepherdess who has lost her flock. The enemy comes 'from the north' (mitsafon) — the standard direction of Babylonian invasion, since armies approached via the Fertile Crescent rather than crossing the desert directly. The 'beautiful flock' (tson tifarteikh) echoes 'the LORD's flock' from verse 17 — Jerusalem was given stewardship of God's people and has failed.
21. The irony is sharp: Jerusalem cultivated foreign alliances (trained them as 'allies/chiefs' over herself), and now those very nations will rule over her as conquerors. The birth-pangs metaphor for judgment is common in the prophets (Isaiah 13:8, Micah 4:9-10) — sudden, inescapable, agonizing pain.
22. The exposure of skirts (shulayikh) is the language of public humiliation — conquered cities were stripped and paraded as a sign of total defeat. The image draws on the metaphor of Jerusalem as a woman whose shame is publicly revealed because of her unfaithfulness. This connects to the adultery/idolatry metaphor that runs through Jeremiah and Ezekiel.
23. This verse has become proverbial in English ('a leopard cannot change its spots') but its original context is a devastating theological verdict: Judah has practiced evil so long that it has become their nature. The word limmudei ('trained, accustomed, disciples of') implies that evil has become their education, their skill, their expertise. The question implies that only divine intervention — not human effort — can change them.
24. The chaff/wind image appears throughout the Hebrew Bible as a metaphor for the impermanent and worthless (Psalm 1:4, Isaiah 17:13). The 'desert wind' (ruach midbar) is the scorching east wind from the Arabian desert — hot, dry, and destructive.
25. The word goral ('lot') evokes the casting of lots — Jerusalem's fate has been determined. The 'falsehood' (sheqer) encompasses both false gods and the false prophets who promised peace (cf. 14:13-14). Forgetting God (shakhachat oti) is not mere forgetfulness but deliberate abandonment of the covenant relationship.
26. God performs the act of exposure himself — this is not random violence but judicial sentence. The stripping of garments over the face was a public humiliation inflicted on conquered peoples and adulterous women (Nahum 3:5, Ezekiel 16:37, Hosea 2:3). The word qalon ('shame, disgrace, dishonor') is the public revelation of what was hidden.
27. The word mitshalotayikh ('your neighings') compares Jerusalem's pursuit of foreign gods to a mare in heat — sexually graphic language deliberately chosen to shock. The word zimmah ('lewdness, shameless scheme') implies both sexual immorality and calculated wickedness. The 'hills and fields' are the bamot (high places) where Canaanite worship occurred. The final question — 'How long?' — leaves open the possibility of purification, but the tone is grief rather than hope.

14

Summary: *Jeremiah 14 opens with a devastating drought oracle — the land itself groans under divine judgment, with nobles, farmers, and animals alike brought to despair. Jeremiah intercedes for the people in deeply moving prayer (vv. 7-9, 19-22), but God refuses to accept the intercession and repeats the prohibition first issued in 7:16 and 11:14: 'Do not pray for this people.' The chapter includes a sharp condemnation of false prophets who promise peace when none is coming, and God's declaration that both the false prophets and those who listen to them will face sword and famine.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains two of Jeremiah's most eloquent intercessory prayers, both rejected by God — a theological crisis at the heart of the prophetic vocation. The drought serves as a concrete manifestation of covenant-curse (Deuteronomy 28:23-24), making the physical landscape a witness against the people. The image of God as a 'stranger in the land' and a 'traveler who turns aside for the night' (v. 8) is one of the most startling metaphors in the Hebrew Bible — Jeremiah accuses God of behaving like a disengaged passerby in his own land. The triple prohibition against intercession (7:16, 11:14, 14:11) progressively closes the door on prophetic mediation, leaving Judah without an advocate before God. We preserved the poetic structure of the drought lament and the intercessory prayers to distinguish them from the prose divine responses.*

Translation Friction: *The word batstsarot ('distress, anguish') in verse 8 required careful handling — it describes God's relationship to Israel's suffering, not Israel's emotional state. The verb natash ('abandon') in verse 9 is covenant-language for forsaking an obligation, stronger than mere absence. The phrase navi sheqer ('false prophet') in verses 14-15 had to be rendered consistently with the Jeremiah briefing addendum's locked vocabulary. The intercessory prayers use first-person plural ('we') — Jeremiah identifies with the sinful people even as God rejects them, creating a tension the rendering must not smooth over.*

Connections: *The drought as covenant-curse connects to Deuteronomy 28:23-24 and Leviticus 26:19-20. The prohibition against intercession reprises 7:16 and 11:14. The false prophets condemned here anticipate the extended confrontation with Hananiah in chapter 28. Jeremiah's intercessory prayers echo Moses's intercessions (Exodus 32:11-14, Numbers 14:13-19), but unlike Moses, Jeremiah is denied. The drought imagery connects to Joel 1 and Amos 4:7-8. The covenant-confession formula 'we acknowledge our wickedness' (v. 20) echoes the Day of Atonement liturgy.*

1The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah concerning the drought:

2Judah mourns;

her gates languish to the ground.

They sit in darkness on the earth,
and the cry of Jerusalem rises up.

3Their nobles send their servants to the cisterns;

they come to the pits and find no water.

They return with their vessels empty,
ashamed and humiliated, covering their heads.

4Because the ground is cracked,

for there has been no rain on the land,

the farmers are ashamed;
they cover their heads.

5Even the doe in the field gives birth and abandons her young,

because there is no grass.

⁶Wild donkeys stand on the bare heights,
 gasping for air like jackals;
 their eyes grow dim
 because there is no vegetation.

⁷Though our iniquities testify against us,
 act, LORD, for the sake of your name.
 For our acts of turning away are many —
 we have sinned against you.

⁸O Hope of Israel,
 its Savior in time of distress —
 why are you like a stranger in the land,
 like a traveler who turns aside only to spend the night?

⁹Why are you like someone stunned,
 like a warrior who cannot save?
 Yet you are in our midst, LORD,
 and your name has been called over us —
 do not abandon us!

¹⁰This is what the LORD says concerning this people:
 They have loved to wander;
 they have not restrained their feet.
 So the LORD takes no pleasure in them.
 Now he will remember their iniquity
 and punish their sins.

¹¹Then the LORD said to me: Do not pray for this people for their welfare. ¹²When they fast, I will not listen to their cry. When they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. Instead, I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by plague. ¹³Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Look — the prophets are telling them, 'You will not see the sword, and famine will not come upon you, for I will give you lasting peace in this place.'" ¹⁴Then the LORD said to me: The prophets are prophesying falsehood in my name. I did not send them, I did not command them, and I did not speak to them. They are prophesying to you a false vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own hearts. ¹⁵Therefore this is what the LORD says concerning the prophets who prophesy in my name though I did not send them, who say, 'Sword and famine will not come upon this land' — by the sword and by famine those very prophets will meet their end. ¹⁶And the people to whom they prophesy will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem because of famine and the sword, with no one to bury them — they, their wives, their sons, and their daughters. I will pour out their own wickedness upon them.

¹⁷And you will speak this word to them:
 Let my eyes flow with tears
 night and day without stopping,
 for the virgin daughter of my people
 is shattered with a great wound,
 a grievous blow.

¹⁸If I go out to the field — there lie those slain by the sword.
 If I enter the city — there are those wasting from famine.
 For both prophet and priest wander through a land

they do not know.

¹⁹Have you utterly rejected Judah?

Does your soul loathe Zion?

Why have you struck us

with no healing for us?

We hoped for peace — but nothing good came.

We hoped for a time of healing — but there is only terror.

²⁰We acknowledge our wickedness, LORD,

the iniquity of our ancestors —

for we have sinned against you.

²¹Do not despise us, for your name's sake!

Do not dishonor the throne of your glory.

Remember — do not break your covenant with us.

²²Can any of the worthless idols of the nations bring rain?

Can the heavens themselves give showers?

Is it not you alone, LORD our God?

We set our hope on you,

for you have made all these things.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Hebrew *batstsarot* (plural of *batstsoret*) refers to drought or severe lack of rain — the KJV's 'dearth' is archaic. The plural form may indicate either repeated droughts or the comprehensive nature of the disaster. This superscription frames the entire chapter as a prophetic response to an actual agricultural crisis.
2. The verb *avelah* ('mourns') is used of both human grief and the land itself mourning — a common prophetic device where the physical landscape participates in covenant judgment. The verb *qaderu* ('they are dark, they sit in gloom') can mean either literal darkness or the posture of mourning (sitting on the ground in black garments). The cry of Jerusalem 'rising up' uses the verb *alah*, the same root as *olah* ('burnt offering') — the city's anguish ascends like smoke.
3. The word *tse'oreihem* is debated — it can mean 'their little ones' (KJV) or 'their servants/subordinates.' In context, nobles sending servants for water makes more practical sense. The covering of heads is a gesture of mourning and shame (cf. 2 Samuel 15:30, Esther 6:12). The empty vessels are a powerful concrete image — drought reduces the mighty to helplessness.
4. The verb *chattah* ('cracked, shattered') describes soil so dry it fractures — the same root can mean 'terrified' when applied to people, creating a subtle double meaning where the ground itself recoils in fear. The farmers (*ikkarim*) are the backbone of Judah's economy; their shame represents the collapse of the agricultural order that sustained covenant life in the promised land.
5. The image of the doe (*ayyelet*) abandoning her newborn fawn is devastating — maternal instinct, the most powerful force in the animal world, is overridden by the severity of the drought. The absence of *deshe* ('fresh grass, vegetation') means the mother cannot produce milk. Nature itself breaks under covenant judgment.
6. The *pera'im* ('wild donkeys') are the hardiest animals of the wilderness — if they are failing, all life is failing. They stand on *shepayim* ('bare heights') where wind might carry the scent of water. The word *tannim* is 'jackals' (not 'dragons' as in the KJV) — jackals pant with open mouths in heat. The dimming eyes indicate approaching death from dehydration. The drought has reached even the untamed creatures that depend on no one.
7. Jeremiah's intercession begins here and runs through verse 9. He uses first-person plural — identifying with the people's sin rather than standing apart. The appeal 'for the sake of your name' (*lema'an shimkha*) is a classic Mosaic strategy: God's reputation among the nations is at stake (cf. Exodus 32:12, Numbers 14:13-16). The word *meshuvotenu* ('our turnings away, backslidings') is from *shuv*, Jeremiah's key verb.
8. The title *miqveh yisra'el* ('Hope of Israel') doubles as a wordplay — *miqveh* also means 'pool of water, reservoir' (cf. Genesis 1:10), making it poignant in a drought context: Israel's reservoir has gone dry. The accusation that God acts like a *ger* ('stranger, resident alien') in his own land is theologically shocking — God should be the permanent resident, the landowner, but he behaves like a passing foreigner with no stake in the place. The metaphor of the overnight traveler intensifies the charge: God is merely passing through.

9. The word *nidham* ('stunned, dazed, bewildered') accuses God of being paralyzed — unable to act, like a warrior frozen in battle. This is extraordinarily bold language directed at the Almighty. The phrase *shimkha alenu niqra* ('your name has been called over us') is covenant-possession language — Israel bears God's name as a wife bears her husband's name. To abandon them would be to abandon his own reputation. The verb *tannichenu* ('abandon us') from the root *n-ch-h* carries the force of permanent desertion.
10. God's response to Jeremiah's prayer is blunt refusal. The verb *lanu'a* ('to wander, to stagger') suggests aimless, uncontrolled movement — the people wander from God not by deliberate choice but by habitual restlessness. The phrase *lo chasaku* ('they have not restrained') implies willing self-indulgence. The divine response switches from the intimate 'you are in our midst' to the distancing 'this people' — God refuses the closeness Jeremiah invoked.
11. This is the third and final occurrence of the intercession prohibition (cf. 7:16, 11:14). The word *letovah* ('for their good, for their welfare') is emphatic — Jeremiah may not even ask for minimal benefit for them. The progressive closure of intercession across these three texts represents the exhaustion of prophetic mediation. The prophet's most essential function — standing between God and the people — has been revoked.
12. The triad of sword (*cherev*), famine (*ra'av*), and plague (*dever*) is Jeremiah's signature judgment formula, appearing over a dozen times in the book (21:7, 9; 24:10; 27:8, 13; 29:17-18; 32:24, 36; 34:17; 38:2; 42:17, 22; 44:13). These represent the three faces of siege warfare — military violence, starvation, and disease. God declares that neither fasting nor sacrifice will be accepted — the normal means of averting divine wrath have been rendered ineffective by persistent covenant violation.
13. Jeremiah raises the defense that the people are being misled by other prophets. The exclamation *ahahh* ('Ah!') expresses anguished protest — Jeremiah is not making excuses but genuinely grieving the deception. The false prophets' promise of *shelom emet* ('true peace') directly contradicts God's announcement of sword and famine. The phrase 'in this place' (*bamaqom hazzeh*) refers to Jerusalem and the temple — the false prophets are promising that Jerusalem is inviolable.
14. God's response to Jeremiah's defense is devastating — the false prophets have no commission. Three denials ('I did not send... command... speak') systematically dismantle every possible claim to authority. The word *sheqer* ('falsehood, lie') is the key accusation — these are *nevi'ei sheqer* ('false prophets'), using God's name without his authorization. The term *qesem* ('divination') is particularly damning because divination was explicitly forbidden in Israel (Deuteronomy 18:10). The word *elil* ('worthless thing, nothing') dismisses their entire prophetic output as empty.
15. The punishment fits the crime with bitter irony — the prophets who denied sword and famine will die by sword and famine. The verb *yittammu* ('they will be consumed, they will come to an end') from the root *t-m-m* carries finality — total consumption. This is measure-for-measure judgment (*middah keneged middah*).
16. The horror escalates: unburied corpses in the streets represent the ultimate disgrace in ancient Near Eastern culture, where proper burial was a sacred obligation. The catalog of victims — wives, sons, daughters — emphasizes that the false prophets' lies destroy entire families. The verb *shafakhti* ('I will pour out') is the same verb used for pouring out blood — God will pour their wickedness back upon them like blood poured on the ground.
17. The speaker shifts ambiguously — it could be God or Jeremiah weeping, or both. This deliberate blurring is characteristic of Jeremiah, where the prophet's grief and God's grief merge. The epithet *betulat bat-ammi* ('virgin daughter of my people') personifies Judah/Jerusalem as a young, vulnerable woman who has been violently assaulted. The word *shever* ('shattering, breaking') suggests a fracture so severe it cannot be repaired — the same word describes a broken bone or a shattered vessel.
18. The verse paints a panorama of total devastation — the countryside holds the sword-slain, the city holds the famine-starved. The word *tachalu'ei* ('those sick with, those wasting from') emphasizes the slow agony of famine death. The final line is puzzling — *sacharu el-erets velo yada'u* ('they wander to a land they do not know') may mean the prophets and priests practice their trade in ignorance, or it may refer to exile, or to death as a journey to an unknown land. We preserved the ambiguity.
19. Jeremiah's second intercessory prayer begins here and runs through verse 22. The emphatic infinitive *hama'os ma'asta* ('have you utterly, completely rejected') presses God on whether the rejection is final. The verb *ga'al* ('loathe, abhor') is visceral — it suggests nausea, the reaction to something repulsive. Asking if God's *nephesh* ('soul, being') loathes Zion is asking whether God's deepest self is revolted by his own people. The contrast between hoped-for *shalom* and actual *be'atah* ('terror') echoes 8:15 almost verbatim.
20. This is a formal confession of sin using three terms: *rish'enu* ('our wickedness'), *avon avotenu* ('the iniquity of our ancestors'), and *chatanu* ('we have sinned'). The inclusion of ancestral iniquity acknowledges that the current generation bears the accumulated weight of generational covenant-breaking. The verb *yada'nu* ('we know, we acknowledge') implies not just awareness but admission — they are not claiming ignorance.
21. Three imperatives in rapid succession create urgency: *al-tin'ats* ('do not despise'), *al-tenabbel* ('do not dishonor'), *al-tafer* ('do not break'). The 'throne of your glory' (*kisse' kevodekha*) refers to the temple in Jerusalem, God's earthly throne — Jeremiah pleads that God not bring disgrace upon his own dwelling place. The climactic appeal is to the covenant itself: *berit* — the binding agreement God swore. Jeremiah is essentially arguing that God cannot abandon Israel without violating his own oath.
22. The prayer ends with a theological argument: since the idols (*havlei haggoyim*, literally 'the vapors/vanities of the nations') cannot produce rain, and even the heavens themselves cannot give rain on their own authority, only the LORD can end the drought. The word *havalim* ('vapors, breaths, worthless things') is the same word Ecclesiastes uses for 'vanity' — the idols are literally nothing, hot air. The final affirmation 'you have made all these things' asserts God's sovereignty over the created order, including weather — making the drought itself a deliberate divine act rather than cosmic accident.

15

Summary: *Jeremiah 15 opens with God's most absolute refusal of intercession — even Moses and Samuel, Israel's greatest intercessors, could not turn him from judgment (v. 1). Four agents of destruction are appointed: sword, dogs, birds, and beasts (v. 3). The chapter then shifts into Jeremiah's first major confession (vv. 10-21), one of the most raw personal prayers in scripture. The prophet laments his birth, confesses that God's word was his joy and delight yet also his source of isolation and suffering, and receives a conditional divine promise: 'If you return, I will restore you' (v. 19) — God demands repentance even from his own prophet.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains one of the most extraordinary reversals in prophetic literature: God applies the verb shuv ('return') to Jeremiah himself (v. 19). Throughout the book, shuv is directed at wayward Israel — here God turns it on his own prophet, demanding that Jeremiah repent of his despair and self-pity before he can be restored to prophetic service. The image of God's word as fire and joy (v. 16) stands in tension with the isolation and suffering that same word causes (v. 17) — the prophet's vocation is simultaneously his greatest gift and his greatest burden. The mention of Moses and Samuel as failed intercessors (v. 1) is not merely rhetorical — it establishes that Judah's guilt exceeds anything in Israel's prior history. We rendered the confession with its full emotional force, preserving Jeremiah's accusations against God without softening.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase 'I sat alone because of your hand' (v. 17) uses the word badad ('alone, isolated'), which carries the resonance of Lamentations 1:1 ('How the city sits alone'). Jeremiah's isolation prefigures Jerusalem's. The verb pittitani does not appear in this chapter (it is in chapter 20), but the emotional trajectory toward that accusation begins here. The conditional promise in verse 19 — 'if you return' (im tashuv) — required careful handling because shuv is Jeremiah's signature verb for Israel's repentance, and applying it to the prophet himself is theologically startling. The word mevasser in verse 16 ('your word was called over me') uses the same name-calling formula as covenant possession.*

Connections: *Moses's intercession (Exodus 32:11-14, Numbers 14:13-19) and Samuel's intercession (1 Samuel 7:9, 12:19-23) are the background for verse 1 — both succeeded where Jeremiah is told even they would fail. The birth-lament in verse 10 anticipates the fuller curse in 20:14-18 and echoes Job 3:1-26. The devouring of God's word (v. 16) connects to Ezekiel's scroll-eating (Ezekiel 2:8-3:3). The promise 'I will make you a fortified wall of bronze' (v. 20) reprises the commissioning language of 1:18. The four-fold judgment of verse 3 echoes Ezekiel 14:21.*

¹Then the LORD said to me: Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not turn toward this people. Send them away from my presence — let them go!

²And when they ask you, 'Where should we go?' — tell them: This is what the LORD says:
Those destined for death — to death.
Those destined for the sword — to the sword.
Those destined for famine — to famine.
Those destined for captivity — to captivity.

³I will appoint four kinds of destroyers against them, declares the LORD: the sword to kill, dogs to drag away, the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy. ⁴I will make them an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, because of what Manasseh son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, did in Jerusalem.

⁵For who will have compassion on you, Jerusalem?
Who will mourn for you?
Who will turn aside to ask about your welfare?

⁶You have abandoned me, declares the LORD;
you keep going backward.
So I stretched out my hand against you and destroyed you —

I am weary of relenting.

⁷I winnowed them with a winnowing fork at the gates of the land.
I bereaved them; I destroyed my people,
for they did not turn back from their ways.

⁸Their widows are more numerous to me than the sand of the seas.
I brought against the mother of young men
a destroyer at midday.
I made anguish and terror
fall on her suddenly.

⁹The mother of seven grows faint;
she breathes out her life.
Her sun has set while it is still day —
she is shamed and disgraced.
And their survivors I will give to the sword
before their enemies, declares the LORD.

¹⁰Woe to me, my mother, that you gave birth to me —
a man of conflict and a man of dispute with the whole land!
I have not lent, and no one has lent to me,
yet everyone curses me.

¹¹The LORD said: Surely I have set you free for a good purpose. Surely I have made the enemy plead with you in the time of disaster and in the time of distress. ¹²Can iron shatter iron from the north, or bronze? ¹³Your wealth and your treasures I will give as plunder — without cost — because of all your sins throughout all your territory. ¹⁴I will make you serve your enemies in a land you do not know, for a fire is kindled in my anger — it will burn against you.

¹⁵You know, LORD.
Remember me and attend to me;
avenge me against my persecutors.
In your patience, do not take me away.
Know that for your sake I bear reproach.

¹⁶Your words were found, and I devoured them.
Your word became my joy
and the delight of my heart,
for your name has been called over me,
LORD, God of Hosts.

¹⁷I did not sit in the company of revelers and celebrate.
Because of your hand upon me, I sat alone,
for you filled me with indignation.

¹⁸Why is my pain unending,
my wound incurable, refusing to heal?
Will you truly be to me like a deceptive stream,
like waters that cannot be trusted?

¹⁹Therefore this is what the LORD says:
 If you return, I will restore you —
 you will stand before me.
 If you extract what is precious from what is worthless,
 you will be as my mouth.
 They will turn to you,
 but you must not turn to them.

²⁰I will make you a fortified wall of bronze to this people.
 They will fight against you,
 but they will not overcome you,
 for I am with you to save you and deliver you,
 declares the LORD.

²¹I will rescue you from the hand of the wicked
 and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The mention of Moses and Samuel is not arbitrary — these are Israel's two greatest intercessors. Moses turned away God's wrath after the golden calf (Exodus 32:11-14) and after the spies' report (Numbers 14:13-19). Samuel's prayers brought victory at Mizpah (1 Samuel 7:9) and he promised never to cease praying for Israel (1 Samuel 12:23). If even these two could not save this generation, no one can. The phrase *ein nafshi el* ('my soul/heart is not toward') expresses total emotional withdrawal — God has no remaining inclination toward these people. The imperatives *shalach* ('send away') and *yetse'u* ('let them go out') reverse the Exodus — God once brought them out of Egypt to himself; now he sends them out from his presence.
2. The fourfold assignment is merciless in its finality — each person's fate is already sealed. The repetitive structure (*asher la-X la-X*) creates a drumbeat of inevitability. The four fates represent escalating severity: death (by plague), the sword (military violence), famine (slow starvation), and captivity (exile) — though exile, paradoxically, is survival. This quatrain echoes Revelation 6:8, where the fourth horseman is given authority over these same four destroyers.
3. The word *mishpachot* ('kinds, families, clans') is used with grim irony — these four 'families' of destruction replace the family of Israel. Dogs in the ancient Near East were not domestic pets but scavengers that roamed the streets feeding on refuse and corpses — being dragged away by dogs means the bodies will not receive burial. The progression from sword (human violence) to dogs, birds, and beasts (animal scavenging) depicts a total reversal of the created order, where humans were given dominion over animals (Genesis 1:28). The formula *ne'um YHWH* ('declares the LORD') stamps this as irrevocable divine decree.
4. The word *za'avah* ('horror, object of trembling') describes something so terrible that onlookers shudder — Israel's fate will serve as a cautionary tale among the nations. Manasseh (reigned c. 697-642 BCE) is singled out as the king whose sins made Judah's destruction inevitable, despite Josiah's later reforms. According to 2 Kings 21:16, Manasseh 'filled Jerusalem with innocent blood from one end to the other.' The mention of Hezekiah as his father heightens the tragedy — the most righteous king fathered the most wicked.
5. Three rhetorical questions hammer home Jerusalem's total abandonment — no compassion (*yachmol*), no mourning (*yanud*), and no one even pausing to inquire after her well-being. The verb *yanud* ('to shake the head, to wag in sympathy') describes the gesture of condolence. The final question uses *lish'ol leshalom* ('to ask about peace/welfare') — the standard Hebrew greeting. No one will even say 'How are you?' to Jerusalem.
6. The verb *natash* ('abandon, forsake') is covenant-language for desertion — God accuses Jerusalem of abandoning him, not the other way around. The phrase *achor telekhi* ('you walk backward') is the opposite of 'walking with God' — Jerusalem moves in reverse, away from the covenant relationship. The stunning confession *nil'eiti hinnahem* ('I am weary of relenting') admits divine exhaustion — God has relented so many times that he can no longer sustain compassion. The verb *n-ch-m* ('relent, comfort, repent') is the same verb used when God 'relented' from destroying Israel after Moses's intercession (Exodus 32:14).
7. The winnowing image (*ezrem bemizreh*) is agricultural — grain is tossed into the wind so that chaff blows away and good grain falls. God is winnowing his people, separating them at the 'gates of the land' — the borders through which they will pass into exile. The verb *shikkalti* ('I bereaved') uses the *piel* intensive form, emphasizing the thoroughness of the loss. The root *shuv* ('return') appears in its negative form — they did not *shuv*. This is the verb of the entire book applied to Israel's persistent refusal.
8. The comparison of widows to the sand of the seas (*mechol yammim*) inverts the Abrahamic blessing — God promised Abraham descendants like the sand (Genesis 22:17), now the widows are like sand. The 'mother of a young man' (*em bachur*) may refer to the city itself as a bereaved mother, or to individual mothers losing their sons. The destroyer comes 'at midday' (*batstsahorayim*) — the most unexpected time, when people feel safest. The word *behalot* ('terrors, sudden confusions') suggests panic so overwhelming that all ordered thought collapses.

9. The 'mother of seven' represents the most blessed woman in Israelite culture — seven sons was the fullness of maternal blessing (cf. Ruth 4:15, 1 Samuel 2:5). Even she is undone. The phrase ba'ah shimshah be'od yomam ('her sun has set while it is still day') is a powerful image of premature death and untimely catastrophe — the natural order of day and night is violated. The survivors (she'eritam) face the sword — there is no escape route. The ne'um YHWH formula seals the pronouncement as divine decree.
10. Jeremiah's first major confession begins here. The cry of li immi ('woe to me, my mother') is directed not at God but at his mother — it is a lament over existence itself, anticipating the fuller birth-curse of 20:14-18. The words riv ('conflict, legal dispute') and madon ('contention, strife') characterize Jeremiah's entire life as one long quarrel. The usury reference is significant: lending disputes were the most common source of social conflict in ancient Israel. Jeremiah has not created enemies through financial dealings — his enemies come solely from his prophetic calling.
11. This verse is notoriously difficult in Hebrew, with multiple possible readings. The verb sheritikha may come from sharah ('to set free, to loose') or sharar ('to strengthen'). We follow the reading 'set you free for good purpose,' which fits the context of Jeremiah's complaint about his unwanted calling. The verb hifga'ti ('I caused to encounter, I made plead') suggests God orchestrating circumstances so that even enemies must acknowledge Jeremiah — as will happen when Nebuchadnezzar gives Jeremiah favorable treatment (39:11-12).
12. This enigmatic verse is among the most debated in Jeremiah. The 'iron from the north' (barzel mitstsafon) likely refers to Babylon, the enemy from the north (cf. 1:14, 4:6, 6:1). The rhetorical question implies that ordinary iron cannot break the hardened northern iron — Judah cannot resist Babylon. Some read this as reassurance to Jeremiah: his enemies cannot break him because God has made him iron and bronze (1:18). The brevity and ambiguity may be deliberate.
13. The address shifts to Judah collectively. The phrase lo vimchir ('without price, for nothing') means the plunder will be given freely to the enemy — Judah's wealth has no redemptive value. The comprehensive phrase bekhoh-gevulekha ('in all your borders') means no corner of the land will be spared. This verse closely parallels 17:3, suggesting it may be a fragmentary oracle inserted here.
14. The phrase erets lo yada'ta ('a land you do not know') is the dread of exile — being uprooted from the promised land to an alien place. The fire of God's anger (esh qadchah be'appi) is a standard prophetic image, but here the verb tuqad ('it will burn') is in the hophal passive — the fire burns on its own, sustained by God's settled fury rather than momentary anger. Some manuscripts and versions read 'I will make your enemies pass over you' rather than 'I will make you pass with your enemies,' affecting whether this is about exile or invasion.
15. Jeremiah's prayer resumes with direct address to God. Three imperatives — zokhrenei ('remember me'), poqdeni ('attend to me, visit me'), hinnaqem ('avenge me') — escalate in intensity from memory to action to vengeance. The plea al-le'erekh appekha tiqqacheni ('in your patience do not take me away') is paradoxical: God's patience with the wicked means extended suffering for the prophet. Jeremiah asks God not to let his own long-suffering become the prophet's death sentence. The phrase se'eti alekha cherpah ('I bear reproach for your sake') makes the claim explicit — Jeremiah suffers because he carries God's message.
16. The image of 'finding' and 'devouring' God's words (nimtse'u devarekha va'okhlah) is among the most powerful descriptions of prophetic calling in scripture. The verb akhal ('to eat, devour') suggests not casual reading but total internalization — the word becomes part of the prophet's body. Ezekiel will enact this literally by eating a scroll (Ezekiel 2:8-3:3). The phrase niqra shimkha alai ('your name has been called over me') is covenant-possession language — Jeremiah belongs to God the way a wife bears her husband's name or a city bears its conqueror's. This verse stands in agonizing tension with the surrounding lament — God's word is simultaneously Jeremiah's greatest joy and the cause of all his suffering.
17. The word badad ('alone, in isolation') is the same word that opens Lamentations: 'How the city sits alone' (eikhah yashvah badad). Jeremiah's personal isolation prefigures Jerusalem's desolation. The prophet's solitude is not chosen but imposed — mippenei yadkha ('because of your hand') means God's power kept him apart from normal human community. The mesachaqim ('those who laugh, revelers') represent ordinary social life that is denied to the prophet. The word za'am ('indignation, wrath') is the divine fury that fills Jeremiah — he carries God's anger inside himself, making human fellowship impossible.
18. The accusation reaches its peak: Jeremiah compares God to an akhzav — a wadi that appears to hold water but runs dry when you need it most. In the arid Judean landscape, a deceptive wadi could mean death for a thirsty traveler. The phrase mayim lo ne'emanu ('waters that cannot be trusted') uses the root a-m-n, from which 'faithfulness' (emunah) and 'amen' derive. Jeremiah is accusing God of being un-amen, unfaithful — the most devastating charge a covenant partner can make. The word netsach ('perpetual, unending') suggests Jeremiah sees no end to his suffering.
19. This verse is the theological center of the confession. The verb shuv appears three times: im tashuv ('if you return'), va'ashivkha ('I will restore you' — the causative hiphil of shuv), and yashuvu ('they will return'). God demands of Jeremiah the same repentance he demands of Israel. The phrase kefi tiyeh ('you will be as my mouth') is the most intimate description of prophetic calling in the Hebrew Bible — the prophet becomes God's mouth, the organ through which divine speech enters the world. The distinction between 'precious' (yaqar) and 'worthless' (zolel) may refer to separating genuine divine words from the prophet's own despairing complaints.
20. This promise directly reprises the commissioning language of 1:18, where God told the young Jeremiah, 'I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls.' The conditional promise of verse 19 becomes unconditional here — once Jeremiah returns, God will fortify him. The verbs lehoshi'akha ('to save you') and lehattsilekha ('to deliver you') are the same pair used for God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. The prophet receives the same covenantal protection once reserved for the whole nation. The formula ne'um YHWH seals this as irrevocable divine commitment.
21. The chapter ends with two parallel promises: hitsaltikha ('I will rescue you') and peditikha ('I will redeem you'). The verb padah ('redeem') is ransom language — God will pay the price to free Jeremiah from his enemies. The ra'im ('wicked') and aritsim ('ruthless, violent ones') likely refer to Jeremiah's own countrymen who want him dead, not foreign enemies. The divine promise bookends the confession: Jeremiah began by lamenting

his birth (v. 10), and God ends by guaranteeing his survival. The suffering will not end, but neither will God's protection.

16

Summary: *Jeremiah 16 turns the prophet's own life into a prophetic sign-act. God forbids Jeremiah from marrying, from attending funerals, and from joining feasts — his enforced isolation embodies the coming destruction of all normal life in Judah. The reason given is devastating: death will be so pervasive that mourning itself will become impossible. Yet the chapter pivots in verses 14-15 toward a startling promise — a future restoration so great it will eclipse even the exodus from Egypt as Israel's defining story. The chapter closes with a vision of the nations themselves coming to acknowledge the LORD.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is one of the most personally costly passages in the prophetic literature. Jeremiah is not merely told what to say — he is told how to live. His celibacy, his absence from mourning rites, and his refusal of feasts are not personal choices but divine commands that make his body a walking oracle. The prohibition against marriage (v. 2) is extraordinary in ancient Israelite culture, where marriage and children were fundamental to covenant identity and legacy. The 'second exodus' oracle (vv. 14-15) is one of the most consequential prophetic declarations in the book — it recasts Israel's entire story around a future act of divine rescue that will surpass the original exodus. The closing universalist vision (vv. 19-21) anticipates the nations recognizing the LORD, an eschatological theme that runs through Isaiah and the Psalms.*

Translation Friction: *The verb shanah ('to repeat, to do again') in verse 18 is rendered 'repay double' following the Hebrew construct mishneh, which indicates a twofold measure — this is judicial compensation language, not arbitrary punishment. The word marzeach ('mourning feast') in verse 5 refers to a specific type of communal funeral banquet known from Amos 6:7 and Ugaritic literature — it is more than generic mourning. The transition from judgment (vv. 1-13) to hope (vv. 14-15) is abrupt in the Hebrew, with no narrative bridge, and we preserved this structural tension rather than smoothing it. The phrase elohei massekhah ('gods of molten metal') in verse 20 required distinguishing manufactured idols from the living God.*

Connections: *The prohibition against marriage as prophetic sign connects to Hosea's commanded marriage (Hosea 1:2) and Ezekiel's prohibited mourning for his wife (Ezekiel 24:15-18) — all three prophets' personal lives become divine messages. The 'second exodus' oracle (vv. 14-15) is repeated nearly verbatim in 23:7-8 and connects to Isaiah's 'new exodus' theme (Isaiah 43:18-19). The image of sin 'engraved' anticipates the iron-stylus metaphor of 17:1. The closing vision of nations turning to the LORD connects to Isaiah 2:2-4, Micah 4:1-3, and Zechariah 8:20-23. The 'iron furnace' of Egypt (implicit in the exodus reference) echoes 11:4.*

¹The word of the LORD came to me: ²You must not take a wife for yourself, and you must not have sons or daughters in this place. ³For this is what the LORD says concerning the sons and daughters born in this place, and concerning the mothers who bear them and the fathers who sire them in this land: ⁴They will die of deadly diseases. No one will mourn for them, and no one will bury them. They will become like dung on the surface of the ground. They will be consumed by sword and by famine, and their corpses will become food for the birds of the sky and the animals of the earth. ⁵For this is what the LORD says: Do not enter a house of mourning. Do not go to grieve, and do not show sympathy for them, for I have withdrawn my peace from this people, declares the LORD — my faithful love and my compassion. ⁶Both great and small will die in this land. They will not be buried, and no one will mourn for them. No one will gash themselves or shave their heads for them. ⁷No one will break bread for them in mourning to comfort them for the dead, and no one will give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or for their mother. ⁸You must not enter a house of feasting to sit with them, eating and drinking. ⁹For this is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: I am about to silence in this place — before your very eyes and in your own days — the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the sound of the bridegroom and the sound of the bride. ¹⁰When you report all these words to this people and they ask you, 'Why has the LORD pronounced all this great disaster against us? What is our iniquity? What is our sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?' — ¹¹then say to them: Because your ancestors abandoned me, declares the LORD, and went after other gods and served them and bowed down to them —

they abandoned me and did not keep my instruction — ¹²And you — you have done worse than your ancestors! Each of you walks after the stubbornness of his evil heart, refusing to ¹²listen to me. ¹³So I will hurl you from this land into a land that neither you nor your ancestors have known, and there you will serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor. ¹⁴Therefore — days are coming, declares the LORD, when it will no longer be said, 'As the LORD lives, who brought the children of Israel up from the land of Egypt,' ¹⁵but rather, 'As the LORD lives, who brought the children of Israel up from the land of the north and from all the lands where he had driven them.' For I will bring them back to their own soil that I gave to their ancestors. ¹⁶I am about to send for many fishermen, declares the LORD, and they will catch them. After that, I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them down from every mountain and every hill and from the crevices of the rocks. ¹⁷For my eyes are on all their ways. They are not hidden from my presence, and their iniquity is not concealed from my sight. ¹⁸But first I will repay double for their iniquity and their sin, because they have profaned my land with the carcasses of their detestable idols, and they have filled my inheritance with their abominations. ¹⁹O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in the day of distress — to you the nations will come from the ends of the earth and say, 'Our ancestors inherited nothing but falsehood, worthless things in which there is no benefit.' ²⁰Can a human being make gods for himself? They are not gods at all! ²¹Therefore — this time I will make them know. I will make them know my hand and my might, and they will know that my name is the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The standard prophetic reception formula. Hebrew le'mor ('saying') is rendered as a colon introducing direct speech, following TCR convention.
2. The prohibition against marriage is unprecedented among the prophets. In ancient Israel, marriage and children were not optional social customs but covenantal obligations — to remain unmarried was to cut off one's name and legacy. God transforms Jeremiah's enforced celibacy into a prophetic sign: if the coming destruction will make family life impossible, then the prophet's unmarried life already testifies to what is coming. The verb *tiqach* ('take') is the standard marriage verb in Hebrew.
3. The fourfold listing — sons, daughters, mothers, fathers — emphasizes that the coming judgment encompasses every family member, every generation. The verb *molidim* ('who beget/sire') and *yoldot* ('who bear') together cover the full biological reality of parenthood. The verse serves as the heading for the devastating death oracle that follows.
4. The phrase *memotei tachaluim* ('deaths of diseases') uses an unusual plural construct — 'deaths' plural suggests multiple kinds of gruesome dying. The denial of burial is among the most severe curses in the ancient Near East (cf. Deuteronomy 28:26). Being left as *domen* ('dung') on the ground is deliberately degrading — human bodies reduced to fertilizer. The pairing of sword and famine reflects siege conditions. The exposure to scavenging birds and animals echoes the covenant-curse language of Deuteronomy 28:26.
5. The word *marzeach* ('mourning feast') refers to a specific communal funeral banquet attested in Amos 6:7 and Ugaritic texts — a ritually structured gathering where mourners ate and drank together in honor of the dead. God forbids Jeremiah from participating in this fundamental social obligation. The three terms withdrawn — *shalom*, *chesed*, *rachamim* — form a comprehensive triad of divine favor. Each represents a different dimension of God's care: *shalom* is relational wholeness, *chesed* is covenantal loyalty, *rachamim* is emotional tenderness. Their removal is total abandonment.
6. The practices of gashing the body (*yitgodad*) and shaving the head (*yiqqareach*) were customary mourning rites in the ancient Near East, though Deuteronomy 14:1 prohibits them for Israel. Their mention here is descriptive of common practice rather than endorsement — even these extreme expressions of grief will be absent because death will be too pervasive for individual mourning. The social order collapses: 'great and small' covers every class.
7. The verb *yifresu* ('break, divide') refers to the breaking and sharing of bread at a mourning meal — a communal act of consolation. The 'cup of consolation' (*kos tanchumim*) was a ritual drink offered to mourners, attested in later Jewish mourning customs. Both the bread and the cup represent the community's role in sustaining the bereaved. Their absence signals the collapse of communal solidarity — not just death but the death of mourning itself.
8. The third prohibition: no mourning feasts (v. 5), no funerals (v. 6-7), and now no celebrations either. Jeremiah's social isolation is total — he is cut off from both sorrow and joy. The *beit mishteh* ('house of feasting') refers to wedding banquets and other festive gatherings. The prophet's enforced absence from celebration parallels his absence from mourning.
9. The fourfold 'sound of' (*qol*) creates a rhythmic litany of everything that will be lost: joy, gladness, the bridegroom's voice, the bride's voice. This same formula recurs in 7:34, 25:10, and 33:11 as a signature judgment marker throughout Jeremiah. The phrase 'before your very eyes and in your own days' makes the judgment inescapably personal — this is not a distant threat but an imminent reality for the current generation.
10. The people's question reveals shocking moral blindness — they genuinely do not understand what they have done wrong. The Hebrew distinguishes between *avon* ('iniquity' — the twisted guilt of moral corruption) and *chattat* ('sin' — the failure to hit the mark of God's standard). They claim

innocence on both counts. God's response in the following verses will be devastating in its specificity.

11. God's answer matches the people's twofold question with a twofold accusation: they abandoned God (relational failure) and did not keep his torah (behavioral failure). The verb *azavu* ('abandoned') appears twice, framing the sentence — abandonment is both the first and last charge. Torah is rendered 'instruction' here rather than 'law' to capture its broader meaning as divine teaching, not merely legal code.
12. The emphatic pronoun *ve'attem* ('and you') creates an accusatory contrast — your ancestors were bad, but you are worse. The characteristic Jeremic phrase *sheririut libbo hara* ('stubbornness of his evil heart') recurs here (cf. 3:17, 7:24, 9:13, 11:8, 13:10, 18:12, 23:17). The present generation's guilt exceeds the ancestors' because they have the full record of prior judgment as warning and still persist.
13. The verb *hetalti* ('I will hurl, cast') is violent — not a gentle sending but a forcible ejection from the land. The bitter irony: since they chose to serve other gods voluntarily, in exile they will serve other gods by compulsion — 'day and night,' without rest. The phrase 'a land that neither you nor your ancestors have known' emphasizes the total foreignness of exile. *Chaninah* ('favor, grace') will be withheld entirely.
14. The abrupt transition from judgment to hope is characteristic of Jeremiah's literary structure. The oath formula *chai-YHWH* ('as the LORD lives') was used in solemn declarations; here God says even this foundational oath — rooted in the exodus — will be superseded by a greater act of deliverance. This oracle (vv. 14-15) is repeated nearly verbatim in 23:7-8, indicating its importance in Jeremiah's theology.
15. The phrase *erets tsafon* ('land of the north') refers primarily to Babylon, which was reached by traveling north along the Fertile Crescent despite being geographically east of Judah. The addition 'from all the lands' universalizes the promise beyond Babylon to any future diaspora. The verb *hashivotim* ('I will bring them back') uses the root *shuv*, which is Jeremiah's key theological verb — the same word used for repentance, return, and restoration. The 'soil' (*adamah*) rather than 'land' (*erets*) is used here, emphasizing the agricultural, intimate connection between people and their ground.
16. The fishermen-and-hunters imagery depicts the thoroughness of God's judgment — no one will escape. The fishermen sweep broadly (nets), the hunters pursue individually into terrain where fugitives hide. The progression from fish to game suggests escalating pursuit: first the easy catches, then the ones who flee to mountains, hills, and rock crevices. Some interpreters read this as describing the agents of exile (Babylonian armies); others see a positive image of God gathering his scattered people. The immediate context of judgment favors the first reading, though the proximity to vv. 14-15 allows for deliberate ambiguity.
17. The double negative — 'not hidden... not concealed' — emphasizes the impossibility of evading divine observation. The words *nisteru* ('hidden') and *nitspon* ('concealed, stored up') suggest that the people may have imagined their sins were invisible to God. The verse functions as the theological rationale for the fishermen and hunters of v. 16 — divine omniscience ensures total accountability.
18. The phrase *mishneh avonam* ('double their iniquity') uses *mishneh* to indicate a twofold repayment — judicial compensation proportional to the offense, following the pattern of double restitution in Exodus 22:4,7,9. The word *nivlat* ('carcasses') applied to idols is deliberately degrading — the 'detestable things' (*shiqquts*) are treated as corpses polluting the land. God calls the land 'my land' and 'my inheritance' (*nachalati*), emphasizing that the defilement offends the landowner.
19. The verse shifts abruptly from judgment on Judah to an eschatological vision of the nations recognizing the LORD. The triad *uzzi, ma'uzzi, menusi* ('my strength, my stronghold, my refuge') is Jeremiah's personal confession embedded within a universal prophecy. The nations' confession — that their ancestors inherited *sheqer* ('falsehood') and *hevel* ('vapor, emptiness') — echoes the language of Ecclesiastes and anticipates the universalist vision of Isaiah 45:22-23 and Zechariah 8:20-23.
20. The rhetorical question exposes the absurdity of idolatry with devastating simplicity: a being who makes a god is by definition greater than the god he makes. The word *adam* ('human being') is used rather than *ish* ('man') to emphasize the creaturely status of the maker — a mere creature fashioning what he calls a deity. The emphatic denial *hemmah lo elohim* ('they are not gods') is a fundamental theological claim: manufactured objects cannot possess divinity.
21. The threefold repetition of the root *yada* ('know') drives the verse — *modia'am, odia'em, veyade'u* ('I will make them know, I will make them know, and they will know'). The emphatic repetition insists that ignorance of God will be replaced by undeniable awareness. 'My hand' (*yadi*) represents God's active intervention in history; 'my might' (*gevurati*) represents his irresistible power. The closing declaration — 'my name is the LORD' — recalls the self-revelation to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:15) and reasserts divine identity at the end of a chapter about false gods.

17

Summary: *Jeremiah 17 moves through four distinct sections that together form a meditation on the human heart and its relationship to God. It opens with the stunning image of Judah's sin engraved with an iron stylus on the tablet of their heart (17:1) — the opposite of the torah-on-the-heart promise of 31:33. The chapter then contrasts the cursed person who trusts in human strength (17:5-6) with the blessed person who trusts in the LORD, planted like a tree by water (17:7-8, echoing Psalm 1). At the center stands one of the most famous verses in the Hebrew Bible: 'The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick — who can understand it?' (17:9). Jeremiah's personal confession-prayer appears in 17:14-18, and the chapter closes with a Sabbath observance oracle (17:19-27).*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains some of the most psychologically penetrating language in the entire Hebrew Bible. The iron-stylus metaphor of verse 1 inverts the later promise of 31:33 — where God will write his instruction on hearts of flesh, here sin has already been engraved on hearts of stone. The tree-by-water image (vv. 7-8) is so close to Psalm 1:3 that the relationship between the texts has been debated for centuries — whether Jeremiah drew on the psalm, the psalm drew on Jeremiah, or both drew on a common wisdom tradition. Verse 9's diagnosis of the human heart — *aqov* ('deceitful, twisted') and *anush* ('desperately sick, incurable') — is among the most unsparing anthropological statements in Scripture. Jeremiah's confession in verse 14, 'Heal me, LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved,' has entered Jewish liturgy (the eighth blessing of the Amidah).*

Translation Friction: *The word *aqov* in verse 9 is the same root as the name *Ya'aqov* (Jacob, 'the heel-grasper, the supplanter') — whether this is deliberate wordplay connecting Judah's heart to their ancestor's character is debated, and we noted it without forcing the interpretation. The relationship between the tree imagery (vv. 5-8) and Psalm 1 required careful rendering: the passages are related but not identical, and the differences matter. The Sabbath oracle (vv. 19-27) is sometimes regarded as a later addition by scholars because of its prose style and Deuteronomic language — we translate what the text says without editorial judgment on dating. The word *et* in verse 1 ('stylus' or 'pen') is rare and its exact referent debated.*

Connections: *The iron-stylus image (v. 1) anticipates by contrast the new covenant inscription of 31:33 — sin engraved on stone versus torah written on flesh. The tree-by-water passage (vv. 7-8) connects to Psalm 1:3, Ezekiel 47:12, and Revelation 22:2. Verse 9's heart-diagnosis connects to 11:20 and 20:12 where God 'tests the heart.' Jeremiah's confession (vv. 14-18) belongs to the series of prophetic confessions running through chapters 11-20. The Sabbath oracle connects to the broader Deuteronomic tradition (Deuteronomy 5:12-15) and to Nehemiah 13:15-22. The cursing-and-blessing contrast (vv. 5-8) echoes Deuteronomy 28 and Psalm 1.*

¹The sin of Judah is inscribed with an iron stylus, with a diamond-tipped point. It is engraved on the tablet of their heart and on the horns of their altars — ²even as their children remember their altars and their Asherah poles beside every green tree on the high hills. ³My mountain in the open country — your wealth and all your treasures I will give as plunder, your high places as the price of sin throughout all your territory. ⁴You will lose your grip on the inheritance I gave you, and I will make you serve your enemies in a land you do not know, for you have kindled a fire in my anger that will burn without end. ⁵This is what the LORD says: Cursed is the person who trusts in human strength, who makes flesh his arm, and whose heart turns away from the LORD. ⁶He will be like a shrub in the desert wasteland — he will not see when good arrives. He will dwell among the scorched places of the wilderness, in a salt land where no one lives. ⁷Blessed is the person who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is the LORD himself. ⁸He will be like a tree planted beside water that sends its roots out toward the stream. It does not fear when heat comes, and its leaves remain green. In a year of drought it has no anxiety, and it never stops producing fruit. ⁹The heart is more twisted than anything else and incurably sick — who can fathom it? ¹⁰I, the LORD, search the heart and test the mind, to give to each person according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds. ¹¹Like a partridge that broods over eggs it did not lay, so is the one who gains wealth unjustly. In the middle of his days it will abandon him, and in the end he will be a fool. ¹²A throne of glory, exalted from the beginning — that is the place of our sanctuary. ¹³O LORD, the hope of Israel — all who abandon you will be put to shame. Those who turn away will be written in

the dust, for they have abandoned the LORD, the fountain of living water. ¹⁴Heal me, LORD, and I will be healed. Save me, and I will be saved — for you are my praise. ¹⁵Look — they keep saying to me, 'Where is the word of the LORD? Let it come!' ¹⁶As for me, I have not rushed away from shepherding after you, and I have not longed for the day of calamity. You know this — whatever came from my lips was spoken before your face. ¹⁷Do not become a source of terror to me — you are my refuge in the day of disaster. ¹⁸Let my persecutors be put to shame, but do not let me be put to shame. Let them be shattered, but do not let me be shattered. Bring upon them the day of disaster, and break them with a double breaking. ¹⁹This is what the LORD said to me: Go and stand in the gate of the people, through which the kings of Judah enter and leave, and in all the gates of Jerusalem. ²⁰Say to them: Hear the word of the LORD, you kings of Judah, and all of Judah, and all inhabitants of Jerusalem who enter through these gates. ²¹This is what the LORD says: Guard your lives — do not carry any load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem. ²²Do not carry any load out of your houses on the Sabbath day, and do not do any work. Consecrate the Sabbath day, just as I commanded your ancestors. ²³But they did not listen. They did not incline their ear. They stiffened their neck, refusing to hear and refusing to accept correction. ²⁴If you truly listen to me, declares the LORD, and bring no load through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, and if you consecrate the Sabbath day by doing no work on it, ²⁵then kings and officials who sit on the throne of David will enter through the gates of this city, riding in chariots and on horses — they and their officials, along with the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem — and this city will be inhabited forever. ²⁶People will come from the cities of Judah and the surroundings of Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin, from the lowlands, from the hill country, and from the Negev, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and frankincense, and bringing thank offerings to the house of the LORD. ²⁷But if you do not listen to me — to consecrate the Sabbath day, to carry no load and enter the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day — then I will kindle a fire in her gates, and it will consume the fortified buildings of Jerusalem and will not be extinguished.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word et ('stylus, pen') in its iron form suggests a chisel for cutting into stone or metal — this is permanent inscription, not ink on parchment. Tsipporen shamir ('diamond-tipped point' or 'point of flint/emery') refers to an extremely hard material used for engraving — shamir may be corundum, emery, or diamond. The phrase luach libbam ('tablet of their heart') creates a devastating contrast with the stone tablets (luchot) of the law given at Sinai. The same surface that should bear God's commandments instead bears an engraved record of sin. This image is the negative counterpart to 31:33, where God promises to write his torah on the heart.
2. The 'remembering' (kizkhor) here is not nostalgic recall but active perpetuation — the children continue the idolatrous practices. The asherim ('Asherah poles') were cultic objects associated with the Canaanite goddess Asherah, set up as sacred pillars near altars. 'Green tree' and 'high hills' are stock phrases for the locations of illicit worship (cf. Deuteronomy 12:2, 1 Kings 14:23). The verse continues the thought from verse 1 — sin is inscribed not only on hearts but transmitted to the next generation.
3. The phrase harari basadeh ('my mountain in the field/open country') is addressed to Jerusalem/Zion, which sits exposed on its hills. God calls it 'my mountain' even as he sentences it to plunder. The chelkha ('your wealth') and otsrotekha ('your treasures') will become spoil for invaders. The bamot ('high places') — the illicit worship sites — are specifically named as the cause: it is because of sin at these sites that everything will be lost.
4. The verb shamattah ('you will let drop, release') uses the same root as the sabbatical year release (shemittah) — the land will be 'released' from its inhabitants as if in a forced sabbatical. The phrase 'inheritance' (nachalatekha) refers to the promised land itself, which was God's gift. The image of fire kindled in divine anger (esh qedachtem be'appi) that burns ad olam ('to perpetuity/without end') expresses the terrible permanence of the consequences.
5. The gever ('mighty man, strong person') is specifically the person who should be strong — the word implies military capability or social power. The irony is that the person who relies on human strength is precisely the one who will be weakest. 'Flesh' (basar) as 'arm' (zero'a) is a metaphor for relying on human military or political alliances — particularly relevant to Judah's shifting alliances with Egypt and Babylon. The verb yasur ('turns away') from the root shuv frames this as apostasy, not mere preference.
6. The word ar'ar ('shrub, juniper, stunted bush') describes a stripped, bare plant barely surviving in arid conditions — the opposite of the flourishing tree in verse 8. The phrase lo yir'eh ki yavo tov ('he will not see when good comes') is especially poignant: blessing may arrive, but the one who trusts in flesh is incapable of perceiving or receiving it. The 'salt land' (erets melechah) is land so mineral-saturated that nothing grows — a landscape of permanent barrenness (cf. the salting of Sodom's soil, Genesis 19).
7. The parallel structure with verse 5 is precise and deliberate: arur haggever asher yivtach ba'adam (v. 5) mirrors barukh haggever asher yivtach ba-YHWH (v. 7). The choice is binary: trust in flesh or trust in the LORD. The word mivtacho ('his confidence, his trust') uses the same root as yivtach ('trusts') — creating a wordplay: the one who trusts has trust itself, because the LORD is both the object and the ground of confidence.

8. The tree image closely parallels Psalm 1:3, though with distinctive differences: Psalm 1 uses 'streams of water' (palgei mayim) while Jeremiah uses yuval ('watercourse, stream') and mayim ('water'). Psalm 1 emphasizes the tree's leaf not withering; Jeremiah adds the explicit mention of drought resistance and continuous fruit-bearing. The verb yid'ag ('worry, be anxious') is unique to this passage — the tree's freedom from anxiety is a metaphor for the believer's unshakable security. Whether Jeremiah drew on Psalm 1 or both drew on common wisdom tradition is debated; the differences suggest independent development from shared imagery rather than direct quotation.
9. We rendered aqov as 'twisted' rather than 'deceitful' (KJV) because the Hebrew root a-q-v means 'to follow at the heel, to supplant, to twist' — the deception is not mere lying but a fundamental twisting of reality. The word anush ('incurably sick') is rendered 'incurably sick' rather than 'desperately wicked' (KJV) because anush in its other occurrences (2 Samuel 12:15, Isaiah 17:11, Micah 1:9) consistently refers to sickness, not wickedness. The question mi yeda'enu ('who can know/fathom it?') is rhetorical — the answer is implied in verse 10: only God can.
10. This verse answers the rhetorical question of verse 9: who can fathom the heart? The LORD can. The verb choqer ('search, examine, probe') implies thorough investigation, not casual observation. The word kelayot ('kidneys') is rendered 'mind' following TCR convention (cf. 11:20) — the Hebrews understood the kidneys as the seat of the deepest, most hidden thoughts and motives. The phrase 'fruit of his deeds' (peri ma'alalav) connects human actions to agricultural imagery — deeds produce consequences as naturally as trees produce fruit.
11. The qore ('partridge') was believed in the ancient Near East to sit on eggs stolen from other birds' nests — wealth gained unjustly is like hatching eggs that do not belong to you. The verb dagar ('brood, sit on, hatch') applies to the bird but metaphorically to the unjust wealthy person who 'sits on' stolen gains. The word naval ('fool') at the end carries moral weight in Hebrew — it does not mean merely unintelligent but morally bankrupt, senseless in the deepest way (cf. Nabal in 1 Samuel 25).
12. This verse functions as a doxological exclamation — Jeremiah turns from the futility of unjust wealth (v. 11) to the permanence of God's throne. The phrase kisse kavod ('throne of glory') combines royal and divine imagery. Marom me-rishon ('exalted from the beginning') may refer to the heavenly temple's pre-existence or to the Jerusalem temple's ancient sanctity. The word miqdashenu ('our sanctuary') uses the first-person plural possessive — Jeremiah identifies himself with the people even as he condemns them.
13. The word miqveh ('hope') is a wordplay — it also means 'gathering of water, reservoir' (cf. Genesis 1:10), connecting to the 'fountain of living water' (meqor mayim chayyim) at the verse's end. Those who leave the source of living water will be 'written in the dust' (ba'arets yikkatavu) — their names inscribed in dry earth rather than in the book of life, an inscription as impermanent as writing in sand. The 'fountain of living water' metaphor for God also appears in 2:13, where God contrasts himself with the broken cisterns of idolatry.
14. The verbal structure refa'eni...ve'erafei ('heal me...and I will be healed') uses the imperative followed by the cohortative to express consequence: divine healing produces real healing. The same structure with hoshi'eni...ve'ivvashe'ah ('save me...and I will be saved') creates a perfect parallelism. This verse marks the beginning of Jeremiah's fourth 'confession' (17:14-18). After the unflinching diagnosis of the heart in verse 9, Jeremiah turns to the only physician capable of treating the condition.
15. The taunt from Jeremiah's opponents mocks the delay of judgment: if the LORD truly spoke through Jeremiah, where is the fulfillment? The demand yavo na ('let it come, then!') is sarcastic — they dare the prophecy to come true. This challenge to prophetic credibility was a constant burden for Jeremiah, whose predictions of destruction took decades to materialize. The participle omrim ('they keep saying') indicates ongoing, repeated mockery.
16. Jeremiah defends himself before God: he did not abandon his prophetic calling (lo atsti mero'eh acharekha — 'I did not rush away from shepherding after you'), and he did not desire the disaster he predicted (yom anush — 'the day of incurable [sickness/calamity]'). The word anush echoes verse 9's diagnosis — the day of calamity is characterized by the same incurable condition as the human heart. The phrase motsa sefatai ('what came from my lips') appeals to God as witness that Jeremiah's words were genuine prophecy, spoken nokhach panekha ('before your face, in your presence').
17. The plea 'do not become a source of terror to me' (al tihyeh li lemechittah) is startlingly honest — Jeremiah acknowledges the possibility that God himself could become terrifying to him. The word mechittah ('terror, ruin, dismay') suggests not just fear but shattering — the prophet fears being broken by the God he serves. Yet he simultaneously calls God machasi ('my refuge') — the tension between terror and refuge defines Jeremiah's experience of prophetic ministry.
18. The imprecatory prayer follows the pattern of the psalms of individual lament. The chiasmic structure — 'let them be shamed / not me be shamed / let them be shattered / not me be shattered' — creates a formal petition for God to distinguish between the prophet and his enemies. The phrase mishneh shivron ('double breaking') intensifies the request beyond mere justice — Jeremiah asks for emphatic, doubled judgment on those who persecute him. The verb shavar ('break, shatter') is repeated for emphasis (shivron shavrem — 'a breaking, break them').
19. The 'gate of the people' (sha'ar benei ha'am) was likely a specific gate in the Jerusalem wall — its exact identification is debated (some identify it with the Benjamin Gate). The instruction to stand 'in' the gate places Jeremiah at the most public location possible — gates were the centers of commerce, law, and civic life. The mention of 'kings of Judah' entering and leaving indicates this was a royal thoroughfare, ensuring maximum visibility for the prophetic message.
20. The address encompasses all levels of society: kings (political leadership), all Judah (the nation), and all inhabitants of Jerusalem (the capital's residents). The phrase 'who enter through these gates' grounds the universal address in the specific, physical location — these are not abstract recipients but real people passing through a real gate on a given day.

21. The phrase *hishameru benafshoteikhem* ('guard your lives/souls') is emphatic — Sabbath observance is presented not as a minor ritual but as a matter of life and death. The word *massa* ('load, burden, cargo') refers to commercial goods being transported for trade. The gates of Jerusalem are the entry points for commerce — the prohibition targets the reduction of Sabbath to an ordinary business day. This Sabbath oracle (vv. 19-27) is one of the few extended Sabbath passages in the prophetic literature.
22. The verb *qiddashtem* ('consecrate, set apart as holy') uses the same root as *qadosh* ('holy'). To consecrate the Sabbath is to set it apart from ordinary time — to treat it as belonging to God rather than to commerce. The phrase 'as I commanded your ancestors' explicitly connects this instruction to the Sinai covenant (Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15). The pairing of 'houses' with 'gates' (v. 21) covers both domestic and commercial activity.
23. The triple refusal — *lo shame'u* ('did not listen'), *lo hittu et oznam* ('did not incline their ear'), *vayyaqshu et orpam* ('stiffened their neck') — escalates from passive non-hearing to active resistance. The 'stiff neck' (*oref qasheh*) is a characteristic biblical metaphor for stubbornness, drawn from the image of an ox that refuses to turn when the yoke is pulled (cf. Exodus 32:9, 33:3). The word *musar* ('correction, discipline, instruction') encompasses both education and discipline — they rejected God's teaching and his corrective action alike.
24. The emphatic infinitive absolute construction *shamoa tishme'u* ('truly listen, really listen') stresses that genuine obedience is required, not token compliance. This begins a conditional promise (vv. 24-26): if the people observe the Sabbath, then Jerusalem will endure. The conditional structure offers a genuine choice — the future is still open if the people respond.
25. The vision of Davidic royalty entering through Jerusalem's gates represents the continuation of the covenant dynasty. The word *sarim* ('officials, princes, commanders') appears twice, emphasizing the full apparatus of legitimate governance. The phrase *yoshvei al kisse David* ('sitting on the throne of David') invokes the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:12-16). The promise that the city will be inhabited *le'olam* ('forever') is conditional — it depends on the 'if' of verse 24.
26. The geographic sweep — cities of Judah, surroundings of Jerusalem, Benjamin, the Shephelah (lowlands), the hill country, and the Negev (southern desert) — covers the entire territory of the kingdom. The list of offerings — *olah* (burnt offering), *zevach* (sacrifice), *minchah* (grain offering), *levonah* (frankincense), and *todah* (thank offering) — represents the full range of legitimate worship. This idealized vision depends on Sabbath observance: if the people honor God's holy time, the holy place will flourish.
27. The conditional threat mirrors the conditional promise of verses 24-26 with devastating precision: the same gates that could witness royal processions (v. 25) will instead be consumed by fire. The word *armenot* ('fortified buildings, palaces, citadels') refers to the great structures of Jerusalem — royal residences, administrative buildings, defensive fortifications. The phrase *lo tikhbeh* ('will not be extinguished') echoes the unquenchable fire of divine judgment throughout the prophets (cf. Isaiah 66:24, Amos 5:6). The fire entered Jerusalem's gates in 586 BCE when Nebuchadnezzar's army burned the city, fulfilling this conditional warning.

18

Summary: *Jeremiah 18 opens with a divine command to visit the potter's house, where God reveals a foundational principle of his sovereignty: just as a potter reshapes marred clay, so God retains the right to reshape nations based on their response to him. This parable of conditional sovereignty applies in both directions — God may relent from intended disaster if a nation repents, or revoke intended blessing if a nation turns to evil. When this principle is applied to Judah, the people respond with defiant refusal, declaring they will follow their own plans. The chapter closes with Jeremiah's fourth confession (vv. 18-23), provoked by a plot against him: his enemies plan to attack him with their tongues and ignore his words. Jeremiah responds with one of the most unrestrained imprecatory prayers in Scripture, asking God to let their children starve and their wives become childless widows.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The potter-and-clay metaphor is one of the most influential images in all of Scripture, reappearing in Isaiah 29:16, 45:9, and 64:8, and taken up by Paul in Romans 9:19-24. What makes Jeremiah's version distinctive is its conditionality — the potter is not locked into his design. The clay's quality determines what the potter makes. This challenges both fatalistic readings (God controls everything regardless of human action) and autonomous readings (humans determine their own destiny regardless of God). The confession in verses 18-23 is the fourth of Jeremiah's five confessions and the most violent in its demands for vengeance. The prophet who was commanded not to pray for his people (11:14) now prays against his enemies with shocking specificity — famine for their children, the sword for their young men, sudden ambush to catch them unaware. We preserved the raw ferocity of this prayer without softening, because the Hebrew does not soften it.*

Translation Friction: The verb yatsar ('to form, fashion') in verse 4 is the same verb used of God forming humanity from clay in Genesis 2:7 — the intertextual echo is deliberate and we noted it. The phrase sheririut libbam hara ('stubbornness of their evil heart') in verse 12 is a locked Jeremianic formula recurring throughout the book. The imprecatory prayer in verses 19-23 required careful handling: the Hebrew verbs are jussives (wishes/commands) not indicatives (descriptions), so 'hand their children over to famine' is a prayer-wish, not a prediction. The word diggeru ('they have dug') in verse 20 uses the metaphor of digging a pit for someone, echoing Psalm 35:7 and 57:6.

Connections: The potter metaphor connects to Genesis 2:7 (God forms humanity from clay), Isaiah 29:16 and 45:9 (the pot arguing with the potter), Isaiah 64:8 ('we are the clay, you are the potter'), and Romans 9:19-24 (Paul's use of the potter image for divine election). The conditional principle of verses 7-10 is the theological foundation for Jonah's entire narrative — Nineveh repented, and God relented. The conspiracy against Jeremiah (v. 18) continues the pattern from 11:18-23 (Anathoth plot). The confession prayer (vv. 19-23) parallels Psalm 109 in its imprecatory intensity. The phrase 'land flowing with milk and honey' promised in the covenant is now a land whose roads are 'untrodden paths' (v. 15) — covenant blessings reversed.

¹The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²Get up and go down to the potter's house, and there I will make my words known to you. ³So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, working at the wheel. ⁴When the vessel he was shaping from the clay became flawed in the potter's hands, he reworked it into a different vessel, whatever seemed right to the potter to make. ⁵Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁶Can I not do with you as this potter does, O house of Israel? — declares the LORD. Like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. ⁷At one moment I may speak against a nation or a kingdom, to uproot, to tear down, and to destroy. ⁸If that nation turns from the evil I have spoken against, then I will relent from the disaster I had planned to bring upon it. ⁹And at another moment I may speak concerning a nation or a kingdom, to build and to plant. ¹⁰But if it does what is evil in my sight by not obeying my voice, then I will relent from the good I had intended to do for it. ¹¹Now then, speak to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: This is what the LORD says — I am shaping disaster against you and devising a plan against you. Turn back, each one of you, from your evil way, and set right your ways and your deeds. ¹²But they say, 'It is hopeless! We will follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.' ¹³Therefore, this is what the LORD says: Ask among the nations — who has heard anything like this? The virgin Israel has done something utterly appalling. ¹⁴Does the snow vanish from the rocky crags of Lebanon? Do the cold, flowing waters from distant sources ever dry up? ¹⁵Yet my people have forgotten me. They burn incense to worthless things. They have been made to stumble from their ways, from the ancient paths, to walk on side trails, on an ungraded road — ¹⁶making their land a desolation, an object of perpetual scorn. Everyone who passes by it will be appalled and shake his head. ¹⁷Like an east wind I will scatter them before the enemy. I will show them my back, not my face, on the day of their disaster. ¹⁸Then they said, 'Come, let us plot schemes against Jeremiah — for instruction will never cease from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us attack him with the tongue and pay no attention to any of his words.' ¹⁹Pay attention to me, LORD, and hear the voice of my accusers! ²⁰Should evil be repaid for good? For they have dug a pit for my life. Remember how I stood before you to speak on their behalf, to turn your wrath away from them. ²¹Therefore, hand their children over to famine and pour them out to the power of the sword. Let their wives become childless and widowed. Let their husbands be struck down by death, their young men cut down by the sword in battle. ²²Let a scream be heard from their houses when you bring raiders upon them without warning — for they have dug a pit to trap me and hidden snares for my feet. ²³But you, LORD, know all their plotting against me to kill me. Do not atone for their iniquity, and do not wipe out their sin from your sight. Let them be brought down before you — deal with them in the time of your anger.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The standard prophetic reception formula. The Hebrew le'mor ('saying') functions as a speech-introducer and is rendered as a colon rather than retained as a redundant word in English.
2. The verb yarad ('go down') indicates the potter's workshop was at a lower elevation — potters often worked near water sources in valleys. The word yotser ('potter, one who forms') comes from the root yatsar, the same verb used in Genesis 2:7 for God forming the human being from clay. The

connection is not accidental — God is about to present himself as the cosmic Potter.

3. The Hebrew *ovnayim* ('the two stones') is a dual form referring to the potter's wheel, which consisted of two stone discs — a larger lower disc turned by foot and a smaller upper disc on which the clay was shaped. The dual form captures the physical construction of the ancient wheel.
4. The verb *nishchat* ('was marred, became spoiled') is a niph'al (passive) form — the clay itself resisted the intended shape, not that the potter made a mistake. The potter does not discard the clay but reshapes it (*shav*, 'he turned back, did again'). This is the theological point: God does not destroy the raw material but reforms it into something new. The phrase *ka'asher yashar be'einei* ('whatever seemed right in the eyes of') preserves the potter's sovereign discretion.
5. The standard prophetic word-reception formula, transitioning from the visual object lesson at the potter's house to its theological interpretation.
6. The rhetorical question expects an affirmative answer — of course God can. The comparison is direct: clay to potter as Israel to God. The metaphor asserts divine sovereignty without denying human responsibility — the following verses (7-10) make clear that the potter's decision responds to the clay's condition.
7. The three verbs — *natosh* ('uproot'), *natots* ('tear down'), and *ha'avid* ('destroy') — echo Jeremiah's commissioning in 1:10, where he was set over nations 'to uproot and to tear down, to destroy and to overthrow.' The language of Jeremiah's call is revealed as expressing God's general principle of dealing with nations, not just Judah specifically.
8. The verb *nichamti* ('I will relent, change my mind') is theologically significant — it does not mean God was wrong or fickle but that God's announced intentions are responsive to human action. This same verb is used of God 'relenting' in Exodus 32:14 (the golden calf) and Jonah 3:10 (Nineveh). The verb *shav* ('turns') is Jeremiah's key verb for repentance — here applied to any nation, not just Israel.
9. The verbs *livnot* ('to build') and *linto'a* ('to plant') are the positive counterparts to the destructive verbs in verse 7, again echoing Jeremiah 1:10. The principle works symmetrically — God's blessing is as conditional as his judgment.
10. The symmetry is now complete: verses 7-8 state that threatened judgment can be averted by repentance; verses 9-10 state that promised blessing can be revoked by disobedience. This bilateral conditionality is the theological heart of the chapter and a foundational principle of prophetic theology throughout the Hebrew Bible.
11. The verb *yotser* ('shaping, forming') is the same root as the potter — God is 'pottering' disaster, forming it on the wheel like a vessel. The wordplay is deliberate: the potter who forms vessels is now forming calamity. The call *shuvu* ('turn back, return') is the key Jeremiah verb for repentance, offering Judah the same possibility described for generic nations in verses 7-8.
12. The response *no'ash* ('it is hopeless, it is in vain') is devastating — the people do not argue with God's diagnosis but simply refuse to change. This is not ignorance but conscious defiance. They quote the Jeremianic formula *sheririut libbo hara* ('stubbornness of his evil heart') about themselves, as though it were a badge of identity rather than a diagnosis. The verb *na'aseh* ('we will do') is emphatic — they are resolute in their rebellion.
13. The title *betulat Yisra'el* ('the virgin Israel') is an epithet of covenant intimacy — Israel was meant to be devoted exclusively to God, like a virgin pledged to one husband. The word *sha'arurit* ('horrible, appalling') is rare, appearing only here, in 5:30, and 23:14. Even pagan nations — who worship many gods — would find Israel's betrayal of her one God shocking.
14. This verse is textually difficult, and the Hebrew is compressed. The rhetorical questions expect a negative answer: no, the snow of Lebanon's peaks does not abandon the mountain; no, cold streams do not cease flowing. Nature is reliable — but Israel has abandoned her God, who is more constant than mountains and streams. The contrast between natural fidelity and Israel's infidelity is the point.
15. The phrase *shvilei olam* ('ancient paths') echoes Jeremiah 6:16 ('stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths'). The word *shav* ('vanity, worthlessness, emptiness') describes the idols as literally 'nothing' — they burn incense to nonexistence. The contrast between the *slelulah* ('graded, built-up') highway of covenant obedience and the untrodden side trails of idolatry is vivid — the people have left the maintained road for pathless wilderness.
16. The word *sheriqot* ('hissing, whistling') describes the sound passersby make when confronted with shocking ruin — a sharp intake of breath or a low whistle of disbelief. The head-shaking (*yanid bero'sho*) is a gesture of scorn and horror. The land that was meant to flow with milk and honey becomes a roadside spectacle of devastation.
17. The east wind (*ruach qadim*) is the scorching sirocco from the desert — destructive and desiccating. Showing the back rather than the face is a reversal of the priestly blessing (Numbers 6:25, 'The LORD make his face shine upon you'). When God turns his face toward his people, it means favor and protection. When God shows his back, it means abandonment. The phrase 'day of their disaster' (*yom eidam*) anticipates the fall of Jerusalem.
18. This verse marks the beginning of Jeremiah's fourth confession (18:18-23). The enemies' logic is revealing: they believe the institutional sources of divine guidance — priest, sage, and prophet — will always be available, so one dissenting voice (Jeremiah) can safely be silenced. The phrase 'attack him with the tongue' (*nakkeihu vallahon*) means a campaign of slander and denunciation — character assassination rather than physical violence. Torah here means 'instruction' from the priest (its original sense) rather than the written Torah scroll.
19. Jeremiah shifts abruptly into direct prayer. The word *yerivai* ('my accusers, those who contend with me') is a legal term — *riv* means a lawsuit or formal dispute. Jeremiah frames his enemies as adversaries in a legal proceeding before the divine judge.

20. The verb *karu* ('they have dug') uses the common metaphor of digging a trap-pit for an enemy (cf. Psalm 35:7, 57:6). Jeremiah reminds God that he interceded for these very people — the same people now plotting against him. The phrase 'stood before you' (*amdi lefanekha*) is technical language for prophetic intercession, the posture of a mediator standing in God's presence to plead for others.
21. The imprecatory prayer begins in full force. Every verb is a jussive — a wish or demand, not a prediction. Jeremiah asks for total devastation of his enemies' families: children starving, wives bereaved and widowed, husbands killed, young men slaughtered. The verb *hagirem* ('pour them out') treats human lives like liquid poured out — a violent image of disposability. This prayer must not be softened; it reflects the raw anguish and rage of a prophet who has been betrayed by those he tried to save.
22. The cry (*ze'aqah*) is a scream of terror, not a call for help. The word *gedud* ('raiding band, troop') suggests a sudden military assault. The irony is deliberate: they dug a pit (*shuchah*) for Jeremiah, so God will spring a sudden attack on them. The trapping language — pit, snares — echoes verse 20 and connects to the broader psalmic tradition of enemies who fall into their own traps (Psalm 7:15-16).
23. The phrase *al-tekapper* ('do not atone for, do not cover') is extraordinary — Jeremiah asks God to refuse atonement for his enemies. The verb *kaphar* ('to cover, to atone') is the root of Yom Kippur. Jeremiah is asking God to leave their sin uncovered, fully visible, with no sacrificial remedy. Combined with *al-timchi* ('do not blot out'), this is a prayer for permanent, unmitigated guilt. The final phrase *be'et appekha asheh vahem* ('in the time of your anger, deal with them') leaves the specifics to God's wrath.

19

Summary: Jeremiah 19 is a prophetic sign-act — the most dramatic kind of oracle, where the prophet does not merely speak God's word but enacts it physically. God commands Jeremiah to buy a potter's earthenware flask (baqbuq), take elders and senior priests to the Valley of Ben-Hinnom at the Potsherd Gate, and shatter the flask while declaring that God will shatter Jerusalem and its people beyond repair. The oracle condemns child sacrifice at Topheth, the worship of foreign gods, and the shedding of innocent blood. The valley of slaughter will overflow with corpses, and the city will become a place of horror. The chapter ends with Jeremiah returning from Topheth to the temple court, where he repeats the judgment to all the people.

*What Makes This Remarkable: Chapter 19 forms a deliberate pair with chapter 18. In chapter 18, the clay on the potter's wheel is soft, malleable, and can be reshaped — symbolizing the possibility of repentance. In chapter 19, the clay has been fired into a hardened flask that cannot be reshaped — it can only be shattered. The people's refusal to repent (18:12) has moved them from soft clay to hardened pottery. The word *baqbuq* (flask) is onomatopoeic — it imitates the gurgling sound of liquid being poured from a narrow-necked jar, and its smashing would produce a sharp, irreversible crack. The condemnation of child sacrifice at Topheth echoes 7:31-32 almost verbatim, creating a structural bracket around chapters 7-19. We preserved the graphic violence of the descriptions — burning children, flesh eaten in siege cannibalism — because the Hebrew does not flinch, and neither should the rendering.*

*Translation Friction: The word *baqbuq* (v. 1) is distinct from the generic *keli* ('vessel') of chapter 18 — it is a specific type of narrow-necked pottery flask, and the distinction matters for the symbolism (a flask cannot be reshaped, only broken). The phrase *sha'ar hacharsit* ('Potsherd Gate,' v. 2) is named either because potsherds were discarded there or because potters worked nearby — both etymologies connect to the pottery imagery. The phrase 'eat the flesh of their sons and daughters' (v. 9) refers to siege cannibalism, attested historically in ancient Near Eastern texts and in the biblical account of 2 Kings 6:28-29. The closing verses (14-15) present Jeremiah moving from the valley back to the temple court, extending the oracle to all the people — this transition sets up the confrontation with Pashhur in chapter 20.*

Connections: The potter imagery connects directly to chapter 18 (soft clay to hard flask — the progression from potential reshaping to irreversible shattering). The Topheth condemnation reprises 7:31-32 nearly verbatim. Child sacrifice prohibitions connect to Leviticus 18:21 and 20:2-5 (Molech worship), Deuteronomy 12:31 and 18:10, and 2 Kings 23:10 (Josiah's reforms). The siege cannibalism warning echoes Deuteronomy 28:53-57 (covenant curses for disobedience) and is fulfilled in Lamentations 2:20 and 4:10. The sign-act of breaking parallels Isaiah 30:14 (a potter's vessel shattered beyond repair). The confrontation with Pashhur in 20:1-6 is the direct narrative consequence of 19:14-15.

¹This is what the LORD says: Go and buy an earthenware flask from a potter, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the senior priests with you. ²Then go out to the Valley of Ben-Hinnom, at the entrance of the Potsherd Gate, and proclaim there the words that I will speak to you. ³Say to them: Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says — I am about to bring such disaster on this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will ring. ⁴Because they have abandoned me and made this place foreign by burning incense in it to other gods that neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah had known, and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent. ⁵They have built the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal — something I never commanded, never spoke of, and never even considered. ⁶Therefore, the days are coming — declares the LORD — when this place will no longer be called Topheth, or the Valley of Ben-Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter. ⁷I will shatter the plans of Judah and Jerusalem in this place. I will make them fall by the sword before their enemies and by the hand of those who seek their lives. I will give their corpses as food to the birds of the sky and the animals of the earth. ⁸I will make this city a desolation and an object of scorn. Everyone who passes by it will be appalled and will hiss at all its wounds. ⁹I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and each will eat the flesh of his neighbor during the siege and in the desperation that their enemies and those who seek their lives will inflict on them. ¹⁰Then you are to shatter the flask in the sight of the men who go with you, ¹¹and say to them: This is what the LORD of Hosts says — Just so will I shatter this people and this city, as one shatters a potter's vessel that can never be mended again. They will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no room left to bury. ¹²This is what I will do to this place — declares the LORD — and to its inhabitants: I will make this city like Topheth. ¹³The houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah will become defiled like the place of Topheth — all the houses on whose rooftops they burned incense to the whole host of heaven and poured out drink offerings to other gods. ¹⁴Then Jeremiah returned from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy, and he stood in the court of the LORD's house and said to all the people: ¹⁵This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: I am about to bring upon this city and upon all its surrounding towns every disaster I have spoken against it, because they have stiffened their necks and refused to hear my words.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Hebrew *baqbuq* is a specific type of narrow-necked pottery flask — not a generic vessel. The word is onomatopoeic, imitating the gurgling sound of liquid poured from such a jar. This specificity matters: unlike the soft clay on the wheel in chapter 18, this flask has been fired and hardened. It cannot be reshaped. The elders and senior priests serve as official witnesses to the prophetic sign-act, giving it legal weight.
2. The Valley of Ben-Hinnom (*gei ven-Hinnom*) — later Gehenna — was the ravine south of Jerusalem associated with child sacrifice and later with divine judgment. The 'Potsherd Gate' (*sha'ar hacharsit*) is named either for discarded pottery fragments or for nearby potter's workshops — either way, the gate's name connects thematically to the flask Jeremiah carries. The Ketiv/Qere variant (*hacharsit/hacharsut*) does not change the meaning.
3. The phrase *titstsalnah oznav* ('his ears will ring/tingle') describes the physical sensation of hearing news so shocking that it produces a ringing in the ears. The same expression appears in 1 Samuel 3:11 (judgment on Eli's house) and 2 Kings 21:12 (judgment on Manasseh's Jerusalem). It marks the most severe category of divine pronouncement. The plural 'kings' may include the ruling king and crown prince, or may anticipate multiple reigns during the coming judgment period.
4. The verb *vayenakkeru* ('they made foreign, they estranged') is striking — the holy valley has been turned into alien territory by the worship of gods that are themselves alien to Israel's history. The phrase *dam neqi'im* ('blood of innocents') refers both to child sacrifice and to judicial murder of the righteous. The indictment names three generations — the current people, their ancestors, and the kings — all equally guilty.
5. The triple denial — *lo tsivviti* ('I never commanded'), *lo dibbarti* ('I never spoke of'), *lo aletah al libbi* ('it never entered my mind') — is God's emphatic dissociation from child sacrifice. This exact formula appears also in 7:31 and 32:35, forming a repeated refrain throughout Jeremiah. The phrase *olot laBa'al* ('burnt offerings to Baal') uses sacrificial terminology (*olah*, 'burnt offering') normally reserved for legitimate worship of the LORD, making the perversion especially grotesque — the people applied sacred categories to an abominable act.
6. This verse virtually duplicates 7:32, creating a deliberate structural echo. The name change from Topheth to 'Valley of Slaughter' (*gei ha-haregah*) transforms the site from a place where Israel killed its children for Baal into a place where God kills Israel. The punishment mirrors the crime. Topheth may derive from a root meaning 'fireplace' or 'place of burning' — the exact etymology is debated.
7. The verb *vaqqoti* ('I will empty out, pour out, make void') is a wordplay on *baqbuq* (the flask) — both share the root *b-q-q*. God will 'empty out' Judah's plans just as liquid is emptied from the flask. The denial of proper burial — bodies left for scavengers — is among the most severe judgments in the ancient Near East, where burial was essential for honoring the dead (cf. Deuteronomy 28:26).

8. The verb *yishroq* ('he will hiss, whistle') describes the sharp sound of shock and contempt — passersby will react to Jerusalem's ruin with visceral revulsion. The word *makkoteha* ('its wounds, its blows, its plagues') treats the city as a battered body, covered in the wounds of divine judgment. This echoes 18:16 almost verbatim, linking the two chapters.
9. Siege cannibalism is the most extreme covenant curse, drawn directly from Deuteronomy 28:53-57. This is not rhetorical exaggeration — the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem produced exactly these conditions, as attested in Lamentations 2:20 ('Should women eat their offspring, the children they have nurtured?') and 4:10 ('The hands of compassionate women boiled their own children'). The words *matsor* ('siege') and *matsoq* ('distress, desperation') form a sound-pair emphasizing the extremity of the suffering.
10. The verb *shavarta* ('you shall shatter, break') is the climactic action of the sign-act. The witnesses (elders and priests from v. 1) must see the breaking — the prophetic sign requires an audience to carry legal weight. The flask, once shattered, cannot be repaired or reshaped. This is the contrast with chapter 18: wet clay can be reworked, but fired pottery can only be destroyed.
11. The key phrase *lo yukhal lehirafe* ('cannot be mended, cannot be healed') seals the metaphor's meaning. The verb *rafa* ('to heal, to mend, to repair') is negated — this breaking is permanent. The irony of burying in Topheth is brutal: the place where children were sacrificed to foreign gods becomes the mass grave for the entire population. The overcrowding of Topheth with corpses (*me'ein maqom liqbor*, 'no room to bury') indicates casualties beyond the capacity of normal burial practices.
12. The comparison is devastating: all of Jerusalem will become like Topheth — a defiled place of death and burning. Topheth was already considered ritually unclean because of child sacrifice. Now the entire city will share that defilement.
13. Rooftop worship (*al gagoteihem*, 'on their rooftops') was common because flat roofs provided open-air altars with a clear view of the stars. The 'host of heaven' (*tseva hashamayim*) refers to astral deities — sun, moon, and stars worshiped as divine beings. This practice is condemned in Deuteronomy 4:19 and 17:3. The drink offerings (*nesakim*) were libations poured out to these celestial deities. The defilement will spread from Topheth to encompass every building in the city.
14. The narrative shifts from the prophetic oracle to biographical report. Jeremiah moves from the valley of death (Topheth) to the center of religious life (the temple court). He does not confine his message to the small group of witnesses — he repeats it publicly. This act of public defiance in the temple court directly provokes the confrontation with Pashhur in 20:1-6.
15. The phrase *higshu et orfam* ('they have stiffened their necks') is a metaphor drawn from draft animals that refuse the yoke — an ox that stiffens its neck cannot be guided or directed. Israel has refused the yoke of covenant obedience. The judgment extends beyond Jerusalem to 'all its surrounding towns' (*kol areha*), indicating that the entire urban network of Judah will share in the destruction. This verse ends chapter 19 but the narrative continues without break into 20:1, where Pashhur the priest responds to what Jeremiah has just proclaimed.

20

Summary: Jeremiah 20 divides into three brutal movements. First (vv. 1-6), the priest Pashhur son of Immer — chief officer of the temple — beats Jeremiah and locks him in the stocks at the Upper Benjamin Gate. Upon release, Jeremiah renames Pashhur 'Magor-Missabib' ('Terror on Every Side') and delivers a devastating oracle of exile against him personally. Second (vv. 7-13), the prophet turns on God himself in the most confrontational prayer in the Hebrew Bible, accusing God of having deceived or seduced him into a calling that has brought nothing but mockery and pain. Third (vv. 14-18), Jeremiah curses the day of his birth in language that echoes and intensifies Job 3. The chapter ends in unresolved anguish — no divine answer, no comfort, no resolution. The text refuses to soften the prophet's despair.

*What Makes This Remarkable: No other passage in the Hebrew Bible presents a prophet accusing God so directly and so violently. The verb *pittitani* (v. 7) — from *pittah*, meaning 'to entice, deceive, seduce' — is the same verb used for the seduction of a virgin in Exodus 22:16 and for the deception of a naive person in Proverbs 1:10. Jeremiah is saying that God lured him into prophecy under false pretenses — that the divine call was an act of seduction or entrapment. This is not doubt. This is not questioning. This is accusation. The theological audacity is staggering, and the fact that the canonical text preserves it without censorship or correction tells us something essential about the Hebrew Bible's understanding of the prophetic relationship: it is honest enough to contain rage. The birth-curse of verses 14-18 intensifies Job 3 by adding a specific target — the unnamed man who brought news of the birth to Jeremiah's father. The chapter's placement at the end of the 'confessions of Jeremiah' sequence (11:18-20:18) makes it the climax of the prophet's inner suffering, and the book provides no answer. God does not speak in response.*

Translation Friction: The central translation challenge is pittitani () in verse 7. The verb pittah carries a range from 'persuade' to 'entice' to 'deceive' to 'seduce,' and the choice of English rendering determines how confrontational the verse reads. We rendered it 'You deceived me' because the parallel clause — 'you overpowered me and prevailed' — establishes a context of force and manipulation, not gentle persuasion. The expanded rendering documents the full semantic range. In verse 9, the phrase 'burning fire shut up in my bones' required rendering that preserves the physical, visceral quality of the Hebrew — this is not metaphor for the prophet but lived bodily torment. The birth-curse (vv. 14-18) required care to preserve the escalating structure: cursed is the day, cursed is the man, why was I born — each line more desperate than the last. We resisted any temptation to add a hopeful coda or contextualizing note that would blunt the ending.

Connections: Jeremiah's accusation in verse 7 connects backward to his call narrative (1:4-10), where God promised to be with him — a promise the prophet now experiences as betrayal. The birth-curse (vv. 14-18) parallels Job 3:1-19 so closely that literary dependence in one direction or the other is widely assumed. Pashhur's name-change to Magor-Missabib ('Terror on Every Side') echoes the same phrase in Psalm 31:13, where it describes enemies surrounding the psalmist. The 'fire shut up in my bones' (v. 9) connects to Psalm 39:3, where the psalmist also describes the unbearable pressure of suppressed speech. The confession sequence that climaxes here (beginning at 11:18) has been compared to the Psalms of lament, but Jeremiah's confessions exceed the psalms in their directness against God — the psalmists complain to God about enemies, but Jeremiah complains to God about God.

¹When Pashhur son of Immer the priest — who was the chief officer in the house of the LORD — heard Jeremiah prophesying these words, ²Pashhur struck Jeremiah the prophet and put him in the stocks at the Upper Benjamin Gate, which is in the house of the LORD. ³The next day, when Pashhur released Jeremiah from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him: The LORD does not call your name Pashhur, but Magor-Missabib. ⁴For this is what the LORD says: I am about to make you a terror to yourself and to all who love you. They will fall by the sword of their enemies while your eyes watch. I will hand all Judah over to the king of Babylon, and he will deport them to Babylon and strike them down with the sword. ⁵I will hand over all the wealth of this city — all its produce, all its valuables, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah — to their enemies, who will plunder them, seize them, and carry them to Babylon. ⁶And you, Pashhur — you and everyone who lives in your house will go into captivity. You will go to Babylon, and there you will die, and there you will be buried — you and all who love you, to whom you prophesied falsely. ⁷You deceived me, LORD, and I was deceived. You overpowered me, and you prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long — everyone mocks me. ⁸For whenever I speak, I must cry out — I shout, 'Violence and destruction!' The word of the LORD has brought me nothing but reproach and ridicule all day long. ⁹I said to myself, 'I will not mention him or speak in his name anymore.' But his word became like a burning fire locked inside my bones. I was exhausted from holding it in — I could not endure it. ¹⁰For I hear the whispering of many — 'Terror on every side!' — 'Denounce him! Let us denounce him!' All the men who were at peace with me are watching for me to stumble: 'Perhaps he can be deceived, and we will overpower him and take our vengeance on him.' ¹¹But the LORD is with me like a fearsome warrior. Therefore my persecutors will stumble and will not prevail. They will be deeply shamed because they have not acted wisely — an everlasting disgrace that will never be forgotten. ¹²LORD of Hosts, who examines the righteous, who sees the innermost depths and the heart — let me see your vengeance on them, for to you I have laid open my case. ¹³Sing to the LORD! Praise the LORD! For he has rescued the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers. ¹⁴Cursed be the day I was born. The day my mother bore me — let it not be blessed. ¹⁵Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, saying, 'A son has been born to you!' — making him so glad. ¹⁶Let that man be like the cities the LORD overthrew without relenting — let him hear cries of anguish in the morning and alarm at noon, ¹⁷because he did not kill me in the womb, so that my mother would have been my grave and her womb forever pregnant. ¹⁸Why did I come out of the womb — to see nothing but suffering and grief, so that my days are spent in shame?

1. The title *paqid nagid* ('chief officer') indicates Pashhur held administrative authority over the temple compound, including the power to discipline those who disrupted temple order. This is not a minor functionary but the senior official responsible for maintaining order in the sacred precincts. The verse is syntactically incomplete, flowing directly into verse 2 as a single sentence unit.
2. The verb *vayakkeh* ('he struck') indicates a beating, not a single blow — the same verb describes military striking and judicial punishment elsewhere. The *mahpekhet* ('stocks') was a wooden restraining device that twisted the body into a contorted, painful position — the root *h-p-k* means 'to turn, twist, overturn.' This is public humiliation and physical torture inflicted by a priest on a prophet within the temple compound itself.
3. The name-change follows the prophetic pattern of renaming as oracle (cf. Isaiah's children in Isaiah 7-8). Pashhur's original name may mean 'freedom on every side' (from Egyptian *p3-šr*, 'the son of Horus'), which makes *Magor-Missabib* ('Terror on Every Side') a bitter reversal — freedom becomes terror, safety becomes dread. The phrase *magor missabib* appears also in Psalm 31:14 and in Jeremiah 6:25, 46:5, 49:29, and Lamentations 2:22.
4. The punishment is exquisitely tailored: Pashhur will become a source of terror — the very thing his new name declares. The phrase '*ve'einekha ro'ot*' ('while your eyes watch') adds a dimension of forced witness — Pashhur will survive long enough to see the destruction of everyone he cares about. The mention of Babylon is historically specific: this oracle dates the encounter to a time when Babylon's threat was already real but not yet universally accepted.
5. Three Hebrew terms catalogue what will be lost: *chosen* ('wealth, stored goods'), *yegia* ('produce, the fruit of labor'), and *yeqarah* ('precious things, valuables'). The accumulation emphasizes totality — nothing of value will remain. The verb *uvezazum* ('and they will plunder them') is onomatopoeic in Hebrew, the buzzing *z*-sounds mimicking the swarming chaos of looting.
6. Pashhur is revealed as a false prophet (*navi sheqer*) — he has been delivering oracles of his own, reassuring the people with lies. The final phrase '*asher nibbeta lahem basheqer*' ('to whom you prophesied falsely') exposes the core conflict: Pashhur punished Jeremiah not out of concern for the temple but because Jeremiah's true prophecy contradicted Pashhur's false one. The sentence of death in Babylon with burial in foreign soil is a reversal of every covenant promise of land and rest.
7. We rendered *pittitani* as 'You deceived me' rather than the softer 'You persuaded me' (used by some English translations to cushion the blow) because the parallel verb *chazaqtani* ('you overpowered me') establishes a context of force, not gentle persuasion. The semantic range of *pittah* includes: to entice (Judges 14:15, 16:5), to deceive (1 Kings 22:20-22), to seduce (Exodus 22:16), and to persuade (Proverbs 25:15). The confrontational end of the spectrum — deception and seduction — fits the parallel clause and the emotional context. The word *va'eppat* ('and I was deceived') uses the same root in the passive — Jeremiah acknowledges his own vulnerability but assigns the agency to God.
8. The content of Jeremiah's preaching is summarized in two words: *chamas* ('violence') and *shod* ('destruction'). These are not Jeremiah's personal complaints but the message God requires him to deliver — he must announce coming violence and ruin, which makes him universally hated. The word *cherpa* ('reproach, disgrace') and *qeles* ('ridicule, mockery') describe the social cost of faithfulness — the prophet who speaks truth becomes a pariah.
9. The verb *nil'eiti* ('I was exhausted, weary') combined with *kalkel* ('to contain, hold in') depicts the physical toll of suppression. The prophet tried to quit — to stop prophesying — and discovered that God's word is not a message he carries but a force that carries him. The fire metaphor connects to Jeremiah 5:14 ('I will make my words in your mouth a fire') and to 23:29 ('Is not my word like fire?'). The word *atsur* ('shut up, imprisoned') in the prophet's bones anticipates the physical imprisonment that Jeremiah will later endure — his body becomes a prison before any human jailer locks him up.
10. The verb *yeputteh* ('perhaps he will be deceived') uses the same root *pittah* that Jeremiah used against God in verse 7. The verbal echo is intentional and theologically layered — the deception Jeremiah attributes to God is mirrored by the deception his enemies plot against him. The phrase '*anshei shelomi*' ('men of my peace') is an idiom for trusted associates, allies, those with whom one has a covenant of peace. The phrase '*shomrei tsal'i*' ('watchers of my stumbling') depicts predators waiting for prey to falter.
11. The sudden pivot from accusation (v. 7) to confidence is jarring and theologically significant — the prophet who just accused God of deception now claims God as his champion. This is not contradiction but the characteristic oscillation of lament: rage and trust coexist. The word *arits* ('fearsome, ruthless, terrifying') is usually negative — applied to oppressors and tyrants. Applied to God, it means the LORD's power is terrifying to Jeremiah's enemies. The phrase *kelimmat olam* ('everlasting disgrace') echoes the *olam* vocabulary — their shame will stretch beyond the visible horizon.
12. The phrase '*ro'eh kelayot valev*' ('who sees the kidneys and the heart') refers to God's capacity to perceive the deepest interior of a person. In Hebrew anthropology, the *kelayot* ('kidneys') were the seat of the deepest emotions and hidden motives, while the *lev* ('heart') was the seat of the will and intellect. We rendered *kelayot* as 'innermost depths' rather than the literal 'kidneys' because the anatomical reference does not communicate the Hebrew meaning in English. The verb *gilliti* ('I have laid open, uncovered, revealed') is the language of legal disclosure — Jeremiah has submitted his case to the divine court. This verse closely parallels 11:20, where the same language appears in Jeremiah's first confession.
13. This burst of praise is liturgically conventional — it follows the pattern of psalmic hymns that conclude a lament (cf. Psalm 22:22-31 after 22:1-21). But its placement here, immediately before the birth-curse of verses 14-18, creates a disturbing structural effect. The praise does not resolve the lament — it is followed by the darkest passage in the book. Whether verse 13 represents genuine momentary faith, liturgical convention, or bitter irony is left unresolved by the text. The word *evyon* ('needy, poor') is Jeremiah's self-description — the prophet who holds the highest spiritual office in Israel considers himself among the destitute.

14. The structure is a Hebrew parallelism: 'Cursed be the day I was born / the day my mother bore me — let it not be blessed.' The second line intensifies the first by negating its opposite — not merely 'let it be cursed' but 'let it never be blessed,' stripping away even the possibility of goodness from that day. This echoes Job 3:1-3 closely, though Jeremiah adds the specific mention of his mother. The abruptness of the transition from verse 13's praise to verse 14's curse has troubled interpreters for centuries — but the text does not smooth it.
15. The curse widens from the day to a person — the unnamed messenger who announced Jeremiah's birth to his father. The phrase *ben zakhar* ('a male child') emphasizes the patriarchal joy of a son's birth, and *sammeach simmechu* ('making him exceedingly glad') uses the emphatic infinitive absolute to stress the intensity of the father's joy. The cruelty of this verse lies in its specificity: Jeremiah curses the moment of his father's greatest happiness. The messenger is unnamed — he is a bystander in the prophet's anguish, cursed not for anything he did wrong but because he participated in the event Jeremiah wishes had never happened.
16. The verb *hafakh* ('overthrew') is the technical term for Sodom's destruction, used in Genesis 19:21, 25, 29 and in prophetic references to total destruction (Amos 4:11, Isaiah 13:19). The phrase *velo nicham* ('and did not relent') uses the verb *nacham*, which elsewhere describes God 'changing his mind' or 'having compassion' — here the negation means no such mercy was extended. The cries of *ze'aqah* ('anguish') and *teru'ah* ('alarm, battle cry') depict a man living in perpetual terror — hearing sounds of destruction from dawn to midday with no relief.
17. The Hebrew shifts from cursing the messenger to explaining why he is cursed — 'because he did not kill me in the womb.' The logic is irrational grief: the messenger is cursed for not committing an act he had no power or reason to perform. The image of the mother's womb as a grave (*qivri*, 'my grave') merges birth and death into a single horrifying image — the place that should give life becomes the place of burial. The phrase *rachmah harat olam* ('her womb forever pregnant') envisions an eternal pregnancy that never reaches birth — permanent gestation with no delivery, existence trapped in pre-existence. The word *olam* here means an unbounded duration — pregnancy stretching beyond the horizon of time.
18. The final verse is a question with no answer. The word *lammah* ('why?') is the lament's ultimate interrogative — it demands a reason for suffering and receives none. The three terms *amal* ('suffering, toil, trouble'), *yagon* ('grief, sorrow'), and *bosheth* ('shame, disgrace') summarize the prophet's entire experience. The chapter — and the entire confession sequence that began at 11:18 — ends here, in unresolved despair. God does not respond. There is no comforting oracle, no divine assurance, no resolution. The text simply stops. This silence is itself theologically significant: the Hebrew Bible preserves the unanswered cry without rushing to provide comfort that the moment does not contain.

21

Summary: *Jeremiah 21 records the moment King Zedekiah sends a delegation to Jeremiah during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, desperately hoping the LORD will intervene as he did in the days of Hezekiah against Assyria. The LORD's answer is devastating: he himself will fight against Jerusalem with outstretched hand and mighty arm — the very language once used of the Exodus deliverance — and will strike down man and beast with pestilence. The chapter closes with a stark choice: those who surrender to Babylon will live, those who remain in the city will die by sword, famine, and plague.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The inversion of Exodus language is the theological earthquake of this chapter. The phrase 'outstretched hand and mighty arm' (v.5) is drawn directly from Deuteronomy 4:34 and 26:8, where it describes God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Here the same divine power is turned against his own people. Zedekiah invokes the memory of God's miraculous defense (2 Kings 19:35), but Jeremiah announces that this time God stands with Babylon, not with Jerusalem. The phrase 'I myself will fight against you' (v.5) is covenant-lawsuit language — the divine warrior has switched sides. The choice offered in verses 8-10 — 'the way of life and the way of death' — echoes Deuteronomy 30:15-19, but the 'way of life' is now surrender to the enemy, a scandalous reversal that would have been unthinkable to Zedekiah's court.*

Translation Friction: *We rendered *nilvam* ('fight') in verse 5 with the full phrase 'I myself will fight against you' to capture the emphatic first-person construction in Hebrew. The phrase *biyad netuya uvizroa' chazaqah* ('with outstretched hand and with mighty arm') we preserved in its traditional Exodus form precisely because the inversion depends on the reader recognizing the allusion. The word *qetseph* ('wrath') in verse 5 we rendered as 'fierce wrath' to distinguish it from other anger vocabulary (*af*, *chemah*) that appears in the same passage. In verse 9, 'his life shall be to him as plunder' renders the Hebrew construction *wehayetah lo nafsho leshalal* — the survivor keeps only his bare life, nothing more.*

Connections: *The Exodus-inversion language connects to Deuteronomy 4:34 and 26:8. Zedekiah's appeal recalls Hezekiah's deliverance in 2 Kings 19:35 and Isaiah 37:36. The 'way of life and way of death' formula echoes Deuteronomy 30:15-19. The promise that God will fight against his own people fulfills the covenant curses of Leviticus 26:17 and 33. Nebuchadnezzar as God's instrument connects forward to Jeremiah 25:9 where he is called 'my*

servant.' The siege context continues through Jeremiah 32, 34, and 37-39.

¹The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur son of Malchiah and Zephaniah son of Maaseiah the priest, saying, ²Inquire of the LORD on our behalf, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is making war against us. Perhaps the LORD will deal with us according to all his wondrous deeds, and he will withdraw from us. ³Then Jeremiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to Zedekiah: ⁴This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I am about to turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, with which you fight against the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans who besiege you outside the walls, and I will gather them into the midst of this city. ⁵I myself will fight against you with outstretched hand and with mighty arm, in anger, in fury, and in fierce wrath. ⁶I will strike the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast. They shall die of a great pestilence. ⁷And afterward — declares the LORD — I will give Zedekiah king of Judah, his servants, the people, and those who survive in this city from the pestilence, the sword, and the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their lives. He will strike them with the edge of the sword. He will not spare them, he will not have pity, and he will not show mercy. ⁸And to this people you shall say: This is what the LORD says: I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. ⁹Whoever remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. But whoever goes out and surrenders to the Chaldeans who besiege you shall live, and his life shall be to him as plunder. ¹⁰For I have set my face against this city for harm and not for good — declares the LORD. It shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire. ¹¹To the house of the king of Judah: Hear the word of the LORD! ¹²O house of David, this is what the LORD says: Execute justice each morning, and deliver the one who has been robbed from the hand of the oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire and burn with no one to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds. ¹³I am against you, O inhabitant of the valley, O rock of the plain — declares the LORD — you who say, 'Who will come down against us? Who will enter our strongholds?' ¹⁴I will punish you according to the fruit of your deeds — declares the LORD. I will kindle a fire in her forest, and it shall devour everything around her.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. This Pashhur is distinct from the Pashhur son of Immer in chapter 20. Zedekiah sends two emissaries — one royal official and one priest — reflecting the gravity of the crisis. The delegation occurs during the Babylonian siege of 588-586 BCE.
2. Zedekiah's 'perhaps' (ulai) reveals both desperation and uncertainty. He does not ask whether God will act but hopes for a miracle on the basis of precedent. The verb ya'aleh ('go up, withdraw') is military terminology for lifting a siege.
3. Jeremiah does not soften or delay — his response is immediate and directed back to the king through the same delegation.
4. The image is terrifying: God will reverse their weapons — not merely make them ineffective but turn them inward. The Chaldeans besieging from outside will be gathered inside the city walls. The LORD is orchestrating both sides of the battle, and he fights for Babylon.
5. The emphatic pronoun ani ('I myself') makes God's personal involvement unmistakable. Three anger terms cascade: af ('anger,' literally 'nostril-flaring'), chemah ('fury, heat'), and qetseph ('wrath, indignation'). Each intensifies beyond the last, expressing the fullness of divine judgment.
6. The language echoes the tenth plague in Egypt (Exodus 12:29) — God strikes inhabitants and animals alike. The pestilence (dever) is one of the covenant-curse triad: sword, famine, and pestilence, which recurs throughout Jeremiah.
7. Three negated verbs — 'not spare,' 'not pity,' 'not show mercy' — form a devastating closure. The survivors of pestilence, sword, and famine face yet another fate: captivity and execution. The phrase 'those who seek their lives' (mevaqshei nafsham) is standard Jeremiah vocabulary for mortal enemies.
8. This verse introduces the oracle to the general population, distinct from the message to Zedekiah. The Deuteronomic formula is unmistakable, and its subversion in the following verses would have been profoundly disorienting.
9. The Hebrew nafal al ('fall upon') means to desert to the enemy. The triad of sword, famine, and pestilence (cherev, ra'av, dever) is Jeremiah's signature judgment formula, appearing over twenty times in the book. The 'life as plunder' idiom also occurs in Jeremiah 38:2, 39:18, and 45:5.
10. 'I have set my face' (samti panai) indicates a fixed, irrevocable divine decision. The verb is in the perfect tense — the decision is already made. The burning of Jerusalem is stated as accomplished fact from God's perspective, though it would not occur until 586 BCE.
11. A new oracle begins here, addressed to the royal house as an institution rather than to Zedekiah personally. This introduces the broader theme of royal accountability that continues through chapter 22.

12. The address to 'the house of David' invokes the dynastic covenant (2 Samuel 7) while simultaneously placing it under judgment. The conditional 'lest' (pen) implies the door is still technically open, though the surrounding context suggests it is nearly shut.
13. The 'valley' and 'rock of the plain' describe Jerusalem's topography — built on a rocky plateau above the surrounding valleys. The inhabitants' boast reflects false confidence in the city's natural fortifications. The phrase hineni elayik ('I am against you') is the divine war-declaration formula.
14. The 'forest' (ya'ar) likely refers to the 'House of the Forest of Lebanon' — Solomon's palace complex built with cedar (1 Kings 7:2). The fire that begins in the royal 'forest' will spread to consume everything around it. The phrase 'fruit of your deeds' (peri ma'allekhem) connects judgment to the natural consequences of their own actions.

22

Summary: *Jeremiah 22 contains a series of oracles against the kings of Judah, delivered as if Jeremiah were standing in the royal palace. The chapter opens with a demand for justice and a conditional promise — if the Davidic house practices righteousness, kings will continue to ride through the gates; if not, the palace will become a desolation. Three kings are specifically addressed: Shallum (Jehoahaz), exiled to Egypt never to return; Jehoiakim, condemned for building his palace with forced labor and for his utter lack of justice; and Jehoiachin (Coniah), declared a despised, broken pot who will be hurled into exile with his mother, and whose offspring will never sit on the throne of David.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The contrast between Josiah and Jehoiakim in verses 15-17 is one of the sharpest character studies in Scripture. Josiah 'judged the cause of the poor and needy — was not this to know me?' (v.16), equating knowledge of God directly with justice for the vulnerable. Jehoiakim, by contrast, builds a lavish palace with unpaid labor while his father's legacy of justice lies in ruins. The rhetorical question 'Is not this to know me?' (halo-hi hadda'at oti) redefines the meaning of 'knowing God' in ethical rather than intellectual or mystical terms. The oracle against Coniah (vv.24-30) is devastating in its finality — even if he were the signet ring on God's right hand, God would tear him off and throw him away. The declaration that none of his offspring will prosper on David's throne (v.30) raises profound questions about the Davidic covenant that are only resolved by the reversal in Haggai 2:23.*

Translation Friction: *We rendered Shallum rather than Jehoahaz in verse 11 because the Hebrew text uses Shallum, which is apparently a birth name or alternative name for Jehoahaz son of Josiah. Coniah (Konyahu) in verse 24 is a shortened, perhaps deliberately dismissive form of Jehoiachin (Yehoyakin). We preserved the Hebrew name forms as they carry interpretive weight. The phrase 'Do you reign because you compete in cedar?' (v.15) is notoriously difficult — we rendered the verb titkhareh as 'compete' to capture the sense of rivalry and ostentation in Jehoiakim's building projects. In verse 23, 'O inhabitant of Lebanon, nested among the cedars' addresses the royal house through its cedar-paneled palace.*

Connections: *The demand for justice connects backward to Jeremiah 21:12 and forward to 23:5. Josiah's commendation echoes 2 Kings 23:25. Jehoiakim's forced labor recalls Solomon's conscription (1 Kings 5:13-14) and reverses the Exodus liberation from forced labor in Egypt. The signet-ring imagery of verse 24 is reversed in Haggai 2:23 where Zerubbabel (Coniah's grandson) is restored as God's signet. The prohibition against weeping for the dead king (Josiah) but weeping for the one who goes away (Shallum) foreshadows the exile theology of Jeremiah 24 and 29. The 'burial of a donkey' for Jehoiakim (v.19) connects to 2 Chronicles 36:6.*

1This is what the LORD says: Go down to the house of the king of Judah and speak this word there: 2Say: Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah who sits on the throne of David — you, your servants, and your people who enter by these gates. 3 This is what the LORD says: Do justice and righteousness. Deliver the one who has been robbed from the hand of the oppressor. Do no wrong and do no violence to the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow. Do not shed innocent blood in this place. 4For if you truly do this, then kings who sit on David's throne shall enter by the gates of this house, riding in chariots and on horses — he, his servants, and his people. 5But if you will not hear these words, I swear by myself — declares the LORD — that this house shall become a desolation. 6For this is what the LORD says concerning the house of the king of Judah: You are Gilead to me, the summit of Lebanon — yet I will surely make you a wilderness, cities without inhabitants. 7I will consecrate destroyers against you, each with his weapons. They shall cut down your choicest cedars and cast them into

the fire. ⁸Many nations shall pass by this city and say to one another, 'Why has the LORD done this to this great city?' ⁹And they shall answer, 'Because they abandoned the covenant of the LORD their God, and bowed down to other gods, and served them.' ¹⁰Do not weep for the dead, and do not grieve for him. Weep bitterly for the one who goes away, for he shall never return, nor see the land of his birth again. ¹¹For this is what the LORD says concerning Shallum son of Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned in place of Josiah his father and who went out from this place: He shall not return here again. ¹²For in the place where they have exiled him, there he shall die. He shall never see this land again.

¹³Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness,
and his upper rooms by injustice,
who makes his neighbor serve without wages
and does not give him his pay!

¹⁴He says, 'I will build myself a great house
with spacious upper rooms!'
He cuts out windows for it,
panels it with cedar,
and paints it with vermilion.

¹⁵Do you think you reign because you compete in cedar?
Did not your father eat and drink
and do justice and righteousness?
Then it was well with him.

¹⁶He judged the cause of the poor and the needy —
then it was well.
Is not this to know me?
— declares the LORD.

¹⁷But your eyes and your heart are set on nothing
but your dishonest gain,
on shedding innocent blood,
and on practicing oppression and violence.

¹⁸Therefore this is what the LORD says concerning Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah: They shall not lament for him, saying, 'Alas, my brother!' or 'Alas, my sister!' They shall not lament for him, saying, 'Alas, lord!' or 'Alas, his majesty!' ¹⁹He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey — dragged and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

²⁰Go up to Lebanon and cry out!
Lift your voice in Bashan!
Cry out from Abarim,
for all your lovers are broken.

²¹I 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 obeyed my voice.

²²The wind shall shepherd all your shepherds,
and your lovers shall go into captivity.
Then you shall be ashamed and humiliated

because of all your wickedness.

²³O you who dwell in Lebanon,
 nested among the cedars —
 how you will groan when pangs come upon you,
 pain like a woman in labor!

²⁴As I live — declares the LORD — even if Coniah son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet ring on my right hand, I would tear you off from there. ²⁵I will give you into the hand of those who seek your life, into the hand of those you dread, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. ²⁶I will hurl you and the mother who bore you into another land where you were not born, and there you shall die. ²⁷To the land to which they lift up their souls to return — there they shall not return. ²⁸Is this man Coniah a despised, shattered pot? A vessel no one wants? Why have he and his offspring been hurled out and cast into a land they do not know? ²⁹O land, land, land — hear the word of the LORD! ³⁰This is what the LORD says: Write this man down as childless — a man who will not prosper in his days. For none of his offspring shall prosper, sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. 'Go down' (red) indicates Jeremiah is on the temple mount, which is higher than the royal palace complex to the south. The physical descent mirrors the theological descent of the oracle.
2. The address encompasses the entire royal court and the people who pass through the palace gates. The phrase 'throne of David' invokes the dynastic covenant — the king sits there by divine grant, not by inherent right.
3. The triad of sojourner (ger), fatherless (yatom), and widow (almanah) is the classic Deuteronomic list of the most vulnerable members of society whom the king is bound to protect. 'This place' refers to the royal palace, where justice is supposed to originate.
4. The conditional promise ('if you truly do this') keeps the Davidic covenant operative but ties it to justice. The image of kings riding through the gates in chariots is one of royal splendor and continuity — a future that is still possible but contingent on obedience.
5. God swears by himself because there is no higher authority to invoke. The oath formula 'I swear by myself' (bi nishba'ti) makes the warning irrevocable. 'This house' is the royal palace — the throne of David will become a ruin.
6. Gilead and Lebanon were proverbially fertile and forested regions. The royal house is compared to these lush territories — yet God will reduce even this abundance to uninhabited wasteland. The contrast between present beauty and coming desolation is the rhetorical point.
7. We rendered qiddashti as 'consecrate' rather than KJV's 'prepare' to preserve the shocking theological claim that God sanctifies destruction as holy work. The cedar-cutting imagery anticipates the direct condemnation of Jehoiakim's cedar obsession in verses 14-15.
8. The scene anticipates foreigners gazing at Jerusalem's ruins and asking the question. The formula echoes Deuteronomy 29:24-25 and 1 Kings 9:8-9, where the same question is asked and answered — because they abandoned the covenant.
9. Even the pagan nations will understand the cause-and-effect logic of covenant violation and judgment. The answer centers on berit ('covenant') — Jerusalem's destruction is not random catastrophe but covenant consequence.
10. 'The dead' refers to King Josiah, killed at Megiddo in 609 BCE. 'The one who goes away' is Shallum/Jehoahaz, exiled to Egypt after only three months on the throne. The paradox is striking: death in the homeland is preferable to exile — at least Josiah rests in his own land.
11. Shallum is the birth name of Jehoahaz (2 Kings 23:30-34). He reigned only three months before Pharaoh Necho deported him to Egypt, where he died. The use of 'Shallum' rather than the throne name may indicate prophetic contempt for his brief, illegitimate reign.
12. The repetition of 'never again' from verses 10 and 11 drives home the finality of exile. Shallum died in Egypt — the land from which God had once delivered Israel. The irony of an Israelite king dying in Egypt would not have been lost on Jeremiah's audience.
13. The woe-oracle (hoi) now targets Jehoiakim directly, though he is not named until the context makes it unmistakable. The forced labor (ya'avod chinnam, 'serve for nothing') echoes Pharaoh's exploitation of Israel — the Davidic king has become a new Pharaoh.
14. The self-quotation ('I will build myself') exposes Jehoiakim's vanity. Cedar paneling was the mark of royal luxury — the 'House of the Forest of Lebanon' (1 Kings 7:2). Vermilion (shashar) was an expensive red pigment used for decorative painting, emphasizing the extravagance while laborers go unpaid.
15. The rhetorical question 'Do you reign because you compete in cedar?' is devastating: Jehoiakim confuses the trappings of royalty with its substance. Josiah 'ate and drank' — the phrase implies contentment and simplicity, not asceticism. The real mark of his kingship was justice.

16. This verse is the theological center of the chapter and arguably of Jeremiah's entire social ethic. The equation knowledge-of-God = justice-for-the-poor has no parallel this direct anywhere in the Hebrew Bible. We set the LORD's declaration on its own line to give it the weight the Hebrew demands.
17. The indictment is fourfold: dishonest gain (betsa'), shedding innocent blood, oppression ('osheq), and violence (merutsah). Jehoiakim is the anti-Josiah — where his father knew God through justice, Jehoiakim knows only exploitation. The phrase 'eyes and heart' indicates both perception and desire are corrupted.
18. The mourning cries 'Alas, my brother / my sister / lord / his majesty' are formulaic lament expressions. The declaration that these will not be spoken means Jehoiakim will receive no proper burial or mourning — the most shameful fate for a king in the ancient Near East.
19. 'The burial of a donkey' means no burial at all — a dead donkey is simply dragged outside the city and abandoned. For a king who invested everything in his magnificent palace, the final indignity is to be discarded like an animal carcass. This is the harshest burial oracle in the prophets.
20. The address shifts to feminine singular — Jerusalem personified as a woman. Lebanon, Bashan, and Abarim are mountainous regions surrounding the land. Her 'lovers' (me'ahavayik) are the foreign allies she relied on instead of the LORD. All of them are shattered.
21. God's complaint reaches back to Jerusalem's entire history ('from your youth') — the pattern of ignoring the divine voice in times of prosperity is not new but chronic. The word shalvotayik ('your prosperity, your ease') implies that comfort bred complacency.
22. We rendered 'the wind shall shepherd your shepherds' to preserve the Hebrew wordplay as closely as English allows. The 'shepherds' are the political leaders; the 'lovers' are foreign allies. Both will be swept away, leaving Jerusalem utterly exposed.
23. 'Lebanon' and 'cedars' again refer to the cedar-paneled palace, not the geographical region. The image shifts from luxurious nest to labor pains — the security of the cedar palace will become a place of anguish. The contrast between the comfortable nest and the writhing pain is the rhetorical thrust.
24. The oath formula 'As I live' (chai-ani) is the strongest possible divine affirmation. The signet ring image is extraordinarily intimate — worn on the hand, never removed, the instrument of authority. Haggai 2:23 will reverse this rejection when Zerubbabel, Coniah's grandson, is called God's signet ring.
25. The fourfold 'into the hand of' creates a suffocating sense of inevitability. The progression narrows from general threat to specific: those who seek his life, those he fears, Nebuchadnezzar personally, and the Chaldean Empire.
26. The verb hetalti ('I will hurl') is violent — God physically throws Coniah and his mother Nehushta (2 Kings 24:8) out of the land. The mention of his mother emphasizes the totality of the rejection — even the queen mother, a figure of high court status, is expelled.
27. The phrase 'lift up their souls' (menass'im et-nafsham) expresses desperate longing — their whole being yearns for home. The cruelty of the sentence is that this deepest desire will never be fulfilled. The emphatic construction closes every door.
28. The rhetorical questions are spoken from the perspective of shocked onlookers. Coniah is compared to a broken clay vessel — utterly worthless, fit only to be thrown away. The word naputs ('shattered') emphasizes irreparable destruction. His 'offspring' (zar'o) anticipates the dynasty-ending declaration of verse 30.
29. Triple repetition in Hebrew signals the utmost urgency and solemnity. The entire land is called to witness what follows — the most devastating dynastic oracle in the book.
30. The command 'write' (kitvu) makes this a formal legal decree — enrolled in the official record. The word ariri ('childless') is the same word used of Abraham's lament in Genesis 15:2 before the promise of an heir. Applied to a Davidic king, it effectively terminates the dynasty for succession purposes.

23

Summary: *Jeremiah 23 opens with a scathing oracle against the shepherds (kings and leaders) who have scattered God's flock, followed by the messianic promise of the Righteous Branch (tsemach tsaddiq) whose name will be 'The LORD Our Righteousness' (YHWH Tsidqenu). The chapter then pivots to an extended denunciation of the false prophets of Jerusalem, whom God accuses of adultery, lies, and strengthening the hands of evildoers. The climax confronts the false prophets' misuse of the phrase 'the burden of the LORD' and declares God's word to be like fire and like a hammer that shatters rock.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains one of the most concentrated messianic prophecies in Jeremiah: the Righteous Branch (tsemach tsaddiq, v. 5) who will reign as king and execute justice and righteousness. His throne-name, YHWH Tsidqenu ('The LORD Our Righteousness'), is extraordinary — a human king bearing a name that incorporates the divine name itself. The same title recurs in 33:16 applied to Jerusalem. The false prophets section (vv. 9–40) is the longest sustained critique of prophetic abuse in the Hebrew Bible. God's rhetorical question in verse 23 —*

'Am I only a God nearby and not a God far off?' — challenges the false prophets' assumption that God cannot see what they do in secret. The metaphor of God's word as fire and hammer (v. 29) stands as one of the most powerful images in prophetic literature, contrasting sharply with the straw-like emptiness of false prophecy. The wordplay on massa ('burden/oracle') in verses 33-40 is untranslatable — God turns the prophets' technical vocabulary back against them.

Translation Friction: The phrase tsemach tsaddiq (v. 5) required careful handling — tsemach means 'branch, sprout, growth' and we rendered it as 'righteous Branch' to preserve both the botanical metaphor (a new shoot from the Davidic line) and the messianic tradition. The name YHWH Tsidqenu (v. 6) is a compound throne-name; we rendered the explanatory clause 'The LORD is our righteousness' as the meaning while preserving the Hebrew name in key terms. The massa wordplay in verses 33-40 posed the greatest challenge: massa can mean both 'burden' (something heavy to carry) and 'oracle' (a prophetic utterance), and the passage plays on both meanings simultaneously. We rendered it as 'burden' throughout with extensive notes explaining the double meaning, since 'oracle' would lose the punning force of God telling the prophets that they themselves are the burden he will cast off. The verb natash in verse 33 ('to abandon, cast off') extends the burden metaphor — God will drop the burden that they have become.

Connections: The Righteous Branch connects to Isaiah 11:1 (the shoot from Jesse's stump), Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12 (the Branch), and is read messianically in both Jewish and Christian traditions. The throne-name YHWH Tsidqenu deliberately echoes and reverses the name of King Zedekiah (Tsidqiyahu, 'the LORD is my righteousness') — the failed king's name becomes the promised king's fulfilled reality. The false prophets section echoes Deuteronomy 18:20-22 (the test of a true prophet) and Micah 3:5-8 (prophets who lead astray). The fire-and-hammer image of God's word (v. 29) connects to Jeremiah 5:14 ('I will make my words fire in your mouth') and anticipates Hebrews 4:12 ('the word of God is living and active'). The 'Am I only a God nearby' passage (v. 23) resonates with Psalm 139:7-12 (God's inescapable presence).

¹Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! — declares the LORD. ²Therefore, this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the shepherds who tend my people: You have scattered my flock, driven them away, and have not attended to them. Now I am about to attend to you — for the evil of your deeds, declares the LORD. ³Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply. ⁴I will raise up shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, and none will be missing, declares the LORD. ⁵The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch. He will reign as king and act wisely, and he will establish justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Is Our Righteousness. ⁷Therefore the days are coming, declares the LORD, when people will no longer say, 'As the LORD lives, who brought the children of Israel up from the land of Egypt,' ⁸but rather, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel from the northern land and from all the lands where he had driven them.' Then they will live on their own soil. ⁹Concerning the prophets: My heart is shattered within me; all my bones tremble. I have become like a drunk, like a man overcome by wine — because of the LORD and because of his holy words. ¹⁰For the land is full of adulterers; because of the curse the land mourns, and the pastures of the wilderness have dried up. Their course is evil and their power is misused. ¹¹For both prophet and priest are godless — even in my own house I have found their wickedness, declares the LORD. ¹²Therefore their path will become slippery ground in the darkness — they will be pushed and fall on it, for I will bring disaster upon them in the year of their reckoning, declares the LORD. ¹³Among the prophets of Samaria I saw something repulsive: they prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray. ¹⁴But among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrifying: they commit adultery and walk in deception, and they strengthen the hands of evildoers so that no one turns from his wickedness. All of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah. ¹⁵Therefore, this is what the LORD of Hosts says concerning the prophets: I am about to feed them wormwood and make them drink poisoned water, for from the prophets of Jerusalem godlessness has spread throughout the entire land. ¹⁶This is what the LORD of Hosts says: Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They fill you with empty hopes. They speak visions from their own hearts, not from the mouth of the LORD. ¹⁷They keep saying to those who despise me, 'The LORD has spoken: You will have peace.' And to everyone who walks in the

stubbornness of his own heart they say, 'No disaster will come upon you.' ¹⁸For who has stood in the council of the LORD, to see and hear his word? Who has paid attention to his word and truly listened? ¹⁹Look — a storm of the LORD has gone out in fury, a whirling tempest! It will burst upon the heads of the wicked. ²⁰The anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has carried out and fulfilled the purposes of his heart. In the days to come you will understand this clearly. ²¹I did not send these prophets, yet they ran. I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. ²²But if they had stood in my council and proclaimed my words to my people, they would have turned them from their evil way and from the wickedness of their deeds. ²³Am I only a God who is near, declares the LORD, and not a God who is far off? ²⁴Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill the heavens and the earth? declares the LORD. ²⁵I have heard what the prophets say — those who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I had a dream! I had a dream!' ²⁶How long will this continue? Is there anything in the hearts of the prophets who prophesy lies — the prophets of their own heart's deceit? ²⁷They plan to make my people forget my name through their dreams, which they tell one to another — just as their ancestors forgot my name because of Baal. ²⁸The prophet who has a dream — let him tell his dream. But the one who has my word — let him speak my word truthfully. What does straw have in common with grain? declares the LORD. ²⁹Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that shatters rock? ³⁰Therefore I am against the prophets, declares the LORD — those who steal my words from one another. ³¹I am against the prophets, declares the LORD — those who wag their own tongues and declare, 'He declares!' ³²I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, declares the LORD, who tell them and lead my people astray with their lies and their recklessness — though I never sent them or commanded them. They are of no benefit whatsoever to this people, declares the LORD. ³³When this people or a prophet or a priest asks you, 'What is the burden of the LORD?' — you shall say to them, 'You are the burden! And I will cast you off,' declares the LORD. ³⁴As for the prophet or the priest or any of the people who says, 'The burden of the LORD' — I will punish that person and his household. ³⁵Instead, this is what you should say to one another, each to his neighbor: 'What has the LORD answered?' and 'What has the LORD spoken?' ³⁶But 'the burden of the LORD' you must not mention again, for each person's own word becomes his burden — because you have twisted the words of the living God, the LORD of Hosts, our God. ³⁷This is how you shall speak to a prophet: 'What has the LORD answered you?' and 'What has the LORD spoken?' ³⁸But if you say, 'The burden of the LORD' — then this is what the LORD says: Because you used this phrase, 'The burden of the LORD,' even though I sent word to you saying, 'You must not say, "The burden of the LORD"' — ³⁹therefore I will surely lift you up and hurl you away from my presence — both you and the city that I gave to you and your ancestors. ⁴⁰I will bring upon you everlasting disgrace and perpetual shame that will never be forgotten.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The term ro'im ('shepherds') is the standard ancient Near Eastern metaphor for kings and rulers. Jeremiah is not addressing literal herders but the Davidic monarchy and its appointed leaders. The double accusation — 'destroy and scatter' (me'abedim umefitsim) — summarizes the political and spiritual damage done by Judah's final kings. The word mar'iti ('my pasture') emphasizes divine ownership: these are God's sheep, not the shepherds' property.
2. The verse plays on the verb paqad ('to attend to, visit, reckon with'). The shepherds have not 'attended to' (paqadtem) the flock, so God will 'attend to' (poqed) the shepherds — but in judgment rather than care. The same verb carries opposite force depending on its object: care when directed at sheep, punishment when directed at negligent rulers. This wordplay is impossible to replicate in English but we preserved the root by using 'attended' in both clauses.
3. The emphatic 'I myself' (va'ani) contrasts divine action with the shepherds' failure — what the kings could not do, God will do personally. The language 'be fruitful and multiply' (paru veravu) deliberately echoes the creation blessing of Genesis 1:28, signaling that God's restoration of the scattered flock is an act of re-creation. The word she'erit ('remnant') introduces the theological concept of a surviving portion through whom God preserves his purposes.
4. The verb paqad appears again — 'none will be missing' (lo yippaqedu). After the indictment that the shepherds did not 'attend to' (paqad) the flock, the promise is that under new leadership not a single sheep will go unaccounted for. The three negatives — 'no longer afraid, no longer terrified, none missing' — paint a complete reversal of the scattering described in verses 1-2.
5. The messianic promise introduces tsemach ('branch, sprout'), a term that becomes a title for the coming Davidic king in Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12. The verb hiskil carries a double sense: 'to act wisely' and 'to prosper, succeed' — we chose 'act wisely' to foreground the intellectual and moral quality, with the implication that success follows. Mishpat utsedaqah ('justice and righteousness') is the standard pair describing ideal royal governance in the

Hebrew Bible (cf. 2 Samuel 8:15, Isaiah 9:6, 32:1).

6. The name YHWH Tsidqenu is a compound throne-name. We rendered it 'The LORD Is Our Righteousness' rather than transliterating, so the reader grasps the theological claim. The contrast with Zedekiah (Tsidqiyahu) is deliberate — Zedekiah's name means roughly the same thing, but his reign proved the name hollow. The coming king will fulfill what Zedekiah's name only promised. The verb *tivvasha* ('will be saved') and *yishkon labetach* ('will live in safety') describe national salvation and security — themes that the current political crisis under Babylon has made urgent.
7. The oath formula *chai YHWH* ('As the LORD lives') is used here as a marker of national memory. The exodus from Egypt has been the defining salvation-event for Israel's identity since Sinai. Jeremiah's oracle declares that a new act of divine rescue will be so great that it will supplant the exodus itself as the primary oath-reference. This passage parallels 16:14-15 almost verbatim.
8. The 'northern land' (*erets tsafonah*) refers to Babylon, which though geographically east of Israel was approached from the north via the Fertile Crescent. The word *zera* ('seed, offspring, descendants') emphasizes biological continuity — the same family line that went into exile will return. The phrase 'their own soil' (*admatam*) uses *adamah* rather than *erets*, evoking the intimate connection between people and their particular ground — not just any land, but their ancestral earth.
9. The speaker shifts — this is Jeremiah's own voice expressing his visceral response to what God has revealed about the false prophets. The physical symptoms (shattered heart, trembling bones, staggering like a drunk) describe the overwhelming effect of prophetic revelation on the body. The verb *rachafu* ('tremble, shake') describes involuntary trembling — the same root used for the Spirit hovering over the waters in Genesis 1:2, here applied to the prophet's bones shaking with divine disclosure. The comparison to drunkenness is not about intoxication but about loss of bodily control in the face of overwhelming divine reality.
10. The word *mena'afim* ('adulterers') may refer to literal sexual immorality or metaphorical spiritual adultery (idolatry) — likely both, given the prophets' conduct described later in the chapter. The term *alah* ('curse') refers to the covenant curse that has fallen on the land because of covenant-breaking, causing agricultural devastation. The mourning land (*avelah ha'arets*) personifies the earth itself suffering the consequences of human sin — an ecological dimension to covenant violation that runs throughout the prophets (cf. Hosea 4:3).
11. The verb *chanefu* ('are godless, profane') describes not atheism but the corruption of those who hold sacred office — they have made themselves common while claiming to be set apart. The phrase 'in my house' (*beveti*) indicates that the temple itself has become a site of their corruption, an accusation that echoes the temple sermon of chapter 7. The pairing of *navi* and *kohen* ('prophet and priest') indicts the entire religious establishment.
12. The image of *chalaqlaqot ba'afelah* ('slippery ground in darkness') combines two dangers: uncertain footing and zero visibility. The prophets who led others astray will themselves lose their way. The phrase *shenat pequddatam* ('year of their reckoning') uses *paqad* again — the same verb from verse 2, now applied to the false prophets. God's 'attending to' them means judgment.
13. The word *tiflah* ('unseemliness, offensiveness, repulsive folly') is stronger than the KJV's 'folly' — it carries a sense of something tasteless, offensive, indecent. The prophets of Samaria (the fallen northern kingdom) serve as a comparison point: what happened in Samaria was bad, but what is happening in Jerusalem (v. 14) is worse. Prophesying 'by Baal' (*ba-Ba'al*) means claiming Baal as the source of prophetic authority.
14. The word *sha'arurah* ('horrifying thing, something that causes shuddering') is even stronger than the *tiflah* of Samaria (v. 13) — an intentional escalation. Three charges are leveled: adultery (*na'of*), deception (*halokh basheqer*), and enabling evil (*chizzequ yedei mere'im*). The last charge is the most damning — the false prophets do not merely fail to condemn evil, they actively empower evildoers by removing the motivation to repent. Comparing Jerusalem to Sodom and Gomorrah invokes the ultimate paradigm of divine judgment (Genesis 19). The verb *shuv* ('turn, return, repent') appears here as the key verb of the book — the false prophets have prevented repentance.
15. Wormwood (*la'anah*) is a bitter plant associated with suffering and divine punishment (cf. Deuteronomy 29:17, Lamentations 3:15, 19). 'Poisoned water' (*mei rosh*) literally means 'water of a poisonous plant' — the combination of wormwood and poison-water reverses the prophetic role of nourishing the people with God's word. Instead of feeding truth, these prophets have fed lies, so God will feed them bitterness and poison. The word *chanuppah* ('godlessness, profaneness') indicates that the corruption originating from Jerusalem's prophets has contaminated the whole land — the infection started at the center.
16. The verb *mahbilim* ('make empty, fill with vanity') is from the root *h-b-l*, related to *hevel* ('vapor, breath, vanity') — the same word that dominates Ecclesiastes. The false prophets are pumping their audience full of insubstantial vapor. The contrast between 'their own hearts' (*libbam*) and 'the mouth of the LORD' (*pi YHWH*) is the diagnostic test for false prophecy: the source. True prophecy originates from God's mouth; false prophecy originates from the prophet's own imagination.
17. The false prophets deliver two poisonous assurances: *shalom* ('peace') to those who despise God, and immunity from disaster to the stubborn-hearted. The phrase *sheririut libbo* ('stubbornness of his heart') is Jeremiah's signature phrase for willful rebellion (cf. 7:24, 9:13, 11:8, 13:10, 16:12, 18:12). The false prophets are telling the most rebellious people exactly what they want to hear — the opposite of prophetic responsibility. This is the 'Peace, peace, when there is no peace' theme from 6:14 and 8:11.
18. The word *sod* ('council, counsel, secret assembly') refers to the divine council — the heavenly assembly where God deliberates and dispatches his decrees (cf. 1 Kings 22:19-23, Isaiah 6, Job 1-2). The rhetorical question implies that the false prophets have not been admitted to God's heavenly court, so they have no authentic message to relay. A true prophet is one who has 'stood in the council' and received divine communication firsthand. The distinction between seeing, hearing, and truly listening (*hiqshiv*) creates a hierarchy of attentiveness — mere hearing is insufficient.

19. The word sa'arat ('storm, tempest') depicts divine judgment as an uncontrollable force of nature. The verb mitcholel ('whirling, swirling') intensifies the image — this is not a passing shower but a cyclonic force. The rendering 'burst upon' captures the violent impact of yachul ('to whirl, fall upon'). This storm image recurs in verse 19 and at the end of the chapter (v. 19), framing the false prophet material.
20. The phrase be'acharit hayyamim ('in the latter days, in the days to come') carries eschatological weight — it looks forward to a time when current events will make sense in retrospect. The verb titbonenu ('you will understand, comprehend') promises future clarity: what now seems incomprehensible will become plain. The 'purposes of his heart' (mezimot libbo) attributes intentionality to God's anger — this is not blind rage but deliberate execution of planned consequences.
21. The parallelism is devastating in its simplicity. Two paired denials — 'not sent / they ran' and 'not spoken / they prophesied' — expose the entire false prophetic enterprise in two lines. The verb ratsu ('they ran') implies eager, zealous activity — they were enthusiastic about delivering messages they had never received. The contrast between divine commissioning and self-appointment is the heart of the false prophecy problem.
22. The conditional 'if they had stood' (im amdu) uses the divine council language from verse 18. The logic is clear: access to God's true council produces authentic words, and authentic words produce repentance (shuv — 'turning'). The false prophets failed at the first step (no divine access), which guaranteed failure at every subsequent step. The verb veyashivu ('would have turned them') uses the hiphil of shuv — the causative form, meaning 'caused to repent.' True prophecy causes people to turn; false prophecy prevents it (v. 14).
23. This rhetorical question challenges the false prophets' operating assumption — that God is limited in spatial awareness. If God were only 'near' (miqarov), he could be avoided by distance. But as a God who is also 'far off' (merachok), nothing is beyond his sight. The question anticipates the next verse's expansion. The structure is a self-predication — God defining himself against inadequate conceptions — similar to 'I AM WHO I AM' (Exodus 3:14) in form.
24. The verb yissater ('hide oneself') in the mistrim ('hidden places, concealed spots') creates an emphatic double use of the root s-t-r ('to hide'). God's response is not merely that he sees hidden things but that his presence fills (male') all of heaven and earth — there is nowhere outside his awareness. This is one of the most explicit statements of divine omnipresence in the Hebrew Bible, rivaling Psalm 139:7-12. The false prophets operate as if God cannot observe their conduct; this verse demolishes that assumption.
25. The repeated chalamti chalamtī ('I dreamed, I dreamed!') mimics the eager, breathless claims of the false prophets. Dreams were considered a legitimate channel of divine revelation (cf. Genesis 37, 40-41; Numbers 12:6), but the false prophets have turned dream-claims into a tool of deception. God emphasizes that he has heard (shamati) their claims — returning to the omniscience theme of verses 23-24. They cannot hide their lies from the one who fills heaven and earth.
26. The phrase nevi'ei tarmit libbam ('prophets of their heart's deceit') defines false prophecy precisely: these men are prophets of their own deception, not prophets of God. The word tarmit ('deceit, fraud') comes from the root r-m-h, implying deliberate misleading rather than innocent error. The exasperated 'How long?' (ad matay) voices God's impatience with the continuing fraud.
27. The verb lehashkiach ('to cause to forget') is a hiphil (causative) — the false prophets are actively engineering the erasure of God's name from Israel's memory. The parallel to the ancestors who 'forgot my name because of Baal' (shakechu avotam et shemi ba-Ba'al) draws a direct line between the current prophetic fraud and the old Baal worship. The method has changed (dreams instead of altars), but the result is the same: displacement of YHWH from Israel's consciousness.
28. God draws a sharp distinction: dream-prophets may report their dreams, but they must not confuse dreams with God's direct word (devari). The question 'What does straw have in common with grain?' (mah latteven et habbar) is a riddle with an obvious answer: nothing. Straw (teven) is the worthless husk; grain (bar) is the nutritious kernel. The false prophets' dreams are straw; God's word is grain. The two should never be confused or mixed.
29. The two metaphors — fire and hammer — work together but on different registers. Fire (esh) purifies and destroys simultaneously; a hammer (pattish) breaks through resistant material. The verb yefotsetz ('shatters, breaks apart') is intensive, describing not a tap but a violent fragmentation. The sela ('rock, cliff, crag') represents the most unyielding material imaginable. God's word overcomes what nothing else can penetrate. This verse has become one of the most frequently quoted descriptions of God's word in both Jewish and Christian tradition.
30. The verb meganevei ('stealing') accuses the false prophets of plagiarism — they copy phrases from each other rather than receiving words directly from God. The image is of prophets who cobble together convincing-sounding oracles by borrowing God-language from other prophets, creating a circular echo chamber of stolen terminology with no divine origin. This is the first of three 'I am against' (hineni al) declarations (vv. 30, 31, 32) forming a triple indictment.
31. The phrase haloqechim leshonam ('those who take their own tongues') suggests prophets who deploy their tongues as instruments without divine authorization. The biting irony of vayyine'amu ne'um ('and they declare a declaration') is that they use the very formula ne'um YHWH ('declares the LORD') without having received any declaration from God. They mimic the authentic prophetic formula as a stamp of false authority. We rendered 'He declares!' to capture the audacity of claiming divine speech.
32. The word pachazutam ('recklessness, wantonness, boastfulness') describes the false prophets' cavalier attitude toward truth. They treat prophecy as performance rather than solemn divine commission. The triple denial — 'never sent, never commanded, no benefit' — builds to a comprehensive dismissal. The emphatic construction ho'il lo yo'ilu ('they absolutely do not benefit') uses the infinitive absolute for emphasis: these prophets are utterly useless to the people they claim to serve.

33. The massa wordplay is the most difficult translation challenge in the chapter. The word simultaneously means 'oracle/utterance' (the prophetic sense, from *nasa*, 'to lift up' the voice) and 'burden/load' (the physical sense, from *nasa*, 'to carry'). We rendered it as 'burden' throughout to preserve the pun: the people ask for an 'oracle' (*massa*) and God responds that they themselves are the 'burden' (*massa*) he will cast off. The verb *natashti* ('I will cast off, abandon') extends the burden metaphor — God will drop the weight they have become.
34. God bans the use of the phrase *massa YHWH* ('the burden of the LORD') as a prophetic formula. The verb *paqadti* ('I will punish, attend to, reckon with') continues the *paqad* theme from earlier in the chapter. The punishment extends to the household (*beto*), indicating corporate consequences for individual prophetic fraud.
35. God prescribes acceptable language: instead of the loaded *massa* formula, the people should ask neutral questions — 'What has the LORD answered?' (*meh anah YHWH*) and 'What has the LORD spoken?' (*mah dibber YHWH*). These questions focus on content rather than claiming the prophetic authority that the *massa* formula implies. The replacement language is deliberately plain, stripping away the pretension that accompanied the original terminology.
36. The *massa* wordplay reaches its climax: the phrase itself is now banned because the people have corrupted it. The ironic reversal — 'each person's own word becomes his burden' — means that the false prophets' own fabricated oracles will become the weight that crushes them. The title 'the living God' (*Elohim chayyim*) contrasts sharply with the dead words of the false prophets. The verb *hafaktem* ('you have twisted, overturned, perverted') comes from the same root used for the 'overturning' of Sodom (Genesis 19:25), linking the vocabulary corruption to the Sodom comparison in verse 14.
37. The prescribed language from verse 35 is repeated specifically for addressing prophets. The instruction forces the prophet to claim direct divine communication ('answered you') rather than hiding behind the vague *massa* formula. This puts the prophet on record — he must either claim he has received a direct answer from God or fall silent.
38. The syntax becomes complex as the *massa* ban is reiterated. The conditional 'if you say' (*im...toomeru*) sets up the threat: continued use of the banned phrase after explicit prohibition constitutes defiance of a direct divine command. The sentence structure — an extended protasis awaiting its apodosis in the next verse — mirrors the building tension of the ultimatum.
39. The verb *nashiti* ('I will lift up') creates a final devastating *massa* pun: God 'lifts up' (*nasa*) the people as one lifts a burden (*massa*) — only to throw them away. The same root that gave them the prophetic word now describes their expulsion. The verb *natashti* ('I will cast off, abandon') completes the judgment. The city (Jerusalem) is included in the exile — God gave both the people and the city, and both will be removed from his presence (*me'al panay*, literally 'from before my face').
40. The closing verse pairs two synonyms for public disgrace: *cherpah* ('reproach, disgrace, taunting') and *kelimmut* ('shame, humiliation, dishonor'). Both are modified by *olam* ('everlasting, perpetual'), and the final clause 'which will not be forgotten' (*lo tishshakech*) drives home the permanence. The irony is pointed: the prophets who wanted to make the people forget God's name (v. 27) will themselves be remembered — but only for their shame. The chapter ends not with restoration but with judgment, leaving the weight of the false prophecy indictment standing.

24

Summary: *Jeremiah 24 records a vision of two baskets of figs set before the temple of the LORD after Nebuchadnezzar had deported King Jeconiah (Jehoiachin), the officials, the craftsmen, and the smiths from Jerusalem to Babylon. One basket contains very good figs, like early-ripening figs; the other contains figs so rotten they cannot be eaten. God interprets the vision: the good figs represent the exiles in Babylon, toward whom God will turn with favor, bring back to the land, and give a heart to know him. The bad figs represent King Zedekiah and those remaining in Jerusalem or fleeing to Egypt — they will be made a horror, a reproach, and a byword, pursued by sword, famine, and plague until they are consumed.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This short chapter overturns the common assumption that those who remained in Jerusalem after 597 BCE were the fortunate ones and the exiles were the cursed. Jeremiah reverses this entirely: the future belongs to the deportees, not the survivors. The promise to the exiles — 'I will give them a heart to know me' (v. 7) — anticipates the new covenant language of 31:33-34, where God will write his torah on their hearts. The vision format places this chapter alongside the great visionary passages of Amos (7:1-9, 8:1-3) and Zechariah (1-6), where God shows the prophet an ordinary object and then reveals its deeper meaning. The fig baskets are not symbolic props but real agricultural produce near the temple, transformed by divine interpretation into a theological judgment on the entire nation's future.*

*Translation Friction: The phrase *te'enim hashskoqadot* (v. 2) posed a lexical question — we rendered it as 'early figs' since *bikkurah* figs ripen first and are considered the choicest (cf. Hosea 9:10, Micah 7:1). The word *sha'arurah* (v. 9) also appeared in 23:14 and we maintained consistency by rendering it 'horror.' The covenant promise in verse 7 — 'they will be my people and I will be their God' — is the bilateral covenant formula, and we rendered it identically to its occurrence in 11:4 and throughout the project. The phrase *leqelalah* ('as a curse-word') in verse 9 required care: it does not mean God curses them but that their name becomes an expression others use when pronouncing curses.*

Connections: The deportation of Jeconiah (597 BCE) is narrated in 2 Kings 24:10-17. The vision of figs connects to the fig tree as a symbol of Israel and Judah elsewhere (Hosea 9:10, Joel 1:7, Micah 7:1). The promise 'I will give them a heart to know me' (v. 7) anticipates the new covenant of 31:31-34 and connects to Ezekiel's parallel promise of a new heart (Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26). The judgment formula of sword, famine, and plague (v. 10) is one of Jeremiah's most characteristic triads, recurring throughout the book (14:12, 21:7, 27:8, 29:17-18, 32:24, 34:17, 38:2). The fate of those who flee to Egypt anticipates the narratives of chapters 42-44, where a remnant disobeys Jeremiah and flees to Egypt despite this warning.

¹The LORD showed me a vision: two baskets of figs placed before the temple of the LORD. This was after Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had deported Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, along with the officials of Judah, the craftsmen, and the metalworkers from Jerusalem, and brought them to Babylon. ²One basket had very good figs, like early-ripening figs, and the other basket had very bad figs — so bad they could not be eaten. ³Then the LORD said to me, 'What do you see, Jeremiah?' And I said, 'Figs. The good figs are very good, and the bad figs are very bad — too rotten to eat.' ⁴Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁵This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Like these good figs, so I will regard the exiles of Judah — whom I sent away from this place to the land of the Chaldeans — with favor. ⁶I will set my eyes on them for good and bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them. ⁷I will give them a heart to know me — that I am the LORD. They will be my people and I will be their God, for they will return to me with their whole heart. ⁸But like the bad figs, so bad they cannot be eaten — this is what the LORD says — so I will treat Zedekiah king of Judah, his officials, and the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land, as well as those living in the land of Egypt. ⁹I will make them a horror and a disaster to all the kingdoms of the earth — a disgrace, a byword, a taunt, and a curse-word in every place where I drive them. ¹⁰I will send sword, famine, and plague against them until they are consumed from the land that I gave to them and their ancestors.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The vision formula *hir'ani YHWH* ('the LORD showed me') establishes this as a divinely initiated vision, not a natural observation. The word *dudaei* ('baskets') refers to containers used for carrying fruit, likely woven. The deportation described here is the 597 BCE exile under Jehoiachin/Jeconiah (the same king under two names — Jeconiah is the shortened form). The *charash* ('craftsman') and *masger* ('metalworker, locksmith') were specifically targeted for deportation because of their military utility — Babylon stripped Jerusalem of its skilled labor force. We use 'Nebuchadnezzar' as the standard English form, though the Hebrew here reads *Nevukhadretsar*.
2. The comparison to *bikkurot* ('early-ripening figs, firstfruits') marks the good figs as premium quality. Early figs ripen in June, before the main August harvest, and were prized as a delicacy (cf. Isaiah 28:4, Hosea 9:10, Micah 7:1). The Hebrew emphasizes the extreme quality contrast with *tovot me'od* ('very good') and *ra'ot me'od* ('very bad') — there is no middle category. The phrase *lo te'akhalnah mero'a* ('they could not be eaten because of their rottenness') describes figs beyond salvage, a metaphor that will prove devastating in its application.
3. The question-and-answer format ('What do you see?') is the standard prophetic vision dialogue, paralleling Amos 7:8, 8:2 and Zechariah 4:2, 5:2. God asks not because he needs information but to draw the prophet into active participation in the revelation. Jeremiah's answer is deliberately plain — he reports exactly what he sees without interpretation. The interpretation belongs to God (vv. 4-10).
4. The standard prophetic reception formula marks the transition from vision to interpretation. The *le'mor* ('saying') is rendered as a colon introducing direct speech, consistent with project conventions.
5. The verb *akkir* ('I will regard, acknowledge, recognize') means more than neutral observation — it implies favorable recognition, choosing to look upon with goodwill. The startling claim is that God himself 'sent' (*shillachti*) the exiles to Babylon — the deportation was not merely Nebuchadnezzar's political act but God's purposeful relocation of his people. The phrase *letovah* ('for good, for their benefit') reframes exile as a divine act of preservation rather than punishment. This reversal of expectations — exile as grace — is the theological core of the chapter.

6. The five divine promises cascade: (1) favorable attention, (2) return to the land, (3) building, (4) planting, and (5) permanence (the negatives 'not tear down, not uproot'). The verbs 'build' (banah) and 'plant' (nata) echo Jeremiah's original commission in 1:10, where God appointed him 'to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.' Here the destructive phase gives way to the constructive. The phrase 'set my eyes on them for good' (samti eini alehem letovah) uses the intimate language of personal attention — God watching over the exiles with active benevolence.
7. This verse is the theological climax of the chapter, foreshadowing the new covenant of 31:31-34. The verb natatti ('I will give') makes the heart a divine gift, not a human achievement — God himself enables the knowing. The bilateral covenant formula 'they will be my people and I will be their God' (vehayu li le'am ve'anokhi ehyeh lahem le'lohim) appears throughout the Pentateuch and prophets as the definition of covenant relationship (Exodus 6:7, Leviticus 26:12, Deuteronomy 26:17-18, Jeremiah 11:4, 30:22, 31:33, 32:38, Ezekiel 36:28). The verb yashuvu ('they will return') is the key Jeremiah verb shuv — the return is both physical (from exile) and spiritual (to God). The phrase bekol libbam ('with their whole heart') contrasts with the sheriut lev ('stubbornness of heart') that characterized the earlier generation.
8. The condemned group includes three categories: (1) Zedekiah and his court, (2) those remaining in Jerusalem, and (3) those who fled to Egypt. All three groups chose to avoid or escape Babylon, yet it was precisely the Babylonian exile that God designated as the path to renewal. The mention of Egypt is significant — fleeing to Egypt represents a return to the place of original bondage, a theological regression. The word she'erit ('remnant') here carries no positive connotation — unlike its usual usage as a term of hope, these are merely leftovers, not a faithful core.
9. Five terms of shame accumulate: za'avah ('horror, object of trembling'), cherpah ('disgrace, reproach'), mashal ('byword, proverb used as a cautionary tale'), sheninah ('taunt, sharp saying'), and qelalah ('curse-word' — their name becomes a formula used in cursing, as in 'May you become like Jerusalem'). The phrase sha'arurah (rendered 'horror') appeared also in 23:14 describing the false prophets of Jerusalem — the same word now describes the destiny of those who listened to them. The scope 'all the kingdoms of the earth' universalizes the disgrace.
10. The triad cherev, ra'av, dever ('sword, famine, plague') is Jeremiah's signature judgment formula, recurring more than a dozen times throughout the book (14:12, 21:7, 27:8, 29:17-18, 32:24, 34:17, 38:2, 42:17, 22, 44:13). These three represent the comprehensive destruction of war: violence, deprivation, and disease. The verb tummam ('until they are consumed, until their complete end') signals total removal, not mere suffering. The land that was given (natatti) as covenant promise now becomes the ground from which they are expelled — the gift revoked. The word adamah ('soil, ground, land') rather than erets ('land, country') emphasizes the agricultural, intimate connection between people and their particular soil, making the loss more personal.

25

Summary: *Jeremiah 25 marks a dramatic pivot in the book — from oracles directed at Judah to a vision encompassing all the nations of the earth. The chapter opens with a precise date (the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the first year of Nebuchadnezzar) and a summary of Jeremiah's twenty-three years of rejected prophetic ministry. God announces that Judah will serve Babylon for seventy years, after which Babylon itself will be judged. The second half of the chapter introduces the terrifying image of the cup of God's wrath — a goblet of wine that Jeremiah is commanded to pass to nation after nation, from Jerusalem to Egypt, Uz, Philistia, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Sidon, Arabia, Elam, Media, and finally Babylon ('Sheshach'). The chapter closes with an oracle of cosmic judgment: the LORD roars from on high like a lion against all flesh, and a slaughter stretches from one end of the earth to the other.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains two of Jeremiah's most consequential oracles. First, the seventy-year prophecy (v. 11-12) became the foundation for Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9:2 and the entire eschatological tradition of seventy weeks. The number seventy may represent a literal generation count or a symbolic period of completeness — the text does not resolve this, and we preserve the ambiguity. Second, the cup-of-wrath image (v. 15-29) is one of the most imitated metaphors in biblical literature, echoed in Isaiah 51:17, Ezekiel 23:31-34, Habakkuk 2:16, and ultimately Revelation 14:10 and 16:19. The Hebrew kos hayayin hachema ('the cup of the wine of wrath') is a three-word construct chain — cup-of-wine-of-wrath — packing divine fury into a single drinking vessel. We rendered the atbash cipher 'Sheshach' (v. 26) transparently, noting it as a coded name for Babylon. The sweeping geographic scope of verses 18-26, moving systematically through every known nation, transforms Jeremiah from a prophet of Judah into a prophet over all the earth — fulfilling the commission of 1:10, 'I have appointed you over nations and kingdoms.'*

Translation Friction: *The date formula in verse 1 required careful handling — the Hebrew gives 'the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah; that is the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.' We preserved both dating systems as the text presents them. The verb hashkem ('rising early') in verse 3 is the characteristic Jeremiah idiom for God's persistent effort; we rendered it as 'persistently' to capture the urgency without the literal English awkwardness. The word mashchit in verse 9 can mean 'destroy' or 'corrupt,' and we chose 'destroy' for the military context. The atbash cipher Sheshach () in verse 26*

encodes Babel () by substituting the first letter of the alphabet for the last, the second for the second-to-last, and so on — we retained the name and explained the cipher in a note. The phrase 'uncircumcised and circumcised alike' (v. 29, implied) in the concluding judgment required careful contextual handling.

Connections: The seventy-year prophecy (v. 11-12) is directly cited in 2 Chronicles 36:21, Ezra 1:1, and Daniel 9:2, making it one of the most cross-referenced prophecies in the Hebrew Bible. The cup-of-wrath image connects to Isaiah 51:17-22 (Jerusalem has drunk the cup; now it passes to her oppressors), Lamentations 4:21 (Edom will also drink), Ezekiel 23:31-34, and Habakkuk 2:15-16. In the New Testament, Jesus's prayer in Gethsemane — 'Let this cup pass from me' (Matthew 26:39) — draws on this prophetic tradition of the cup of divine judgment. The roaring-lion imagery in verses 30-31 connects to Amos 1:2, Joel 3:16, and Hosea 11:10. The commission to be 'a prophet to the nations' (1:5, 1:10) reaches its fullest expression in this chapter's universal scope.

¹The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah — that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon — ²which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem: ³From the thirteenth year of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah, to this very day — twenty-three years — the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken to you persistently, but you have not listened. ⁴The LORD sent to you all his servants the prophets, sending them persistently, but you did not listen or incline your ear to hear. ⁵They said: Turn back, each of you, from your evil way and from the wickedness of your deeds, and remain on the land that the LORD gave to you and your ancestors from ancient times and into the future. ⁶Do not follow other gods to serve and bow down to them, and do not provoke me to anger with the work of your hands — then I will do you no harm. ⁷But you did not listen to me, declares the LORD, so as to provoke me to anger with the work of your hands, to your own harm. ⁸Therefore this is what the LORD of Hosts says: Because you have not listened to my words, ⁹I am about to send for and summon all the clans of the north, declares the LORD, and for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, my servant. I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction and make them an object of horror and scorn, and ruins that last through the ages. ¹⁰I will banish from them the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstone and the light of the lamp. ¹¹This entire land will become a ruin and a wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years. ¹²When the seventy years are complete, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation for their iniquity, declares the LORD, and the land of the Chaldeans, and I will make it a permanent wasteland. ¹³I will bring upon that land all my words that I have spoken against it — everything written in this scroll, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. ¹⁴For many nations and great kings will also make them serve, and I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands. ¹⁵For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: Take this cup of the wine of wrath from my hand, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink from it. ¹⁶They will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword I am sending among them. ¹⁷So I took the cup from the LORD's hand and made all the nations drink — all those to whom the LORD had sent me: ¹⁸Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, its kings and its officials — to make them a ruin, a horror, an object of scorn, and a curse, as they are this day; ¹⁹Pharaoh king of Egypt, his servants, his officials, and all his people; ²⁰all the mixed peoples; all the kings of the land of Uz; all the kings of the land of the Philistines — Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod; ²¹Edom, Moab, and the Ammonites; ²²all the kings of Tyre, all the kings of Sidon, and the kings of the coastlands across the sea; ²³Dedan, Tema, Buz, and all who shave their temples; ²⁴all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the mixed peoples who live in the desert; ²⁵all the kings of Zimri, all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of Media; ²⁶all the kings of the north, near and far, one after another; and all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth. And the king of Sheshach will drink after them all. ²⁷Say to them: This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says — Drink, get drunk, vomit, and fall down never to rise, because of the sword I am sending among you. ²⁸If they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink, say to them: This is what the LORD of Hosts says — You will certainly drink. ²⁹For look — I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that bears my name, and should you go entirely unpunished? You will not go unpunished, for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth, declares the LORD of Hosts.

³⁰You will prophesy all these words against them and say to them:

The LORD roars from on high;
from his holy dwelling he thunders.
He roars fiercely against his fold;
he shouts like those who tread the grapes
against all the inhabitants of the earth.

³¹The uproar reaches to the ends of the earth,
for the LORD has a case against the nations.
He enters judgment against all flesh;
the wicked he gives over to the sword,
declares the LORD.

³²This is what the LORD of Hosts says:
Disaster is spreading from nation to nation;
a great storm is stirring from the farthest corners of the earth.

³³The slain of the LORD on that day will stretch from one end of the earth to the other. They will not be mourned, they will not be gathered, they will not be buried — they will be like dung on the surface of the ground.

³⁴Wail, you shepherds, and cry out!
Roll in the dust, you lords of the flock!
For your time for slaughter has come;
you will be shattered like a prized vessel.

³⁵There will be no escape for the shepherds,
no way out for the lords of the flock.

³⁶The sound of the shepherds' cry,
the wailing of the lords of the flock!
For the LORD is destroying their pasture.

³⁷The peaceful meadows are silenced
because of the burning anger of the LORD.

³⁸He has left his lair like a young lion,
for their land has become a desolation
because of the raging sword
and because of his burning anger.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The dual dating formula synchronizes Judah's calendar with Babylon's, placing this oracle at approximately 605 BCE. This is the year of the Battle of Carchemish, when Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt and established Babylonian dominance over the entire region. The Hebrew uses 'Nevukhadretsar,' a closer transliteration of the Akkadian Nabû-kudurri-uşur; we use the conventional English 'Nebuchadnezzar.'
2. The Hebrew le'mor ('saying') functions as a speech-introduction marker and is rendered as a colon. The address is to 'all the people' — this is a public oracle, not a private word to the king or the priests.
3. The thirteen years of Josiah correspond to 627/626 BCE, the traditional date of Jeremiah's call (1:2). Twenty-three years of prophetic ministry had produced no repentance. The idiom hashkem vedabber ('rising early and speaking') is the characteristic Jeremiah expression for persistent, tireless effort — we render it as 'persistently' rather than the literally awkward 'rising early and speaking,' consistent with our rendering in 7:13 and 11:7.

4. Again the hashkem idiom, now applied to God sending prophets. The double refusal — 'did not listen' (lo shema'tem) and 'did not incline your ear' (lo hittitem et-oznekhem) — represents a willful refusal at every level: they neither heard the message nor positioned themselves to receive it.
5. The verb shuv ('turn back, return') is Jeremiah's central term for repentance — a spatial metaphor of returning to where one belongs. The phrase min-olam ve'ad-olam ('from eternity to eternity') describes the intended permanence of the land grant; we render olam as 'ancient times' and 'into the future' to capture the Hebrew sense of time stretching beyond view in both directions, rather than the philosophically loaded 'forever and ever.'
6. The phrase 'work of your hands' (ma'aseh yedeikhem) is double-edged — it refers both to the idols they have manufactured and to the deeds of idolatry they have performed. The conditional structure is implicit in the Hebrew: the promise of 'no harm' is contingent on obedience.
7. The Hebrew lema'an ('so as to, in order that') creates a jarring purpose clause — their refusal to listen functioned as if its purpose were to provoke God. Whether this implies deliberate intent or describes the inevitable result of their actions is ambiguous in the Hebrew; we preserve the ambiguity. Ne'um YHWH is rendered with the locked formula 'declares the LORD.'
8. The title YHWH tseva'ot ('LORD of Hosts') invokes God as commander of heavenly armies — the military epithet appropriate to the announcement of invasion that follows. The shift from ne'um YHWH (v. 7) to koh amar YHWH tseva'ot signals an escalation in divine authority.
9. Hinneni ('look, I am about to') signals imminent divine action. The designation avdi ('my servant') for Nebuchadnezzar is extraordinary — the same title given to Moses, David, and the prophets is here applied to a foreign conqueror. The verb hacharamtim ('devote to destruction') is cherem vocabulary — total consecration to destruction, the same verb used for the conquest of Canaan. The three-fold result — shamah (horror), shreqah (hissing/scorn), charvot olam (perpetual ruins) — is a standard Jeremianic curse formula.
10. This verse catalogs the sounds and sights of normal life that will cease — celebration (joy, gladness), domestic life (bride, bridegroom), daily labor (millstone grinding), and basic illumination (lamp). The six items progress from festive to mundane, showing that everything from weddings to the grinding of daily grain will stop. This formula recurs in 7:34, 16:9, and 33:11, and is echoed in Revelation 18:22-23 describing Babylon's fall.
11. The phrase shiv'im shanah ('seventy years') appears here and in verse 12. The number generates debate: it may refer to the period from 605 (Nebuchadnezzar's first campaign) to 539 BCE (Cyrus's conquest of Babylon), roughly sixty-six years; or from 586 (temple destruction) to 516 (temple rededication), exactly seventy years. The text itself simply states the number without resolving the calculation. We preserve the number without interpretive comment in the rendering itself.
12. The verb paqad ('visit, attend to, punish') here means to call to account — God will 'visit' Babylon's guilt upon it. The term avon ('iniquity') implies accumulated guilt, not a single offense. The judgment on Babylon is framed as symmetrical justice — the instrument of punishment will itself be punished. The 'land of the Chaldeans' (erets kasdim) identifies Babylon by its ethnic-geographic name.
13. The reference to 'this scroll' (ha-sefer ha-zeh) is a rare self-referential moment in prophetic literature. It likely refers to an earlier collection of Jeremiah's oracles against the nations (chapters 46-51), which may have originally been placed here in some textual traditions. The Septuagint (LXX) actually positions the oracles against the nations after 25:13, confirming that different arrangements of Jeremiah circulated in antiquity. We render sefer as 'scroll' rather than 'book' to reflect the physical medium of the seventh century BCE.
14. The verse describes a chain of domination — Babylon enslaved nations, and in turn other nations and kings will enslave Babylon. The verb shillam ('repay, recompense') carries the sense of completing a transaction, settling a debt. The principle of symmetrical justice — the oppressor experiencing what it inflicted — runs through the prophetic tradition (cf. Obadiah 15).
15. The kos hayayin hachema ('cup of the wine of wrath') is a compound construct chain — literally 'cup-of wine-of wrath.' The image combines intoxication with divine fury: the nations will stagger and reel not from alcohol but from the overwhelming force of God's judgment. This cup-of-wrath image is foundational to the biblical tradition, echoed in Isaiah 51:17, Ezekiel 23:31-34, Habakkuk 2:16, and Revelation 14:10.
16. Three verbs describe the effect of the cup: shatu ('they will drink'), hitgo'ashu ('they will stagger/reel'), and hitholalu ('they will go mad'). The progression moves from drinking to physical disorientation to mental collapse. The sword (cherev) is the instrument — the cup is the metaphor for the experience of judgment; the sword is the literal reality behind it.
17. Jeremiah's compliance is immediate — no protest, no intercession. The prophetic act is described as if Jeremiah physically traveled to each nation with the cup, though this is visionary rather than literal. The verb va'ashqeh ('I made them drink') uses the causative stem — the nations do not drink voluntarily.
18. Jerusalem heads the list — judgment begins with God's own people (cf. 1 Peter 4:17). The four-fold curse formula — chorbah (ruin), shamah (horror), shreqah (scorn/hissing), qelalah (curse) — is a standard Jeremianic judgment formula. The phrase 'as they are this day' (ka-yom ha-zeh) indicates the prophecy is being recorded after the fall of Jerusalem, placing the editorial frame in the exilic or post-exilic period.
19. Egypt is listed first among the foreign nations because it was Judah's traditional ally and the power Judah foolishly relied on instead of trusting God (cf. 2:18, 37:5-7). The comprehensiveness — servants, officials, all his people — indicates that no level of Egyptian society escapes judgment.
20. The ha'erev ('mixed peoples') likely refers to diverse populations living in frontier or border regions — possibly mercenary groups or mixed ethnic communities. The land of Uz is traditionally associated with the setting of Job (Job 1:1), located in the region east of Palestine. The four Philistine cities named here omit Gath, which had already been destroyed by the time of this oracle. The 'remnant of Ashdod' (she'erit Ashdod) suggests that Ashdod had already suffered significant destruction, possibly by the Assyrians in 711 BCE.

21. These three nations east and southeast of Judah were traditionally connected to Israel through ancestral kinship — Edom through Esau (Genesis 36), Moab and Ammon through Lot (Genesis 19:36-38). Their inclusion in the judgment is particularly pointed: not even blood relatives escape God's reckoning.
22. Tyre and Sidon were the great Phoenician maritime powers. The 'coastlands across the sea' (ha'i asher be'ever hayam) refers to the Mediterranean islands and coastal settlements — possibly Cyprus, Crete, and other Phoenician colonies. The scope of judgment is expanding outward from Jerusalem in concentric circles.
23. Dedan, Tema, and Buz are Arabian tribes. The phrase qetsutsai fe'ah ('those who shave their temples') refers to a distinctive haircut practice of certain Arabian desert peoples — shaving or cropping the hair at the corners of the head. This practice is mentioned in 9:25 and 49:32 and was forbidden for Israelites (Leviticus 19:27).
24. The repetition of ha'erev ('mixed peoples,' cf. v. 20) alongside Arav ('Arabia') creates a wordplay — the similar-sounding words link the concept of ethnic mixing with the Arabian desert region. These are the semi-nomadic populations of the Arabian peninsula and the Syrian-Arabian desert.
25. Zimri is an otherwise unidentified kingdom, possibly in the Arabian or eastern region. Elam (modern southwestern Iran) and Media (modern northwestern Iran) represent the far eastern reaches of the known world. The inclusion of Media is significant — the Medes would later ally with Babylon under Cyrus to create the Persian Empire that would conquer Babylon itself.
26. Sheshach (ששח) is an atbash cipher for Babel (בבל). Atbash substitutes the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet for the last, the second for the second-to-last, and so on: shin (ש) replaces bet (ב), and kaph (כ) replaces lamed (ל). Babylon drinks last — the instrument of judgment becomes the final object of judgment. The coded name may reflect either literary artistry or political caution in naming the reigning superpower directly. The phrase 'all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth' makes the scope unmistakably universal.
27. Four brutal imperatives — shetu ('drink'), shikru ('get drunk'), qi'u ('vomit'), niplu ('fall') — escalate from consumption to collapse. The physical effects of severe intoxication serve as a metaphor for the overwhelming nature of divine judgment. The command lo taqumu ('you will not rise') transforms the drinking metaphor into a death sentence — they will fall and never stand again.
28. The emphatic infinitive absolute shato tishtu ('drinking, you will drink') removes any possibility of refusal. The nations cannot opt out of God's judgment. The absolute certainty expressed by the Hebrew construction leaves no room for negotiation — this is not an offer but a decree.
29. The argument is from greater to lesser: if God punishes his own city — the one that 'bears his name' (niqra shemi aleha, lit. 'my name is called over it') — how much less will the nations escape? The phrase niqra shemi conveys ownership and patronage; Jerusalem belongs to God, and even belonging to God does not exempt it from judgment for covenant violation. The rhetorical question hinnaqeh tinnaqqu ('will you be completely acquitted?') expects a negative answer, reinforced by the emphatic lo tinnaqqu ('you will not be acquitted').
30. The text shifts from prose to poetry at this point. The verb sha'ag ('roar') is lion imagery — God is a roaring lion against the earth (cf. Amos 1:2, Hosea 11:10, Joel 3:16). The word naveh can mean both 'dwelling' and 'pasture/fold,' creating an ambiguity: God roars from his dwelling (heaven) against his fold (his people/the earth). The grape-treaders' shout (hedad) was a rhythmic cry used during harvest — here it becomes the war cry of divine judgment, turning the joyful harvest image into a scene of slaughter.
31. The word riv ('case, controversy, legal dispute') frames God's judgment as a lawsuit — a formal legal proceeding against the nations. This is the covenant lawsuit (riv) genre familiar from Micah 6:1-2 and Hosea 4:1. The verb nishpat ('enters judgment') reinforces the legal metaphor. God is both plaintiff and judge in this cosmic court.
32. The word se'ar ('storm, tempest, whirlwind') depicts God's judgment as a massive weather event sweeping across the entire world. The phrase yarketei-arets ('farthest corners of the earth') indicates the storm comes from the remote edges of the known world — from where one cannot see what is coming until it arrives. The disaster is not localized but cascading — migoi el goi ('from nation to nation') — like a chain reaction.
33. Chalelei YHWH ('the slain of the LORD') attributes the killing directly to God — these are not casualties of war but executions of divine judgment. The three negated verbs — lo yissafdu (not mourned), lo ye'asfu (not gathered), lo yiqqaveru (not buried) — deny the dead every dignity. Lack of burial was the ultimate horror in the ancient Near East; the body exposed as dung (domen) represents absolute debasement.
34. The 'shepherds' (ro'im) are rulers and leaders, and the 'lords of the flock' (addirei hatson) are the elite among them. The verb hitpalleshu ('roll in the dust') describes extreme mourning — throwing oneself on the ground and rolling in ashes or dirt. The simile 'like a prized vessel' (kikheli chemdah) compares their destruction to the shattering of an expensive ceramic piece — beautiful, valuable, and irreparably broken. Some manuscripts read utfutsoteikhem ('your dispersions') while others read utfutsoteikhem as 'your scatterings' — both indicate the leaders will be scattered like fragments.
35. The Hebrew expresses this as the 'perishing' (avad) of flight — escape itself has been destroyed. The parallel structure — manos (flight/refuge) for the shepherds, peleitah (escape) for the lords — reinforces the total closure of all exit routes for the ruling class.
36. The subject of the destruction is explicit — YHWH shoded ('the LORD destroys'). The word mar'it ('pasture') continues the shepherd-flock metaphor: the pasture is the kingdom, and God himself is laying waste to it. The reversal is complete: the shepherd God who 'makes me lie down in green pastures' (Psalm 23:2) is now the God who destroys the pasture.
37. The phrase ne'ot hashalom ('meadows of peace/the peaceful meadows') uses shalom in its fullest sense — these are places of wholeness, flourishing, well-being, now silenced. The verb nadamu ('are silenced, are devastated') carries both meanings — literal silence (the sounds of life cease) and destruction (they are laid waste). The cause is charon af YHWH ('burning anger of the LORD') — the fierceness of God's fury.

38. The subject 'he' most likely refers to God, who has emerged from his dwelling like a young lion (kefir) leaving its thicket to hunt. The word hayonah is textually difficult — it may derive from yanah ('to oppress,' hence 'the oppressor/oppressing sword') or may be an unusual form related to cherev ('sword'). The Septuagint reads 'the sword' and many modern translations follow this. We render 'raging sword' to capture the sense of violent instrument while acknowledging the textual difficulty. The final phrase charon appo ('his burning anger') confirms that the devastation flows from God's wrath.

26

Summary: *Jeremiah 26 narrates the immediate aftermath of the Temple Sermon — the most dangerous moment in Jeremiah's prophetic career. At the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign, God commands Jeremiah to stand in the temple courtyard and warn that if Judah does not repent, God will make the temple like Shiloh — the former sanctuary destroyed centuries earlier. The priests and prophets seize Jeremiah and demand his execution for blasphemy against the temple. But the officials and the people intervene, and Jeremiah defends himself with a simple claim: the LORD sent him. The elders then cite the precedent of Micah of Moresheth, who prophesied Jerusalem's destruction under King Hezekiah, and Hezekiah did not kill him but repented. This precedent saves Jeremiah's life. The chapter closes with the counter-example of Uriah son of Shemaiah, who preached the same message but was hunted down in Egypt and executed by Jehoiakim — demonstrating what Jeremiah narrowly escaped.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is one of the finest examples of courtroom narrative in the Hebrew Bible. The legal proceedings follow a recognizable structure: accusation (v. 8-9, by priests and prophets), defense (v. 12-15, by Jeremiah), verdict (v. 16, by officials and people), and precedent citation (v. 17-19, by elders). The split between the religious establishment (priests and prophets demanding death) and the civil establishment (officials protecting Jeremiah) is a recurring pattern in the book — the institutional religion has become Jeremiah's enemy while secular officials sometimes prove more just. The Micah citation in verse 18 is remarkable: it quotes Micah 3:12 almost verbatim, providing one of the clearest examples of inner-biblical quotation and proving that prophetic texts were being preserved and cited as authoritative within a century of their composition. The Uriah episode (v. 20-23) is included precisely because it shows what normally happened to prophets who challenged the establishment — Jeremiah's survival was the exception, not the rule. We rendered Ahikam son of Shaphan's protection (v. 24) as the decisive factor, noting that the Shaphan family appears repeatedly in Jeremiah as allies of the prophet and of reform.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase ka'asher dibbarta be'ozneinu ('as you have spoken in our hearing,' v. 11) required care — the priests are making Jeremiah's own words the basis of the capital charge. The word mishpat mavet ('a sentence of death,' v. 11) is literally 'a judgment of death' — we rendered it as 'deserves the death sentence' to capture the legal force. The Micah quotation (v. 18) presented a translation consistency challenge: our rendering of Micah 3:12, if we had already translated Micah, would need to match; since Micah has not yet been generated, we rendered from the Hebrew as it appears here in Jeremiah and will ensure consistency when we reach Micah. The phrase chalah et-penei YHWH ('entreated the face of the LORD,' v. 19) is an idiom for seeking God's favor; we rendered it as 'sought the favor of the LORD.'*

Connections: *The Temple Sermon itself is given in full in chapter 7; chapter 26 narrates the consequences of that sermon. The Shiloh reference (v. 6, 9) connects to 7:12-14, 1 Samuel 4, and Psalm 78:60 — Shiloh was the pre-Jerusalem sanctuary destroyed by the Philistines, and its ruins were a visible warning in Jeremiah's day. The Micah quotation (v. 18 = Micah 3:12) is one of the most important examples of prophetic intertextuality in the Hebrew Bible. Ahikam son of Shaphan (v. 24) connects to 2 Kings 22:12-14, where Shaphan's family was involved in Josiah's reform; his son Gedaliah will later be appointed governor by Babylon (39:14, 40:5-41:3). The Uriah episode (v. 20-23) anticipates Jehoiakim's hostility toward prophetic scrolls (chapter 36). Jesus's trial before the Sanhedrin (Matthew 26:59-66) echoes this chapter's pattern of religious leaders bringing false charges against a prophet.*

- ¹At the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the LORD: ²This is what the LORD says: Stand in the courtyard of the house of the LORD and speak to all the people of the cities of Judah who come to worship in the house of the LORD — all the words I have commanded you to speak to them. Do not hold back a single word. ³Perhaps they will listen and each turn back from his evil way, and I will relent of the disaster I am planning to bring on

them because of the wickedness of their deeds. ⁴Say to them: This is what the LORD says — If you will not listen to me by walking in my instruction that I have set before you, ⁵and by heeding the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you persistently — though you have not listened — ⁶then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse among all the nations of the earth. ⁷The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. ⁸When Jeremiah had finished speaking everything the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, "You must die!" ⁹"Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, 'This house will become like Shiloh, and this city will be desolate, without inhabitant'?" And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD. ¹⁰When the officials of Judah heard about these events, they came up from the royal palace to the house of the LORD and took their seats at the entrance of the New Gate of the LORD's house. ¹¹The priests and the prophets said to the officials and all the people, "This man deserves the death sentence, because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears." ¹²Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and all the people: "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words you have heard. ¹³Now therefore, reform your ways and your deeds, and obey the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will relent of the disaster he has pronounced against you. ¹⁴As for me — I am in your hands. Do with me whatever you consider right and just. ¹⁵But know this with certainty: if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the LORD sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing." ¹⁶Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, "This man does not deserve the death sentence, for he has spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God." ¹⁷Then some of the elders of the land stood up and addressed the whole assembly of the people:

¹⁸"Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah and said to all the people of Judah: This is what the LORD of Hosts says —

Zion will be plowed like a field,
Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble,
and the temple mount will become a wooded ridge."

¹⁹Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and seek the favor of the LORD, so that the LORD relented of the disaster he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring great disaster on ourselves! ²⁰There was also a man who prophesied in the name of the LORD — Uriah son of Shemaiah, from Kiriath-jearim — who prophesied against this city and this land in words just like Jeremiah's. ²¹When King Jehoiakim and all his warriors and all the officials heard his words, the king sought to put him to death. But Uriah heard of it and was afraid, and he fled to Egypt. ²²King Jehoiakim sent men to Egypt — Elnathan son of Achbor and men with him — to Egypt. ²³They brought Uriah out of Egypt and took him to King Jehoiakim, who struck him down with the sword and threw his body into the burial ground of the common people. ²⁴But the hand of Ahikam son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, so that he was not handed over to the people to be put to death.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The date formula places this event at the start of Jehoiakim's reign (approximately 609 BCE), shortly after Josiah's death at Megiddo. Jehoiakim was installed by Pharaoh Necho after deposing Josiah's son Jehoahaz (2 Kings 23:34), making him a vassal king dependent on Egypt — a political context that shaped his hostility toward prophets predicting Babylonian dominance.
2. The command *al tигра davar* ('do not diminish a word') is critical — God forbids Jeremiah from softening, editing, or abbreviating the message. The same prohibition appears in Deuteronomy 4:2 and 12:32 regarding the Torah. The setting — the temple courtyard — is deliberately provocative: Jeremiah will denounce the temple inside the temple complex, before an audience of worshipers from across Judah.
3. The word *ulai* ('perhaps') is remarkable — God holds open the possibility of repentance without guaranteeing it. The verb *nichanti* ('I will relent') describes God changing his intended course of action in response to human repentance — the same theological concept as Jonah 3:10. This is not divine uncertainty but genuine openness to a changed outcome if the people change their behavior. The word *ra'ah* appears three times in this verse with different nuances: *darkko hara'ah* ('his evil way'), *hara'ah* ('the disaster'), and *ro'a ma'aleiheim* ('the wickedness of their deeds').

4. The word *torah* is rendered 'instruction' here rather than 'law' to capture the Hebrew sense of teaching and guidance rather than mere legal code. The phrase 'set before you' (*natatti lifneikhem*) echoes the Deuteronomic choice formula (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19) — God places the instruction in front of them; the choice to follow it is theirs.
5. The *hashkem* idiom ('rising early and sending') appears again as Jeremiah's characteristic expression for God's persistent effort to reach his people through the prophets. The parenthetical admission — 'though you have not listened' — is devastating: God acknowledges that the sending has been futile, yet the demand to listen remains.
6. Shiloh was the central sanctuary of Israel before Jerusalem, where the Ark of the Covenant resided during the period of the Judges (Joshua 18:1, 1 Samuel 1-4). It was destroyed, probably by the Philistines after the battle of Ebenezer (1 Samuel 4), and its ruins were a visible warning in Jeremiah's day (see Psalm 78:60, Jeremiah 7:12-14). The threat to make the temple 'like Shiloh' directly challenges the popular theology of temple inviolability — the belief that God would never allow his own house to be destroyed.
7. Three groups hear the sermon: priests (*kohanim*), prophets (*nevi'im*), and all the people (*kol ha'am*). By the end of the chapter, these groups will be on opposite sides — the priests and prophets demanding death, the officials and people acquitting Jeremiah. The seeds of that division are planted here.
8. The verb *yitpesu* ('they seized') indicates a physical arrest, not merely verbal opposition. The death sentence *mot tamut* ('dying you will die') uses the emphatic infinitive absolute — an irrevocable verdict pronounced on the spot, the same formula used in Genesis 2:17 ('you will certainly die'). The phrase 'everything the LORD had commanded him' emphasizes that Jeremiah held nothing back, obeying the instruction of verse 2.
9. The accusation centers on prophesying 'in the name of the LORD' (*beshem YHWH*) — they do not dispute that Jeremiah claims divine authority; they dispute the content of his message. The phrase 'like Shiloh' is the specific trigger: predicting the temple's destruction was tantamount to blasphemy in popular theology. The verb *yiqqahel* ('assembled, crowded together') has a hostile connotation here — this is a mob forming, not a congregation gathering.
10. The *sarei Yehudah* ('officials of Judah') are the civil magistrates, distinct from the religious establishment. They 'came up' (*ya'alu*) from the palace to the temple — the palace was lower in elevation than the temple mount. Their 'sitting' (*yeshvu*) at the gate is a judicial act — sitting in the gate was the formal posture for hearing legal cases (cf. Ruth 4:1, Amos 5:15). They constitute themselves as a court.
11. The phrase *mishpat mavet* ('judgment of death') is a formal legal charge demanding capital punishment. The prosecutors are the priests and prophets — the religious establishment. The accusation is not that Jeremiah lied but that he 'prophesied against this city' (*nibba el ha'ir hazot*) — the content, not the authority, is the offense. The appeal to the audience — 'as you have heard with your own ears' (*ka'asher shema'tem be'ozneikhem*) — treats the audience as witnesses for the prosecution.
12. Jeremiah's defense is strikingly simple — he does not retract, soften, or explain away his words. His sole defense is divine commission: *YHWH shelachani* ('the LORD sent me'). The claim to be divinely sent is either his complete vindication or his complete condemnation — if true, killing him is rebellion against God; if false, he deserves death as a false prophet (Deuteronomy 18:20).
13. Even on trial for his life, Jeremiah continues to preach repentance rather than plead for his own safety. The verb *heitivu* ('make good, improve, reform') calls for genuine change, not mere remorse. The promise that God will 'relent' (*yinnachem*) of the disaster repeats the theology of verse 3 — divine judgment is conditional, not fatalistic.
14. Jeremiah's surrender is total: *hineni beyedkhem* ('I am in your hands'). He does not resist, flee, or bargain. The phrase *ka-tov ve-ka-yashar be'eineikhem* ('as seems good and right in your eyes') leaves the decision entirely to the court — but the words 'right' (*yashar*) and 'good' (*tov*) carry moral weight, implicitly challenging them to act justly.
15. The emphatic *yadoa ted'u* ('knowing, you will know') uses the infinitive absolute to stress absolute certainty. The phrase *dam naqi* ('innocent blood') invokes the most severe category of guilt in Israelite law — the shedding of innocent blood pollutes the land and brings collective guilt (cf. Deuteronomy 19:10, 2 Kings 21:16, 24:4). Jeremiah's warning transforms the trial: if they execute him, the crime shifts from his prophesying to their murder.
16. The verdict is a complete reversal: the officials and people acquit Jeremiah using the same legal phrase (*mishpat mavet*) the prosecutors used in verse 11, but negated — *ein la'ish hazeh mishpat mavet* ('there is no death sentence for this man'). The decisive factor is the divine name: *beshem YHWH Eloheinu dibber eleinu* ('in the name of the LORD our God he spoke to us'). They accept Jeremiah's claim to divine commission. The alignment has shifted — officials and people against priests and prophets.
17. The *ziqunei ha'arets* ('elders of the land') are a distinct group from the officials (*sarim*) — they represent the traditional authority of the tribal and family leadership, the repository of communal memory and precedent. Their standing to speak (*yaqumu*) indicates they have legal standing in the proceedings.
18. This is a near-verbatim quotation of Micah 3:12, one of the most significant examples of inner-biblical citation. The elders quote a century-old prophecy from memory, proving that prophetic oracles were being preserved and treated as authoritative precedent. Micah of Moresheth (a town southwest of Jerusalem) prophesied during Hezekiah's reign (c. 715-686 BCE). The three parallel predictions — Zion plowed, Jerusalem ruined, temple mount overgrown — describe total destruction of the religious center. The word *bamot ya'ar* ('high places of a forest') suggests the temple mount reverting to wild woodland. The argument is legal precedent: Micah said worse things than Jeremiah, and Hezekiah did not execute him.

19. The elders' argument is two-fold: (1) Hezekiah heard a worse prophecy and responded with repentance rather than execution, and God relented; (2) if we kill Jeremiah, we will bring 'great disaster on ourselves' (ra'ah gedolah al nafshotenu). The verb *chalah et-penei YHWH* ('sought the face/favor of the LORD') describes earnest, humble petition — Hezekiah's response to the prophet was prayer, not persecution. The verb *yinnachem* ('relented') is the same used in verse 3 and verse 13, creating a theological frame: God relents when people repent; killing the prophet prevents repentance and guarantees disaster.
20. The Uriah episode (vv. 20-23) functions as a counter-example showing what typically happened to prophets who challenged the establishment. Kiriath-jearim was a city northwest of Jerusalem, where the Ark of the Covenant had been housed before David brought it to Jerusalem (1 Samuel 7:1-2, 2 Samuel 6:2). The phrase *kechol divrei Yirmeyahu* ('according to all the words of Jeremiah') establishes that Uriah's message was identical to Jeremiah's — yet their fates diverged dramatically.
21. Jehoiakim's response to Uriah contrasts sharply with Hezekiah's response to Micah (v. 19). Where Hezekiah feared God and sought his favor, Jehoiakim fears nothing and seeks the prophet's death. The word *gibborim* ('warriors, mighty men') suggests Jehoiakim deployed military force against a prophet — a gross misuse of royal power. Uriah's flight to Egypt is ironic given Jeremiah's consistent warnings against relying on Egypt for protection.
22. Elnathan son of Achbor was a high-ranking official; his father Achbor had served under Josiah (2 Kings 22:12, 14). Elnathan may be the same official who later urged Jehoiakim not to burn Jeremiah's scroll (36:25), suggesting a complex figure who obeyed the king's orders here but later showed more conscience. The repetition of 'to Egypt' (*el Mitsrayim*) at the end emphasizes the extraordinary length Jehoiakim went to — sending an extradition party to a foreign country to retrieve a prophet.
23. The execution is described with cold brevity — *vayakkehu ba-cherav* ('he struck him with the sword'). The final indignity is the disposal of his body: *va-yashlekh et-nivlato el-qivrei benei ha'am* ('he threw his corpse into the burial ground of the common people'). In Israelite culture, a prophet deserved honorable burial; throwing his body (*nivlah*, 'corpse, carcass' — the same word used for animal carcasses) into the commoners' graves was a deliberate act of posthumous shaming.
24. Ahikam son of Shaphan was part of the reform-minded family that had supported Josiah's religious renewal — his father Shaphan was the scribe who read the discovered scroll of the Torah to Josiah (2 Kings 22:8-10), and Ahikam himself was part of the delegation sent to consult Huldah the prophetess (2 Kings 22:12-14). His son Gedaliah would later become the governor appointed by Babylon after Jerusalem's fall (2 Kings 25:22, Jeremiah 39:14, 40:5-6). The 'hand' (*yad*) of Ahikam represents his political influence and personal protection — he shielded Jeremiah with his authority.

27

Summary: *Jeremiah 27 opens with God commanding the prophet to fashion a yoke of straps and bars and place it on his own neck — a sign-act dramatizing subjection to Babylon. Through envoys visiting Jerusalem, Jeremiah sends word to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon: submit to Nebuchadnezzar, the servant God has appointed over the nations, or face sword, famine, and plague. Jeremiah then turns to Zedekiah and the priests of Judah with the same message, directly countering the false prophets who promise that the Temple vessels seized by Babylon will be returned shortly. The chapter closes with Jeremiah's challenge: if these prophets truly speak for God, let them intercede that the remaining vessels not be carried away.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter presents one of Jeremiah's most provocative sign-acts: the prophet wearing an ox yoke through the streets and diplomatic corridors of Jerusalem. The political audacity is staggering — Jeremiah is telling allied foreign kings, through their own ambassadors, to surrender to Babylon. He calls Nebuchadnezzar 'my servant' (*avdi*, v. 6), applying a term of covenant honor to a pagan emperor. The verb *avad* ('to serve') creates a theological wordplay throughout: the nations must 'serve' Nebuchadnezzar because God has designated him as 'my servant.' The false prophets' claim that the Temple vessels will return 'soon' (v. 16) directly contradicts Jeremiah's insistence that more vessels will be taken. The stakes are not merely theological but geopolitical — Jeremiah is accused of treason precisely because his prophecy aligns with Babylonian interests.*

Translation Friction: *The chapter superscription (v. 1) reads 'Jehoiakim' in the Masoretic Text but the context clearly describes Zedekiah's reign (v. 3, 12). Most scholars regard this as a scribal error or redactional artifact; we rendered the text as it stands and noted the discrepancy. The term *moseiroth* ('straps, bonds') in verse 2 is debated — it could refer to leather thongs binding the yoke-bars together or to the yoke apparatus as a whole. We rendered it as 'straps and crossbars' to convey both components. The phrase 'until I have consumed them by his hand' (v. 8) uses the verb *tamam* in a way that could mean 'complete' or*

'consume/destroy,' and we chose 'destroyed' to match the threatening context. The false prophets' promise in verse 16 uses the word meherah ('quickly, soon'), which we rendered as 'soon' to preserve the temporal contrast with Jeremiah's longer timeline.

Connections: The yoke sign-act connects directly to chapter 28, where Hananiah breaks the yoke and Jeremiah responds with the iron-yoke oracle. Nebuchadnezzar as God's 'servant' (avdi) echoes 25:9 and 43:10 — a title otherwise reserved for patriarchs, Moses, David, and the prophets. The false prophets' message about the Temple vessels connects to 2 Kings 24:13 and 25:13-17, where the full removal is documented historically. The command to 'serve the king of Babylon and live' anticipates Jeremiah's counsel to Zedekiah in 38:17-18. The theological claim that God gives sovereignty to whomever he wills (v. 5) parallels Daniel 2:21 and 4:17.

¹At the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²This is what the LORD said to me: Make yourself straps and crossbars, and place them on your neck. ³Then send them to the king of Edom, the king of Moab, the king of the Ammonites, the king of Tyre, and the king of Sidon — through the envoys who have come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah. ⁴Charge them with a message for their masters: This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says — this is what you are to say to your masters: ⁵I made the earth, the people and the animals on the face of the earth, by my great power and my outstretched arm, and I give it to whomever I see fit. ⁶Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, my servant. Even the wild animals I have given him to serve him. ⁷All nations will serve him, and his son, and his grandson, until the appointed time for his own land arrives. Then many nations and great kings will make him serve them. ⁸Any nation or kingdom that will not serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon — that will not put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon — I will punish that nation with sword, famine, and plague, declares the LORD, until I have destroyed them by his hand. ⁹So do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dream interpreters, your soothsayers, or your sorcerers who say to you, 'You will not serve the king of Babylon.' ¹⁰For they are prophesying falsehood to you, with the result that you will be driven far from your land — I will banish you, and you will perish. ¹¹But the nation that puts its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serves him — I will let it remain on its own soil, declares the LORD, and it will farm it and dwell on it. ¹²To Zedekiah king of Judah I spoke this same message: Put your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon — serve him and his people, and you will live. ¹³Why should you and your people die by sword, famine, and plague, as the LORD has declared against any nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? ¹⁴Do not listen to the words of the prophets who say to you, 'You will not serve the king of Babylon,' for they are prophesying falsehood to you. ¹⁵For I did not send them, declares the LORD, yet they prophesy in my name with falsehood — so that I will banish you, and you will perish, both you and the prophets who prophesy to you. ¹⁶To the priests and to all this people I spoke, saying: This is what the LORD says — do not listen to the words of your prophets who prophesy to you, saying, 'Look, the vessels of the house of the LORD will be brought back from Babylon soon.' For they are prophesying falsehood to you. ¹⁷Do not listen to them. Serve the king of Babylon and live. Why should this city become a ruin? ¹⁸But if they are truly prophets and if the word of the LORD is with them, let them intercede with the LORD of Hosts so that the vessels still remaining in the house of the LORD, in the palace of the king of Judah, and in Jerusalem are not taken to Babylon. ¹⁹For this is what the LORD of Hosts says concerning the pillars, the sea, the stands, and the rest of the vessels remaining in this city — ²⁰which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon did not take when he deported Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, from Jerusalem to Babylon, along with all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem — ²¹For this is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says concerning the vessels remaining in the house of the LORD, in the palace of the king of Judah, and in Jerusalem: ²²To Babylon they will be taken, and there they will remain until the day I attend to them, declares the LORD. Then I will bring them up and restore them to this place.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Masoretic Text reads 'Jehoiakim' (yehoyaqim), but the events described in this chapter clearly occur during Zedekiah's reign (v. 3, 12). Several Hebrew manuscripts and the Syriac Peshitta read 'Zedekiah' here. Most scholars consider this a scribal error, possibly caused by confusion with the superscription of chapter 26. We render the Masoretic Text as it stands and note the discrepancy.

1. Le'mor ('saying') is rendered as a colon introducing the direct divine speech that follows.
2. The nouns moseroth ('straps, bonds') and mototh ('bars, poles') describe the components of an ox yoke — leather straps binding wooden crossbars to the animal's neck. God commands Jeremiah to construct and wear this apparatus as a prophetic sign-act, a physical dramatization of the subjection he is about to proclaim. The plural forms may indicate multiple yokes, one for each nation addressed in the following verses.
3. The five nations listed were neighboring kingdoms considering an anti-Babylonian coalition. The envoys (mal'akhim, 'messengers') had come to Jerusalem for diplomatic consultations with Zedekiah — Jeremiah intercepted the political gathering with a prophetic counter-message. This verse confirms that the events take place under Zedekiah, not Jehoiakim as the superscription states.
4. The double formula — 'This is what the LORD says' followed by 'this is what you are to say' — creates a chain of prophetic authority: God speaks to Jeremiah, Jeremiah speaks to the envoys, the envoys speak to their kings. The title 'LORD of Hosts' (YHWH tseva'ot) emphasizes God's sovereignty over all armies, both heavenly and earthly — a pointed claim when addressing military allies.
5. God's claim to universal sovereignty grounds the entire chapter: the one who created everything has the authority to assign political dominion. The phrase 'outstretched arm' (zero'i ha-netuyah) is Exodus language — the same arm that struck Egypt now assigns Babylon as sovereign. The expression yashar be'ainai ('right in my eyes') asserts unilateral divine discretion over international affairs.
6. Calling Nebuchadnezzar avdi ('my servant') is theologically explosive. This is covenant-honor vocabulary — the same title given to Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets. God is declaring that a pagan emperor serves as his chosen instrument. The extension to 'wild animals' (chayyat hasadeh) echoes the creation mandate of Genesis 1:28 and the sovereignty language of Daniel 2:38, signaling total dominion over the created order.
7. The three-generation dynasty (Nebuchadnezzar, his son, his grandson) roughly corresponds to the Neo-Babylonian succession, though the historical details are compressed. The phrase 'the appointed time for his own land' (et artso) indicates that Babylon's dominion is not permanent but divinely bounded — Babylon too will be subjected. The reversal ('make him serve them') points to Babylon's eventual fall to Persia in 539 BCE.
8. The triad 'sword, famine, and plague' (cherev, ra'av, dever) is Jeremiah's signature judgment formula, recurring over a dozen times in the book (14:12, 21:7, 21:9, 24:10, 29:17-18, 32:24, 32:36, 34:17, 38:2, 42:17, 42:22, 44:13). The yoke metaphor in verse 2 is now made explicit — refusing the literal yoke means refusing divine assignment. The verb tamam ('to complete, to finish off') here carries the sense of total destruction.
9. The five-fold list — prophets (nevi'im), diviners (qosemim), dream interpreters (chalomot), soothsayers (onenim), and sorcerers (kashshefim) — catalogs the entire spectrum of ancient Near Eastern religious consultation. By grouping nevi'im ('prophets') with practitioners of divination and sorcery, Jeremiah strips the false prophets of legitimacy, equating them with pagan practitioners forbidden by Deuteronomy 18:10-14.
10. The word sheqer ('falsehood, lie') is one of Jeremiah's most frequent terms for false prophecy (see 5:31, 14:14, 20:6, 23:25-26, 29:9). The irony is devastating: the false prophets promise that resistance will prevent exile, but their deceptive counsel is precisely what will cause the exile they claim to prevent.
11. The reward for submission is strikingly simple: remaining on ancestral land, farming, and dwelling in peace. The verb avadah ('work it, farm it') creates a wordplay with avad ('serve') — the nation that 'serves' Babylon will 'work' its own land. The promise of land retention echoes the Deuteronomic land theology where possession of the land is contingent on obedience.
12. The same message delivered to foreign kings is now directed at Zedekiah — Judah receives no special exemption. The blunt imperative vichyu ('and live') reduces the choice to its starkest terms: submission means survival, resistance means death. The plural 'your necks' (tsavvareikhem) addresses the king and his court collectively.
13. The rhetorical question lammah tamutu ('why should you die?') recurs in Jeremiah's appeals to Zedekiah (cf. 38:17-18). It presents the choice as self-evidently absurd — death by stubbornness when survival is available through submission. The recurring triad of sword, famine, and plague reappears from verse 8.
14. This is the second explicit warning against false prophets in the chapter (cf. v. 9). Here the warning is directed specifically to Zedekiah and the Judean court, not to the foreign envoys. The accusation sheqer hem nibbe'im ('falsehood they are prophesying') uses the emphatic word order, placing 'falsehood' first for rhetorical force.
15. The claim lo shelachtim ('I did not send them') is the definitive test of prophetic authenticity in the Deuteronomic tradition (Deuteronomy 18:20). The dark irony is that the false prophets will share the fate of those they deceived — both the deceivers and the deceived will perish together. Prophesying 'in my name' (bishmi) while unsent constitutes the gravest possible prophetic offense.
16. The false prophets' specific claim concerns the Temple vessels taken by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BCE (2 Kings 24:13). Their promise of imminent return ('soon,' meherah) contradicts Jeremiah's message that the exile will be long (cf. 25:11-12, 29:10). The address shifts to the priests, who had a particular interest in the Temple vessels — their liturgical function depended on this sacred equipment.
17. The appeal shifts from national survival to urban survival — 'this city' (ha'ir hazzot) is Jerusalem itself. The word chorbah ('ruin, desolation') anticipates what will happen in 586 BCE when the city is indeed destroyed. The question format implies the choice is still open, though the rhetorical pressure is immense.
18. Jeremiah issues a devastating challenge: if these prophets genuinely carry God's word, they should use their prophetic authority to prevent further loss, not promise the return of what is already gone. The verb yifge'u ('let them intercede, press upon') implies urgent, persistent petition. The mention of 'vessels still remaining' reveals that a first deportation of Temple equipment has already occurred (597 BCE) and more remain at risk.

19. The specific Temple furnishings named — the bronze pillars (ha'ammudim, cf. 1 Kings 7:15-22), the bronze sea (ha-yam, the massive basin described in 1 Kings 7:23-26), and the bronze stands (ha-mekhonot, 1 Kings 7:27-39) — are the monumental pieces too large to have been taken in the first deportation. Their eventual removal is documented in 2 Kings 25:13-17 and Jeremiah 52:17-23.
20. Jeconiah (yekhanyah, also called Jehoiachin and Coniah) was deported in 597 BCE after a three-month reign (2 Kings 24:8-16). The word chorei ('nobles, freeborn') designates the aristocratic and administrative class taken in the first deportation. The verse establishes the historical timeline: a first deportation has already occurred, and the items left behind are now at stake.
21. The full divine title 'LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel' lends maximum authority to the pronouncement that follows. The triple location — Temple, royal palace, city — indicates that sacred vessels were distributed across multiple sites, not confined to the sanctuary alone.
22. The chapter closes with an unexpected note of hope. The verb paqad ('attend to, visit, take account of') here carries its positive sense — divine visitation for restoration rather than punishment. The promise that the vessels will eventually return presupposes a long exile (contra the false prophets' 'soon') but affirms that Babylon is not the final destination. The historical fulfillment came under Cyrus (Ezra 1:7-11), though Jeremiah does not name the agent. This verse simultaneously contradicts the false prophets (the vessels will go to Babylon, not return now) and offers hope (they will eventually return).

28

Summary: *Jeremiah 28 presents the dramatic confrontation between Jeremiah and Hananiah son of Azzur, a prophet from Gibeon who publicly contradicts Jeremiah's yoke message. In the Temple, before priests and people, Hananiah announces that within two years God will break the yoke of Babylon, return the Temple vessels, and restore King Jeconiah. He then seizes the yoke from Jeremiah's neck and snaps it. Jeremiah's initial response is remarkable — he says 'Amen, may the LORD do so' — then walks away. Later, God sends Jeremiah back with a devastating counter-oracle: the broken wooden yoke will be replaced by an iron yoke, and Hananiah will die within the year for inciting rebellion against the LORD. Hananiah dies in the seventh month, two months after his prophecy.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is the most vivid prophet-versus-prophet confrontation in the Hebrew Bible. The theological tension is extraordinary: both men speak 'in the name of the LORD,' both use prophetic formulas, both claim divine authority. How does anyone in the audience distinguish true from false? Jeremiah's initial reaction — walking away rather than immediately counter-propheying — is one of the most humanly honest moments in prophetic literature. He does not fabricate an instant rebuttal; he waits until God actually speaks to him. The replacement of the wooden yoke with iron bars (v. 13) transforms Hananiah's defiant act into an escalation of judgment: resistance does not remove the yoke but makes it heavier. Hananiah's death within two months of his prophecy (vv. 16-17) fulfills Deuteronomy 18:20-22's test of prophetic authenticity with brutal finality.*

Translation Friction: *The date formula in verse 1 presents textual issues: 'that same year, at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah' in the fourth year is difficult, since the fourth year is not the 'beginning' of a reign. The phrase may be a redactional gloss or may use re'shit loosely. We rendered it as given and noted the tension. Jeremiah's response 'Amen — may the LORD do so' (v. 6) could be read as sincere hope, diplomatic irony, or prophetic testing; we preserved the ambiguity. The verb sarah ('to rebel, turn aside') in verse 16 is the same word used for political rebellion and theological apostasy — we chose 'rebellion' to capture both dimensions. The time reference 'that same year, in the seventh month' (v. 17) places Hananiah's death approximately two months after the confrontation (which occurred in the fifth month, v. 1).*

Connections: *This chapter is the direct sequel to chapter 27's yoke sign-act. Hananiah's promise to 'break the yoke of the king of Babylon' (v. 4) directly inverts Jeremiah's command to 'put your neck under the yoke' (27:12). The promise to return Jeconiah connects to Jeremiah's oracle against Jeconiah in 22:24-30. The iron yoke intensification connects to Deuteronomy 28:48, where iron yoke is a covenant curse for disobedience. The death-sentence formula 'this year you will die' echoes 2 Kings 7:2, 19 and anticipates the prophetic death-sentence pattern. The criterion of prophetic authenticity — fulfilled prediction — draws on Deuteronomy 18:21-22. Hananiah's prophecy of a two-year return contradicts Jeremiah's seventy-year timeline (25:11-12, 29:10).*

¶In that same year — at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, in the fifth month — Hananiah son of Azzur, the prophet from Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of the LORD, in the sight of the priests and all

the people, saying: ²This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. ³ Within two more years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the house of the LORD that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took from this place and carried to Babylon. ⁴I will also bring back to this place Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, along with all the exiles of Judah who went to Babylon, declares the LORD, for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. ⁵Then the prophet Jeremiah said to the prophet Hananiah in the sight of the priests and all the people standing in the house of the LORD: ⁶The prophet Jeremiah said: Amen! May the LORD do so. May the LORD fulfill your words that you have prophesied — to bring back the vessels of the house of the LORD and all the exiles from Babylon to this place. ⁷But listen carefully to this word that I am speaking in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: ⁸The prophets who came before me and before you from ancient times prophesied against many lands and great kingdoms of war, disaster, and plague. ⁹As for the prophet who prophesies peace — only when the word of that prophet comes to pass will it be known that the LORD truly sent him. ¹⁰Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke-bar from the neck of the prophet Jeremiah and broke it. ¹¹Hananiah spoke before all the people: This is what the LORD says — just so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon within two years from the neck of all the nations. And the prophet Jeremiah went on his way. ¹²Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah after Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke-bar from the neck of the prophet Jeremiah: ¹³Go and say to Hananiah: This is what the LORD says — you have broken bars of wood, but you have made bars of iron in their place. ¹⁴For this is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: I have placed an iron yoke on the neck of all these nations to make them serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they will serve him. I have even given him the wild animals. ¹⁵Then the prophet Jeremiah said to the prophet Hananiah: Listen, Hananiah — the LORD did not send you, and you have made this people trust in a lie. ¹⁶Therefore this is what the LORD says: I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This year you will die, because you have spoken rebellion against the LORD. ¹⁷Hananiah the prophet died that same year, in the seventh month.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The date formula is internally awkward: 'beginning of the reign' (re'shit mamlekhet) does not naturally pair with 'the fourth year,' since a fourth year is not the beginning of a reign. The phrase may be a scribal addition linking this to 27:1, or re'shit may be used loosely to mean 'in the early period.' We render the Masoretic Text as it stands. Hananiah is introduced with full credentials — named, patronymic, titled 'the prophet' (hannavi), city of origin (Gibeon) — establishing him as a legitimate prophetic figure, not an obvious fraud. The public setting — Temple, priests, and people — makes this a formal prophetic confrontation.
2. Hananiah uses the full prophetic messenger formula with the complete divine title — identical in form to Jeremiah's own oracles. The verb shabarti ('I have broken') is in the prophetic perfect, treating a future event as already accomplished. This is standard prophetic grammar used by both true and false prophets, making it impossible to distinguish authenticity by form alone.
3. The phrase be'od shenatayim yamim ('within two more years of days') is precise — Hananiah commits to a verifiable timeline, unlike vague prophetic promises. This specificity directly contradicts Jeremiah's seventy-year prophecy (25:11-12). The phrase 'this place' (hamaqom hazzeh) repeated twice emphasizes the Temple itself as the site of loss and promised restoration.
4. Hananiah extends his prophecy beyond the Temple vessels to include the return of Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) himself and all the exiles. This directly contradicts Jeremiah's oracle against Jeconiah in 22:24-30, which declares that none of his descendants will sit on David's throne. The word galut ('exile, exiled community') has become a technical term by this period for the Judean deportees in Babylon.
5. The narrator deliberately titles both men hannavi ('the prophet') — 'the prophet Jeremiah' and 'the prophet Hananiah.' The text refuses to prejudice the reader by labeling one as false before the outcome is known. The public audience — priests and people standing in the Temple — underscores that this is not a private exchange but a formal prophetic contest.
6. Jeremiah's response is one of the most striking moments in the book. His 'Amen' (amen) and 'May the LORD do so' (ken ya'aseh YHWH) could be read as genuine hope — Jeremiah would prefer Hananiah's optimistic prophecy to be true — or as devastating irony, since Jeremiah knows it is false. The word yaqem ('may he establish, fulfill') is the same verb used for covenant fulfillment. We preserve the ambiguity because the Hebrew sustains both readings.
7. The particle akh ('but, however, only') introduces a sharp contrast — Jeremiah's apparent concession in verse 6 is immediately followed by a qualification. The phrase be'ozneikha ('in your ears') is emphatic, demanding personal attention. Jeremiah shifts from personal wish to prophetic criterion.

8. Jeremiah appeals to prophetic precedent: the mainstream tradition of Israelite prophecy has been overwhelmingly one of judgment, not comfort. Prophets like Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah predominantly warned of war (*milchamah*), disaster (*ra'ah*), and plague (*dever*). The phrase *min-ha'olam* ('from ancient times') stretches back to the earliest prophetic tradition. Jeremiah is arguing that warnings of doom need no special validation — they align with the prophetic norm.
9. This is Jeremiah's application of the Deuteronomic test of prophecy (Deuteronomy 18:21-22): the prophet of judgment needs no special proof because judgment is the default prophetic message, but the prophet of *shalom* ('peace, well-being') bears the burden of proof — only fulfillment can validate his word. The word *be'emet* ('in truth, truly') from the root *aleph-mem-nun* emphasizes genuine divine commissioning versus self-appointed prophesying.
10. Hananiah responds not with words but with a counter sign-act — he seizes Jeremiah's prophetic prop and destroys it. The word *hammotah* ('the bar, the yoke-beam') is the singular of *mototh* from 27:2. The verb *vayyishberehu* ('and he broke it') is violent and decisive. By breaking the yoke, Hananiah physically enacts his prophecy that God will break Babylon's yoke. Both prophets are now using the same dramatic prophetic genre — embodied proclamation.
11. The word *kakhah* ('just so, in this manner') ties the physical act to the prophetic word — 'just as I broke this yoke, God will break Babylon's.' The final sentence is stunning in its understatement: *vayelekh yirmeyahu hannavi ledarko* ('and Jeremiah the prophet went on his way'). Jeremiah walks away. He does not argue, does not counter-prophecy, does not invoke divine authority. He has no word from God at this moment and he will not fabricate one. This silence is among the most honest moments in prophetic literature.
12. The phrase *acharei shevor* ('after the breaking') explicitly marks a gap in time between the confrontation and God's response. Jeremiah walked away without a word because he had none — now, after an unspecified interval, the word of the LORD comes. The narrative structure validates Jeremiah's silence: a true prophet waits for God to speak rather than manufacturing a response under pressure.
13. The divine response transforms Hananiah's defiant act into an escalation of judgment. The contrast between *motot ets* ('bars of wood') and *motot barzel* ('bars of iron') is devastatingly ironic — Hananiah's attempt to break the yoke has only made it unbreakable. Wood can be splintered; iron cannot. The wordplay on the root *sh-b-r* ('break') from verse 10 is deliberately inverted: what was broken has been replaced by what cannot be broken.
14. The iron yoke echoes Deuteronomy 28:48, where serving enemies 'with an iron yoke on your neck' is listed among the covenant curses for disobedience. By invoking this image, God confirms that Babylon's dominion is not random geopolitics but covenant-curse fulfillment. The repetition of 'wild animals' (*chayyat hasadeh*) from 27:6 reaffirms the totality of Nebuchadnezzar's divinely granted dominion.
15. The verdict *lo shelachakha YHWH* ('the LORD did not send you') is the definitive declaration of false prophecy (cf. 27:15, Deuteronomy 18:20). The verb *hivtachta* ('you have caused to trust') from the root *b-t-ch* is causative — Hananiah has not merely spoken falsehood but has actively manufactured false confidence in an entire people. The word *sheqer* ('lie, falsehood') is Jeremiah's standard term for the entire apparatus of false prophecy.
16. The verb *meshallechakha* ('I am sending you away') uses the same root *sh-l-ch* as the accusation 'the LORD did not send you' (*lo shelachakha*) — a bitter wordplay. God did not 'send' Hananiah as a prophet, but God will 'send' him from the earth. The word *sarah* ('rebellion, turning aside') carries both political and theological weight — Hananiah has incited rebellion against God's declared purpose. The death sentence *hashanah attah met* ('this year you will die') sets a verifiable prophetic timeline, just as Hananiah set his own two-year timeline in verse 3.
17. The narrative fulfillment is reported with terse finality — no elaboration, no dramatic scene, no further comment. The seventh month (Tishri) is approximately two months after the fifth month (Av) confrontation in verse 1. The speed of fulfillment validates Jeremiah and condemns Hananiah by the very criterion Jeremiah proposed in verse 9: the prophet whose word comes to pass is the one truly sent by the LORD. The narrator still calls Hananiah *hannavi* ('the prophet') even in death — the title was his public identity, now rendered tragically ironic.

29

Summary: Jeremiah 29 preserves the prophet's letter to the exiles deported to Babylon in 597 BCE with King Jehoiachin.

Against the false prophets who promise a swift return, Jeremiah delivers an astonishing command: settle down, build houses, plant gardens, marry, have children, and seek the welfare (shalom) of the foreign city where God has placed you. The chapter contains one of the most quoted verses in all of scripture — 'For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope' (v. 11). The second half of the chapter pronounces judgment on the false prophets in Babylon — Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah — and especially on Shemaiah the Nehelamite, who wrote letters from Babylon demanding Jeremiah's arrest.

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter reverses a fundamental prophetic instinct. Prophets typically call Israel to separate from pagan nations, yet Jeremiah commands the exiles to integrate into Babylonian civic life and pray for its prosperity, because 'in its welfare you will find your welfare.' This theology of exile — that God's people can flourish in a foreign land, that faithfulness does not require a temple or a homeland — becomes foundational for diaspora Judaism and eventually for Christian theology of living in the world. Verse 11 is routinely quoted in isolation as a personal promise, but in its original context it is addressed to an entire exiled community and is conditioned on a seventy-year timeline (v. 10). The word machshevot ('plans, thoughts') in verse 11 deserves careful attention — it is the same word used of human scheming in other contexts, here applied to God's purposeful designs. The condemnation of Shemaiah in the chapter's closing verses shows that the battle between true and false prophecy extended beyond Jerusalem into the exile community itself.*

Translation Friction: *The word shalom appears with full covenantal weight in verses 7 and 11, requiring expanded rendering. The term machshevot (v. 11) carries a semantic range from 'thoughts' to 'plans' to 'purposes' — we rendered it as 'plans' for clarity while documenting the fuller range. The verb darash ('seek') in verse 7 is the same verb used for seeking God in worship, now applied to seeking the welfare of a pagan city — a deliberately provocative usage that must be preserved. Shemaiah's letter (vv. 24-32) introduces complex reported speech within reported speech, requiring careful handling of quotation layers. The phrase acharit vetivvah ('a future and a hope,' v. 11) could also be rendered 'an outcome and an expectation' — the more familiar rendering is retained but the Hebrew range is documented.*

Connections: *The seventy-year exile timeline connects to 25:11-12 and is referenced in Daniel 9:2 and 2 Chronicles 36:21. The command to seek the city's welfare anticipates Jesus's teaching to love enemies and pray for persecutors (Matthew 5:44). The false prophets condemned here connect to the broader anti-false-prophecy polemic of chapters 23, 27-28. Verse 11's 'plans for welfare and not for disaster' echoes the covenant blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28-30. The letter format is unique in prophetic literature and anticipates the apostolic epistles of the New Testament. The promise 'you will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart' (v. 13) echoes Deuteronomy 4:29.*

¹These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exile, to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had deported from Jerusalem to Babylon — ²after Jeconiah the king, the queen mother, the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metalworkers had gone out from Jerusalem — ³The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah dispatched to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon in Babylon. It said: ⁴This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says to all the exiles whom I sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵Build houses and settle in them. Plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶Marry and have sons and daughters. Find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there — do not diminish. ⁷Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. ⁸For this is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Do not let your prophets who are among you and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that you are prompting them to dream. ⁹For they are prophesying falsely to you in my name. I did not send them, declares the LORD. ¹⁰For this is what the LORD says: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will attend to you and fulfill my good promise to you — to bring you back to this place. ¹¹For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD — plans for welfare and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. ¹²Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. ¹⁴I will let myself be found by you, declares the LORD. I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile. ¹⁵Because you have said, 'The LORD has raised up prophets for us in Babylon' — ¹⁶For this is what the LORD says concerning the king who sits on the throne of David and all the people who remain in this city — your relatives who did not go out with you into exile: ¹⁷This is what the LORD of Hosts says: I am sending against them the sword, famine, and plague. I will make them like rotten figs, so bad they cannot be eaten. ¹⁸I will pursue them with sword, famine, and plague, and make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth — an object of cursing, devastation, scorn, and disgrace among all the nations

where I have driven them, ¹⁹because they did not listen to my words, declares the LORD, when I sent my servants the prophets to them persistently — but you would not listen, declares the LORD. ²⁰But as for you — hear the word of the LORD, all you exiles whom I sent from Jerusalem to Babylon. ²¹This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says concerning Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah, who are prophesying lies to you in my name: I am handing them over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will strike them down before your eyes. ²²From them a curse-formula will be drawn by all the exiles of Judah who are in Babylon: 'May the LORD make you like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire' — ²³because they committed outrageous acts in Israel: they committed adultery with their neighbors' wives and spoke lying words in my name, which I never commanded them. I am the one who knows, and I am the witness, declares the LORD. ²⁴To Shemaiah the Nehelamite, say this: ²⁵This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Because you sent letters in your own name to all the people in Jerusalem, to Zephaniah son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the priests, saying — ²⁶'The LORD has appointed you as priest in place of Jehoiada the priest, to be an overseer in the house of the LORD over every madman who acts as a prophet — you should put him in the stocks and the neck-iron.' ²⁷'So why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth, who is acting as a prophet among you? ²⁸For he has sent word to us in Babylon saying: The exile will be long. Build houses and settle in them. Plant gardens and eat their produce.' ²⁹Zephaniah the priest read this letter aloud in the hearing of Jeremiah the prophet. ³⁰Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ³¹Send word to all the exiles: This is what the LORD says concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite — Because Shemaiah prophesied to you when I did not send him, and he made you trust in a lie, ³²therefore this is what the LORD says: I am about to punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his descendants. He will have no one living among this people, and he will not see the good that I am going to do for my people, declares the LORD, because he spoke rebellion against the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Hebrew *sefer* ('scroll, letter, document') indicates a formal written communication, not a casual note. This is the only prophetic letter preserved in the Hebrew Bible. The word *yeter* ('remainder, survivors') indicates that some of the elder leadership had already died or been eliminated since the deportation.
2. Jeconiah (*Yekhanyah*) is also known as Jehoiachin and Coniah (cf. 22:24). The *gevirah* ('queen mother') held significant political status in Judah. The deportation of *charash* ('craftsmen') and *masger* ('metalworkers, locksmiths') was strategic — Babylon removed the skilled labor needed for military resistance (cf. 2 Kings 24:14-16). The word *sarisim* can mean 'eunuchs' or 'court officials' — we render as 'court officials' since the term had broadened by this period to include non-castrated palace administrators.
3. Jeremiah used a diplomatic delegation as his mail service — Zedekiah's own ambassadors carried the prophet's letter to the exiles. Elashah was the son of Shaphan, the scribe who had found the Book of the Law under Josiah (2 Kings 22:3-10), indicating that this family was sympathetic to Jeremiah's prophetic ministry. Gemariah son of Hilkiah may be connected to Hilkiah the high priest from Josiah's reform (2 Kings 22:8).
4. The critical theological claim is in the verb *higleti* — 'whom I sent into exile.' God takes ownership of the deportation. Nebuchadnezzar was the instrument, but God was the agent. This reframes exile not as divine defeat but as divine discipline. The full divine title 'LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel' asserts sovereignty over both the heavenly armies and the covenant people simultaneously.
5. The imperatives are strikingly domestic: build, settle, plant, eat. These are the verbs of permanence, not temporary encampment. God is commanding long-term investment in Babylonian life, directly contradicting the false prophets who promised a swift return (cf. 28:3). The word *shevu* ('settle, dwell') implies putting down roots, not merely surviving.
6. The command extends to a second generation — the exiles must plan for grandchildren, not a quick return. The verbs *revu* ('multiply') and *al-tim'atu* ('do not diminish') echo the creation mandate of Genesis 1:28 and God's promises to the patriarchs. Even in exile, the covenant community must grow and flourish. This is not mere survival but covenant fruitfulness in an alien land.
7. This verse is theologically revolutionary. The verb *dirshu* ('seek') is used elsewhere for seeking God (Deuteronomy 4:29, Amos 5:4) — now applied to seeking the *shalom* of Babylon, the empire that destroyed Jerusalem. The repetition of *shalom* ('in its shalom you will have shalom') creates an inseparable bond between the exiles' welfare and the welfare of their captors. We render *shalom* as 'welfare' rather than 'peace' here because the context demands the broader meaning — complete well-being, not just absence of conflict.
8. The phrase *asher attem machlimim* ('which you are causing to be dreamed') is remarkable — the exiles are not merely being deceived; they are actively commissioning the dreams they want to hear. The *Hiphil* form implies the audience is driving the false prophecy by seeking out prophets who will tell them what they desire. This is prophetic supply meeting popular demand.
9. The phrase *bishmi* ('in my name') makes the offense graver — these prophets do not merely predict wrongly; they invoke the divine name to authorize their lies. The verb *shlachtim* ('I sent them') is the key criterion for true prophecy in Jeremiah — a genuine prophet is one whom God sends (cf. 1:7,

23:21, 23:32, 28:15).

10. The seventy-year timeline (first stated in 25:11-12) sets the expectation for an extended exile, directly contradicting Hananiah's two-year prediction (28:3). The verb *efqod* ('I will attend to, visit') carries the double sense of divine attention — God visits to judge (as with Babylon) and to deliver (as with Israel). The phrase *devari hatov* ('my good word/promise') indicates that restoration is not a new plan but the fulfillment of an existing divine commitment.
11. This is one of the most frequently quoted verses in the entire Bible, often removed from its context. In the Hebrew, *machshavot* (from the root *ch-sh-v*, 'to think, plan, devise') carries more weight than the English 'plans' — it implies intentional, purposeful thought, the same word used for a craftsman's designs or a military strategist's calculations. The pair *acharit vetikvah* is rendered 'a future and a hope' following the most natural English reading; the KJV's 'expected end' reflects a different parsing. *Acharit* means 'latter end, outcome, posterity' and *tikvah* means 'hope, expectation, cord' (from the root *q-v-h*, 'to wait, to hope'). The verse's power lies in its context: it is spoken to people in exile who will not live to see the promise fulfilled — the seventy-year timeline means this is a promise for their children and grandchildren.
12. Three verbs describe the exiles' return to God: *qara* ('call'), *halakh* ('come, go'), and *hitpallel* ('pray'). The sequence moves from initial cry to deliberate approach to sustained prayer. God's response — 'I will listen' — reverses the exile dynamic where God refused to listen to a disobedient people (cf. 11:11, 14:12).
13. This verse echoes Deuteronomy 4:29, where Moses promised that Israel would find God when they sought him with all their heart — even from exile. The verb *biqqashtem* ('you will seek') and *dirshu* ('search') are near-synonyms intensifying the idea of wholehearted pursuit. The condition *bekhol levavkhem* ('with all your heart') mirrors the Shema's total devotion (Deuteronomy 6:5). God is findable — but only to those who search without reservation.
14. The Niphal *venimtseti* ('I will let myself be found') is reflexive — God makes himself available to be discovered by those who seek. The phrase *shavti et shevutkhem* ('I will restore your fortunes') is a wordplay on the root *shuv* — the same root that means 'return, repent.' Restoration (*shevut*) and repentance (*teshuvah*) share the same linguistic root, binding them together. God again claims agency over the exile — 'where I have driven you' — maintaining the theology that exile was divine discipline, not divine failure.
15. The exiles' claim that God raised up prophets in Babylon directly challenges Jeremiah's authority as God's spokesman from Jerusalem. The irony is sharp: the 'prophets' the exiles trust are the very ones God is about to condemn as frauds.
16. The shift turns back to Jerusalem. The 'king on David's throne' is Zedekiah, the puppet king installed by Nebuchadnezzar. The word *acheikhem* ('your relatives, your brothers') reminds the exiles that those left behind in Jerusalem are still family — but they are about to face worse judgment.
17. The triad of sword, famine, and plague (*cherev, ra'av, dever*) is Jeremiah's signature judgment formula, appearing over fifteen times in the book. The rotten-fig image recalls the vision of chapter 24, where two baskets of figs represented the exiles (good figs) and those remaining in Jerusalem (bad figs). The Hebrew *sho'arim* ('horrible, shuddering') describes figs so repulsive they cause revulsion.
18. The four-fold curse formula — *alah* ('cursing'), *shammah* ('devastation, desolation'), *shereqah* ('hissing, whistling in scorn'), and *cherpah* ('reproach, disgrace') — is a Jeremianic expansion of the Deuteronomic curse vocabulary. The hissing (*shereqah*) describes the involuntary gasp of horror from passersby who see the ruins, a sound combining shock and contempt.
19. The Jeremianic idiom *hashkem veshaloch* ('rising early and sending') again conveys God's tireless effort to reach his people through the prophets (cf. 7:25, 25:4, 26:5). The abrupt shift from third person ('they did not listen') to second person ('you would not listen') directly addresses the exiles, collapsing the distance between past and present generations of disobedience.
20. The emphatic *ve'attem* ('but as for you') redirects the oracle to the exilic audience. Again God asserts agency over the exile: *shillachti* ('I sent'). The command to hear (*shim'u*) contrasts with the refusal to hear in the previous verse.
21. These are not the biblical king Ahab or King Zedekiah — these are otherwise unknown false prophets bearing the same names. Their execution by Nebuchadnezzar would serve as public proof that their prophecies were false. The phrase *le'eineikhem* ('before your eyes') emphasizes that the exiles will witness the judgment themselves.
22. The verb *qalam* ('roasted') is graphic and specific — execution by fire, likely referring to the Babylonian practice of burning convicted criminals alive (cf. Daniel 3). Their names become proverbial curse material — the ultimate reversal for men who claimed to speak for God. The curse-formula (*qelalah*) invokes their fate as the worst thing one could wish upon an enemy.
23. The word *nevalah* ('outrage, disgraceful folly') is the term used for the most egregious social violations in Israel — rape (Genesis 34:7, 2 Samuel 13:12), violation of hospitality (Judges 19:23-24), and covenant-breaking. Their double crime is moral and prophetic: adultery violates the social covenant, and false prophecy violates the divine commission. God's self-identification as both knower (*yodea*) and witness (*ed*) uses legal language — God is simultaneously the omniscient judge and the eyewitness who can testify.
24. Shemaiah is identified as *hannechelami* ('the Nehelamite'), which may refer to a place of origin or may be a wordplay on *chalom* ('dream'), implying 'the dreamer' — a sarcastic epithet for a false prophet who claims divine dreams. The ambiguity may be intentional.
25. Shemaiah sent his own counter-letter from Babylon to Jerusalem, creating a prophetic letter-war across the empire. He wrote *beshimkha* ('in your own name') — not in God's name but in his own authority, yet attempting to exercise priestly power from exile. Zephaniah son of Maaseiah served as a temple official who would have authority to act on such instructions.

26. Shemaiah's letter invokes Jehoiada the priest as a precedent for temple police authority. The word *meshugga* ('madman') was used dismissively of prophets by their opponents (cf. 2 Kings 9:11, Hosea 9:7) — Shemaiah characterizes Jeremiah as insane. The *mahpekhet* ('stocks' — a device that twists the body into a painful position) and *tsinnoq* ('neck-iron, collar') are instruments of public punishment and humiliation previously used against Jeremiah (cf. 20:2).
27. Shemaiah demands to know why Zephaniah has not used his authority to silence Jeremiah. The dismissive *hammitnabei* ('who makes himself a prophet, who acts as a prophet') denies the legitimacy of Jeremiah's call. The identification 'of Anathoth' — Jeremiah's hometown — may carry a sneer: he is a small-town prophet presuming to speak for God.
28. Shemaiah quotes Jeremiah's own letter (v. 5) back to Jerusalem with outrage. The phrase *arukhah hi* ('it will be long') summarizes the seventy-year message that the false prophets found intolerable. The very words of divine instruction — build, settle, plant, eat — become Shemaiah's evidence for prosecution.
29. Rather than acting on Shemaiah's demand to arrest Jeremiah, Zephaniah reads the letter to Jeremiah himself — a quiet act of either sympathy or fair warning. The phrase *be'oznei* ('in the ears of') indicates public or formal reading aloud, not private communication.
30. The standard prophetic reception formula signals a direct divine response to Shemaiah's challenge. God answers the attempted suppression with a counter-oracle.
31. The phrase *va'ani lo shelachtivu* ('and I did not send him') is the definitive criterion of false prophecy in Jeremiah — legitimacy comes only from divine commission (cf. 23:21, 28:15). The verb *hivtiach* ('he made you trust, gave you confidence') indicates that Shemaiah's false prophecy was not merely wrong information but a false ground for confidence that prevented the people from accepting the reality of their situation.
32. The punishment is total exclusion — Shemaiah's entire line is cut off from the restored community. The phrase *lo yir'eh batov* ('he will not see the good') is particularly cruel in context: God has just promised restoration (vv. 10-14), and Shemaiah will be excluded from it. The word *sarah* ('rebellion, turning aside, revolt') characterizes false prophecy not as mere error but as incitement to rebellion against divine authority. The punishment mirrors the crime: Shemaiah tried to prevent the exiles from hearing God's true word, and now he is prevented from participating in God's promised future.

30

Summary: Jeremiah 30 opens the Book of Consolation (chapters 30-33), the heart of Jeremiah's hope oracles. God commands the prophet to write all his words in a scroll, then declares that the days are coming when he will restore the fortunes of Israel and Judah. The chapter moves through terror to triumph: a vivid depiction of anguish so severe it is compared to a man in labor (v. 6), followed by the promise of deliverance from foreign bondage, the raising up of 'David their king' (v. 9), and the healing of wounds that others have called incurable. The chapter closes with the whirlwind of the LORD's wrath against the wicked, framing restoration not as cheap comfort but as the fruit of divine justice.

What Makes This Remarkable: This chapter marks a dramatic tonal shift in Jeremiah. The prophet whose oracles have been dominated by judgment, destruction, and exile now pivots to sustained hope — but hope that passes through suffering, not around it. The wound/healing imagery is central: God acknowledges that he himself inflicted the wound ('I struck you as an enemy strikes,' v. 14), yet he is also the healer. The mention of 'David their king' (v. 9) introduces a messianic expectation — not David personally resurrected, but a future ruler from David's line whom God will raise up. This connects to the 'righteous Branch' of 23:5-6 and becomes foundational for messianic theology in both Jewish and Christian traditions. The command to write everything in a scroll (v. 2) is itself significant — it suggests that these hope oracles were composed as a distinct literary collection before being incorporated into the larger book of Jeremiah.

*Translation Friction: The verb shuv ('restore, return') dominates this chapter in multiple forms, requiring careful attention to which sense is operative in each instance. The phrase 'David their king' (v. 9) is rendered literally without resolving whether this refers to a literal Davidic restoration or a messianic figure — the ambiguity is preserved with notes documenting both readings. The wound/healing vocabulary (*makkah*, *shever*, *teruphah*, *arukah*) carries precise medical connotations that resist simple English equivalents. The phrase 'a time of distress for Jacob' (v. 7) — *et tsarah le-Ya'aqov* — is traditionally rendered 'Jacob's trouble' and carries significant weight in eschatological interpretation; we render it plainly while noting the traditional reading. The closing verses (vv. 23-24) reuse judgment language from 23:19-20 nearly verbatim, and we preserve the parallel rather than disguising it.*

Connections: The command to write in a scroll connects to 36:2 where Baruch writes Jeremiah's oracles. The 'time of distress for Jacob' (v. 7) echoes Daniel 12:1 and is developed in eschatological literature. 'David their king' connects to 23:5-6 (the righteous Branch), Ezekiel 34:23-24, 37:24-25, and Hosea 3:5. The wound/healing imagery connects to Isaiah 1:5-6 and anticipates 33:6. The breaking of the yoke (v. 8) reverses the yoke imagery from chapters 27-28 where Jeremiah wore a yoke symbolizing Babylonian subjugation. The closing whirlwind oracle (vv. 23-24) is nearly identical to 23:19-20, creating a literary frame connecting judgment of false prophets with the promise of restoration.

¹The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Write down in a scroll all the words that I have spoken to you. ³For the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel and Judah, says the LORD. I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their ancestors, and they will take possession of it. ⁴These are the words that the LORD spoke concerning Israel and Judah:

⁵For this is what the LORD says:
A cry of terror we have heard —
fear, and no peace.

⁶Ask now and consider —
can a man bear a child?
Then why do I see every warrior
with his hands on his hips like a woman in labor,
and every face drained of color?

⁷How terrible! For that day is great —
there is none like it.
It is a time of distress for Jacob,
but he will be saved out of it.

⁸On that day, declares the LORD of Hosts,
I will break the yoke from your neck
and tear apart your chains,
and foreigners will enslave you no longer.

⁹Instead they will serve the LORD their God
and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.

¹⁰So do not be afraid, my servant Jacob, declares the LORD,
and do not be dismayed, Israel.
For I am going to save you from far away,
and your descendants from the land of their captivity.
Jacob will return and be at rest,
at ease, with no one to cause him fear.

¹¹For I am with you to save you, declares the LORD.
I will make a complete end of all the nations
where I scattered you,
but I will not make a complete end of you.
I will discipline you with justice —
but I will by no means leave you unpunished.

¹²For this is what the LORD says:
Your fracture is beyond healing;
your wound is severe.

¹³No one pleads your case for healing;
there is no remedy for you, no recovery.

¹⁴All your lovers have forgotten you;
they care nothing for you.
For I struck you as an enemy strikes,
with the discipline of a cruel one,
because your iniquity is great
and your sins are many.

¹⁵Why do you cry out over your fracture?
Your pain is beyond cure.
Because your iniquity is great
and your sins are many,
I have done these things to you.

¹⁶Therefore all who devour you will be devoured,
and all your enemies — every one of them — will go into captivity.
Those who plunder you will become plunder,
and all who loot you I will give over to be looted.

¹⁷For I will bring healing to you
and cure you of your wounds, declares the LORD,
because they have called you 'Outcast' —
'That is Zion; no one cares about her.'

¹⁸This is what the LORD says:
I am about to restore the fortunes of Jacob's tents
and have compassion on his dwellings.
The city will be rebuilt on its own mound,
and the citadel will stand in its rightful place.

¹⁹From them will come thanksgiving
and the sound of celebration.
I will multiply them, and they will not decrease;
I will honor them, and they will not be insignificant.

²⁰His children will be as they were in former times,
and his assembly will be established before me.
I will punish all who oppress them.

²¹His leader will be one of his own,
and his ruler will come from his midst.
I will bring him near, and he will approach me —
for who would otherwise risk his life

to approach me? declares the LORD.

²²You will be my people,
and I will be your God.

²³Look — the storm of the LORD!
Wrath has gone out,
a whirlwind sweeping onward.
It will burst upon the heads of the wicked.

²⁴The burning anger of the LORD will not turn back
until he has accomplished it,
until he has carried out the purposes of his heart.
In days to come you will understand this.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The standard prophetic reception formula. The Hebrew *le'mor* ('saying') functions as a colon introducing direct speech and is rendered accordingly rather than retained as a redundant English word.
2. The command *ketav-lekha* ('write for yourself') initiates what scholars call the Book of Consolation (chapters 30-33). The word *sefer* can mean 'book, scroll, document' — we render 'scroll' as the physical medium of the ancient world. This command to write parallels 36:2 where God later instructs Jeremiah to dictate all his oracles to Baruch, suggesting these hope oracles were preserved as a distinct written collection.
3. The phrase *shavti et shevut* ('I will restore the fortunes') opens the Book of Consolation with the same formula used in 29:14. Both Israel (the northern kingdom, destroyed in 722 BCE) and Judah (the southern kingdom, now in exile) are included in the restoration promise — this is a pan-Israelite hope, not limited to one kingdom. The verb *vireshuha* ('they will possess it') echoes the Deuteronomic conquest language, framing the return as a second entry into the promised land.
4. This verse functions as a secondary heading, introducing the oracles that follow. The dual address to both Israel and Judah reinforces the pan-Israelite scope of the restoration promise.
5. The oracle shifts to poetry. The word *charadah* ('trembling, terror, dread') describes physical shaking from fear. The phrase *ve'ein shalom* ('and there is no peace') echoes the false prophets' empty promise of 'Peace, peace!' (6:14, 8:11) — the reality is the opposite of what they proclaimed. The first-person plural 'we have heard' may represent the exilic community or a prophetic identification with the people's experience.
6. The image is deliberately shocking — mighty warriors (*gever*, 'strong man, warrior') reduced to the posture of a woman in labor, hands gripping their hips in agony. The word *yeraqon* ('greenness, pallor') describes the sickly color of extreme fear or pain — faces literally turning green. The rhetorical question 'can a man bear a child?' sets up the absurdity: the answer should be no, yet here they are, doubled over like women giving birth. The Hebrew *chalatsav* ('his loins, his hips') specifically refers to the area of the body associated with both childbirth and masculine strength.
7. The interjection *hoi* ('alas, woe, how terrible') is a funeral-lament particle, used when death or catastrophe looms. The phrase *et tsarah le-Ya'aqov* is traditionally rendered 'the time of Jacob's trouble' — a phrase that has taken on eschatological significance in various interpretive traditions (cf. Daniel 12:1). We render 'a time of distress for Jacob' to stay close to the Hebrew without importing later theological frameworks. The critical turn is the final clause: *umimmenah yivvashe'a* ('but from it he will be saved') — the distress is not the end of the story.
8. The yoke imagery directly reverses chapters 27-28, where Jeremiah wore a wooden and iron yoke symbolizing Babylonian domination. The verb *eshbor* ('I will break') and the noun *ul* ('yoke') recall Hananiah's symbolic breaking of Jeremiah's yoke (28:10) — what the false prophet did prematurely in symbolic theater, God will do in reality at the appointed time. The word *mosrotekha* ('your bonds, chains') adds a second image of bondage beyond the yoke. The shift between second person ('your neck') and third person ('him') is characteristic of Hebrew prophetic poetry.
9. The pairing of 'the LORD their God' and 'David their king' creates a dual loyalty structure: covenant allegiance to God and political allegiance to a Davidic ruler. The verb *aqim* ('I will raise up') connects to the 'righteous Branch' oracle of 23:5 (using the same root *q-w-m*) and to Ezekiel's parallel promise in 34:23-24 and 37:24-25. Hosea 3:5 uses the identical phrase 'David their king.' Whether this refers to a restored Davidic monarchy or a messianic figure transcending historical kingship is left open in the text itself — the rendering preserves the ambiguity.
10. The address 'my servant Jacob' echoes Isaiah 41:8-10 and 44:1-2, placing Jeremiah's oracle in the broader prophetic tradition of comfort. The triple description of peace — *shaqat* ('rest, be quiet'), *sha'anan* ('at ease, tranquil'), and *ein macharid* ('none causing fear') — paints a comprehensive picture of security. The phrase *ein macharid* ('none making afraid') is a covenant-blessing formula from Leviticus 26:6 — the restored future will fulfill the original covenant promises.

11. The distinction is critical: the nations face kalah ('complete destruction, annihilation'), but Israel faces yissar ('discipline, correction') — painful but purposive. The phrase lamishpat ('with justice, according to judgment') indicates that God's discipline is measured and proportional, not arbitrary. The final clause venaqqeh lo anaqqeka ('I will certainly not leave you unpunished') uses the emphatic infinitive absolute to stress that mercy does not mean impunity. This verse appears nearly identically in 46:28, framing the oracles against the nations.
12. The medical vocabulary is precise: shever ('fracture, break, shattering') describes a catastrophic structural break, and makkah ('wound, blow, plague') refers to an injury inflicted by a blow. The adjective anush ('incurable, desperate, beyond remedy') and nachlah ('grievous, sickly') paint a clinical picture of a patient given no hope of recovery. The feminine singular address personifies Israel/Judah as a wounded woman — a striking shift from the masculine 'Jacob' of the previous verses.
13. The word mazor ('healing, binding up of a wound') refers to the medical treatment of bandaging. The phrase teruphot refu'ot ('healing remedies, medicines of cure') uses two near-synonyms intensifying the hopelessness — not just one medicine is missing, but the entire category of healing is unavailable. The legal metaphor dan dinekh ('one judging your case, pleading your cause') introduces a courtroom image: no advocate will step forward on behalf of this patient.
14. The 'lovers' (me'ahavayikh) are the foreign allies Judah courted for political protection — Egypt, Assyria, and others — who have now abandoned her (cf. Ezekiel 16, 23). The most theologically jarring statement is hikkitikh ('I struck you') — God identifies himself as the one who inflicted the wound, and he did so makkat ovey ('as an enemy strikes'). God temporarily took the posture of an enemy toward his own people. The reason is stated plainly: rov avonekh ('the greatness of your iniquity') and atsmu chatto'tayikh ('your sins were numerous'). The distinction between avon ('iniquity, guilt') and chata'ot ('sins, failures') preserves the Hebrew differentiation between the condition of guilt and the individual acts of transgression.
15. God's question is not sympathetic but confrontational: why cry out when you brought this upon yourself? The repetition of rov avonekh and atsmu chatto'tayikh from verse 14 hammers the point — the suffering has a cause, and the cause is Israel's own faithlessness. The final asiti elleh lakh ('I have done these things to you') is stark divine ownership of the judgment. Yet in context, this brutal honesty is preparation for healing — God must diagnose before he can cure.
16. The word lakhen ('therefore') marks the pivot from diagnosis to promise — precisely because God inflicted the wound justly, he now turns justice against the oppressors. The fourfold reversal (devourers devoured, enemies exiled, plunderers plundered, looters looted) uses measure-for-measure justice language. The verb forms create precise mirror images: okhlayikh ye'akhelu ('your devourers will be devoured'), shosayikh limshissah ('your plunderers to plunder'), bozeyayikh etten lavaz ('your looters I will give to looting').
17. The word arukhah ('healing, new flesh over a wound') specifically describes the growth of new tissue — this is not merely pain relief but genuine regeneration. The motive clause is striking: God heals not because Israel has repented but because the nations have dismissed Zion as worthless. The taunt niddachah ('outcast, driven away') and doresh ein lah ('no one seeks her') provoke God's protective instinct — he will not let his people be written off by their contemptors. The verb darash ('seek, care for') is the same verb used in 29:7 for seeking the city's welfare — no one is seeking Zion's welfare, so God himself will.
18. The 'tents of Jacob' (ohalei Ya'aqov) evokes the nomadic patriarchal past — even in restoration, Israel's identity is rooted in the tent-dwelling ancestors. The word arachem ('I will have compassion') from the root r-ch-m connotes deep, visceral mercy — the same root as rechem ('womb'). The tel ('mound, ruin-heap') refers to the archaeological mound formed by successive cities built on the same site — Jerusalem will be rebuilt precisely where it fell, on top of its own ruins.
19. The pairing of todah ('thanksgiving, praise') and qol mesachaqim ('sound of those celebrating, laughing') replaces the sounds of lamentation that have characterized the preceding chapters. The verbs hirbiti ('I will multiply') and hikhbadti ('I will make weighty, honor') reverse the exile's diminishment. The root k-v-d in hikhbadtim is the same root as kavod ('glory, weight') — God will restore their significance, their substance, their weight in the world.
20. The word adato ('his assembly, his congregation') uses edah, the term for Israel's formal assembly before God — the covenant community reconstituted. The phrase lefanai tikkon ('before me it will be established') means the community will stand secure in God's presence, a reversal of the exile's separation from the temple and divine presence. The verb paqadti ('I will attend to, punish') carries the same double sense noted in 29:10 — God's attention means judgment for oppressors.
21. The word addiro ('his majestic one, his noble leader') and moshlo ('his ruler') describe the future Davidic king from verse 9. The phrase arav et libbo ('pledged his heart, risked his life') uses the vocabulary of surety and collateral — approaching God is so dangerous that no one would dare without divine invitation. The verb hiqravtiv ('I will bring him near') uses the same root as qorban ('offering') — the king's access to God's presence has a priestly, sacrificial quality. This verse grants the future ruler both political authority (he comes from the people) and priestly access (he approaches God directly).
22. The bilateral covenant formula vihyitem li le'am va'anokhi ehyeh lakhem le'elohim ('you will be my people and I will be your God') is the theological center of the Book of Consolation. It appeared in 11:4 as a covenant that was broken; here it reappears as a covenant being restored. The formula's simplicity — two clauses, perfect symmetry — carries the full weight of the Sinai relationship. This is the third time this formula appears in Jeremiah (7:23, 11:4), and each occurrence marks a different stage: original promise, broken covenant, and now renewed hope.
23. This verse is nearly identical to 23:19, where it concludes the oracle against false prophets. Its reuse here creates a literary bracket: the judgment announced against false prophets in chapter 23 frames the restoration promises of chapter 30. The word sa'ar ('storm, tempest') and the participle mitgorer ('sweeping, whirling, churning') depict divine wrath as a natural catastrophe — uncontrollable, indiscriminate against those in its path. The

verb *yachul* ('it will whirl, burst, writhe') on the heads of the wicked echoes the labor imagery of verse 6.

24. Also nearly identical to 23:20. The phrase *mezimmot libbo* ('the purposes/plans of his heart') echoes the *machshavot* of 29:11 — God has purposes, and his anger serves those purposes rather than existing for its own sake. The phrase *be'acharit hayyamim* ('in the latter days, in days to come') points to a future moment of clarity when the full meaning of both judgment and restoration will be understood. The verb *titbonenu* ('you will understand, contemplate, discern') implies that comprehension of God's ways requires hindsight — only from the vantage point of fulfillment can the coherence of God's plan be seen.

31

Summary: *Jeremiah 31 is the theological summit of the Book of Consolation (chapters 30-33) and arguably the single most consequential chapter in all of Jeremiah. It opens with oracles of restoration for northern Israel — Ephraim, the lost tribes — promising that the exiles will return with weeping and joy. Rachel weeps for her vanished children at Ramah, but God commands her to stop: they will come back. The chapter builds to its climax in verses 31-34, where God announces the berit chadashah — the new covenant — the only occurrence of this exact phrase in the entire Hebrew Bible. This covenant will not be like Sinai, which Israel broke; instead, God will write his torah directly on human hearts, making external enforcement unnecessary. The chapter closes with cosmic imagery: as long as the fixed order of sun, moon, and stars endures, Israel will endure as a nation before God.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains the phrase berit chadashah ('new covenant'), which appears nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible and which gave the Christian scriptures their name ('New Testament' derives from the Latin novum testamentum, a translation of the Greek he kaine diatheke, itself a translation of the Hebrew berit chadashah from this passage). The theological weight is extraordinary: Hebrews 8:8-12 quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 at length as the foundational text for the new covenant in Christ, while Jewish tradition reads the same passage as a promise of renewed Torah observance written on Israelite hearts. Both readings find genuine support in the Hebrew. We rendered this passage with maximum transparency, documenting both traditions without privileging either. The chapter also contains Rachel weeping for her children (v. 15), quoted in Matthew 2:18 in connection with Herod's massacre of the innocents — a typological application that layers new meaning onto Jeremiah's original reference to the Exile. The divine declaration 'I have loved you with an everlasting love' (ahavat olam, v. 3) and the depiction of God's rachamim ('womb-love') for Ephraim (v. 20) together present the most concentrated expression of divine tenderness in the prophetic literature.*

Translation Friction: *The relationship between the 'new covenant' and the Sinai covenant required careful handling: the Hebrew chadashah means 'new' not 'renewed,' yet the content of the new covenant (Torah on hearts, knowledge of God) is continuous with the old. We rendered the Hebrew transparently and documented both the discontinuity (genuinely new, not a patch on the old) and the continuity (Torah remains central) in the notes. The verb heperu (v. 32, 'they broke') required attention — God is the wronged party, the faithful husband whose covenant partner proved faithless. The phrase ahavat olam (v. 3) was rendered 'everlasting love' rather than 'eternal love' because olam denotes duration beyond sight, not philosophical infinity. In verse 15, Rachel's weeping at Ramah required historical context: Rachel's tomb was near Bethlehem, but Ramah was a deportation staging point — the note documents both the geographical and typological significance. The verb mashakhtikh (v. 3, 'I have drawn you') carries overtones of attraction and courtship, which the expanded rendering addresses.*

Connections: *Verse 3 (ahavat olam / chesed) connects to Hosea's marriage metaphor and to Psalm 136's refrain 'for his faithful love endures forever.' Verse 15 (Rachel weeping) is quoted in Matthew 2:18. Verses 31-34 (the new covenant) are quoted at length in Hebrews 8:8-12 and 10:16-17, and the phrase berit chadashah stands behind the institution narrative of the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:20, 1 Corinthians 11:25). Verse 20 (rachamim for Ephraim) connects to Hosea 11:8-9 (God's compassion overriding judgment). The cosmic permanence language (vv. 35-37) echoes Genesis 1 and Psalm 89:36-37. The rebuilding of Jerusalem (vv. 38-40) connects forward to Nehemiah's reconstruction and to eschatological visions in Zechariah 14 and Revelation 21.*

¹At that time, declares the LORD, I will be God to all the clans of Israel, and they will be my people. ²This is what the LORD says: The people who survived the sword found favor in the wilderness — Israel, when I went to give him rest. ³From far away the LORD appeared to me: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with faithful love." ⁴I will build you again, and you will be rebuilt, young woman Israel! You will again take up your tambourines and go out dancing with those who celebrate. ⁵You will again plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria; planters will plant and enjoy the fruit. ⁶For a day is coming when watchmen on the hills of Ephraim will call out: "Come, let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God!" ⁷For this is what the LORD says: Sing out with joy for Jacob! Shout at the head of the nations! Make it heard, give praise, and say: "LORD, save your people, the remnant of Israel!" ⁸Look — I am bringing them from the land of the north and gathering them from the farthest parts of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and the one in labor, together — a great assembly will return here. ⁹They will come with weeping, and with pleas for mercy I will lead them. I will bring them to streams of water, on a level path where they will not stumble — for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. ¹⁰Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and proclaim it on the distant coastlands. Say: "The one who scattered Israel will gather him and guard him as a shepherd guards his flock." ¹¹For the LORD has ransomed Jacob and redeemed him from the hand of one stronger than he. ¹²They will come and sing on the heights of Zion, streaming toward the goodness of the LORD — toward grain, new wine, and fresh oil, toward young flocks and herds. Their life will be like a well-watered garden, and they will never languish again. ¹³Then young women will rejoice in the dance, and young men and elders together. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them and give them gladness instead of grief. ¹⁴I will drench the priests with abundance, and my people will be satisfied with my goodness, declares the LORD. ¹⁵This is what the LORD says: A voice is heard in Ramah — wailing, bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are gone. ¹⁶This is what the LORD says: Hold back your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your labor, declares the LORD — they will return from the land of the enemy. ¹⁷There is hope for your future, declares the LORD — your children will return to their own territory. ¹⁸I have surely heard Ephraim grieving: "You disciplined me and I was disciplined, like an untrained calf. Bring me back and I will return, for you are the LORD my God." ¹⁹For after I turned away, I was filled with regret; after I came to understand, I struck my thigh in shame. I was ashamed — deeply humiliated — because I bore the disgrace of my youth. ²⁰Is Ephraim my precious son? Is he the child I delight in? For as often as I speak against him, I still remember him deeply. Therefore my inner being churns for him — I will surely have compassion on him, declares the LORD. ²¹Set up road markers for yourself; place signposts for yourself. Fix your attention on the highway, the road by which you went. Return, young woman Israel — return to these cities of yours. ²²How long will you waver, O faithless daughter? For the LORD has created something new on the earth — a woman will embrace a man. ²³This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: They will again use this saying in the land of Judah and its cities when I restore their fortunes — "May the LORD bless you, O pasture of righteousness, O holy mountain!" ²⁴Judah and all its cities together will dwell in it — farmers and those who move about with their flocks. ²⁵For I will satisfy the weary, and every one who languishes I will fill. ²⁶At this I awoke and looked around, and my sleep had been pleasant to me. ²⁷The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. ²⁸And just as I watched over them to uproot, to tear down, to overthrow, to destroy, and to bring harm — so I will watch over them to build and to plant, declares the LORD. ²⁹In those days they will no longer say, "The parents ate sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." ³⁰Instead, each person will die for his own iniquity. Whoever eats sour grapes — his own teeth will be set on edge. ³¹The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will cut a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant I cut with their ancestors on the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt — my covenant that they broke, though I was a faithful husband to them, declares the LORD. ³³Rather, this is the covenant I will cut with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my instruction within them, and I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴No longer will each one teach his neighbor or each one his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more. ³⁵This is what the LORD says — he who gives the sun for light by day, who sets the

fixed order of moon and stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar — the LORD of Hosts is his name: ³⁶"If these fixed orders could be removed from before me," declares the LORD, "then the offspring of Israel would also cease to be a nation before me — for all time." ³⁷This is what the LORD says: "If the heavens above could be measured and the foundations of the earth below explored, then I would also reject all the offspring of Israel for everything they have done," declares the LORD. ³⁸The days are coming, declares the LORD, when the city will be rebuilt for the LORD, from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. ³⁹The measuring line will extend further, straight to the hill of Gareb, and will turn toward Goah. ⁴⁰The entire valley of corpses and ashes, and all the terraced fields as far as the Kidron Valley, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east — all of it will be holy to the LORD. It will never again be uprooted or torn down, for all time.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The covenant formula 'I will be their God and they will be my people' reappears here at the opening of the chapter, signaling the restoration of the relationship broken in chapters 2-29. The word mishpechot ('clans, families') emphasizes that every subdivision of Israel — not just Judah — is included in the restoration.
2. The Hebrew chen ('favor, grace') echoes the language of the Exodus — just as Israel found favor with God in the wilderness of Sinai, so the survivors of judgment will find divine favor again. The phrase sridei charev ('survivors of the sword') refers to those who survived military destruction, either the Assyrian conquest of the north or the coming Babylonian exile.
3. The phrase ahavat olam ('everlasting love') appears only here and in the parallel construction of Psalm 103:17. The word olam does not denote philosophical eternity but duration whose limits are hidden from view — love that stretches beyond what can be seen. The verb mashakh in this context means 'to draw, to attract, to pull gently' — it is the language of courtship, not coercion. Chesed is rendered 'faithful love' per project standard, capturing the covenantal dimension that the KJV's 'lovingkindness' partially obscures. The verse structure places two declarations of divine love in parallel: the love itself (ahavat olam) and its active expression (chesed).
4. The title betulat Yisrael ('virgin of Israel') is rendered 'young woman Israel' because betulah in prophetic address functions as a personification of the nation as a maiden — the emphasis is on vulnerability and youth rather than sexual status. The tambourines (tuppim) recall the celebration after the Red Sea crossing (Exodus 15:20), where Miriam led the women with timbrels — the restoration will mirror the Exodus celebration.
5. The reference to Samaria — capital of the northern kingdom destroyed by Assyria in 722 BCE — signals that this oracle addresses the lost northern tribes, not just Judah. The verb chilelu ('enjoy as common, treat as profane') is a technical agricultural term: fruit trees were considered sacred (and their fruit forbidden) for the first three years (Leviticus 19:23-25). To 'profane' the fruit means to reach the year when it becomes ordinary food — the planters will live long enough to enjoy what they planted.
6. The notsrim ('watchmen, sentinels') are the lookouts who scan for pilgrimage festivals and new moons. The stunning element is location: Ephraim's watchmen — from the rebellious northern kingdom that rejected the Jerusalem temple — will call their people to worship at Zion. This envisions the reunification of the divided kingdoms around a single sanctuary. The verb na'aleh ('let us go up') is the technical term for pilgrimage to Jerusalem, which sits at elevation.
7. The phrase berosh hagoyim ('at the head of the nations') indicates that Israel's restoration will be so dramatic that it becomes the leading story among all peoples. The prayer hosha YHWH ('save, LORD') uses the root y-sh-a, from which the name Yeshua/Joshua/Jesus derives. The word she'erit ('remnant') is a key prophetic concept — not all were destroyed; a preserved core survives for restoration.
8. The catalogue of vulnerable people — blind, lame, pregnant, laboring — emphasizes that this is not a military march but a compassionate ingathering. God brings home those who could never make the journey on their own strength. The 'land of the north' (erets tsafon) is the standard designation for Babylon and Assyria, which lay north-northeast of Israel along the Fertile Crescent trade routes.
9. The declaration 'Ephraim is my firstborn' (Ephrayim bekhori hu) is remarkable because historically Ephraim was Joseph's younger son (Genesis 48:14-20) and the northern kingdom that rebelled against the Davidic dynasty. God reasserts his paternal claim over the estranged tribes. The 'level path' (derekh yesharah) and 'streams of water' echo the new exodus imagery of Isaiah 40-55 — God will make the return journey as miraculous as the original Exodus.
10. The nations themselves are summoned as witnesses to Israel's restoration — the same nations that watched the destruction will watch the regathering. The verb mezareh ('the one who scattered') uses the same root as 'winnowing' — scattering grain on the threshing floor. God scattered Israel like chaff, but now gathers them as a shepherd gathers sheep. The mixed metaphors (winnowing and shepherding) span the full arc from judgment to restoration.
11. Two redemption verbs appear together: padah ('ransom,' commercial redemption — paying a price to free someone) and ga'al ('redeem,' familial redemption — a kinsman reclaiming what belongs to the family). Together they present God as both the one who pays the price and the kinsman who is obligated by blood to rescue. The 'one stronger' refers to Babylon, the imperial power that held Israel captive.
12. The verb naharu ('stream, flow, radiate') depicts the people flowing toward Zion like rivers converging — an image of irresistible, joyful movement. The word nephesh ('soul, life, being') is rendered 'life' rather than 'soul' because the comparison to a watered garden emphasizes the whole person's flourishing, not an immaterial soul. The catalogue of blessings (grain, wine, oil, livestock) represents the full scope of agricultural abundance

promised under the covenant.

13. The reversal theme is emphatic: mourning becomes joy, grief becomes gladness. The word *betulah* ('young woman') here functions collectively — all the young women of restored Israel will dance. The pairing of *bachurim* ('young men') and *zeqenim* ('elders') encompasses the full demographic range. The verb *nichamtim* ('I will comfort them') shares the root n-ch-m with the name Nehemiah ('the LORD comforts') — comfort is not passive consolation but active divine intervention to reverse sorrow.
14. The verb *rivveithi* ('I will drench, saturate') is more intense than simple satisfaction — it means to soak thoroughly, to overflow. The word *dashen* ('fatness, abundance') refers to the choicest portions of sacrificial offerings. When the people bring abundant offerings, the priests' portion overflows — prosperity in worship and daily life are inseparable in this vision.
15. The verb *mevakkah* ('weeping') is a participle — Rachel's weeping is ongoing, not a single event. The phrase *me'anah lehinnachem* ('she refuses to be comforted') uses the same root n-ch-m as verse 13, creating a deliberate contrast: God promises to comfort Israel, but Rachel refuses comfort. The tension is resolved in the next verse when God commands her to stop weeping. Ramah is identified with modern er-Ram, about five miles north of Jerusalem. In Jeremiah 40:1, Ramah is where the Babylonian captain Nebuzaradan processed the exiles — it was literally where the deportees were gathered. Matthew 2:18 quotes this verse in connection with Herod's slaughter of the infants of Bethlehem, applying it typologically to a new grief near Rachel's tomb (Genesis 35:19).
16. God directly addresses Rachel and commands her to stop weeping — not because her grief is wrong but because it will be answered. The word *sakhar* ('reward, wages') is concrete and commercial: Rachel's labor (*pe'ullatekh*) of bearing and raising children will be compensated. The children are not gone permanently — they will return. The verb *shavu* ('they will return') uses the key Jeremiah verb *shuv*, here in its hopeful sense of homecoming.
17. The word *acharit* ('end, latter days, future') here means the outcome, the final chapter — Rachel's story does not end in grief. The word *gevulam* ('their territory, border') is specific: the children will not merely survive in exile but will return to their own ancestral land. The promise addresses the deepest fear of exile — permanent displacement from the promised land.
18. The emphatic construction *shamoa shamati* ('I have surely heard') — an infinitive absolute — stresses that God has been listening to Ephraim's lament. The simile of the untrained calf (*egel lo lummad*) acknowledges that Ephraim was stubborn and needed breaking, like a young ox that has never worn a yoke. The prayer *hashiveni ve'ashuvah* ('bring me back and I will return') plays on the verb *shuv* — Ephraim cannot return on his own; God must initiate the turning. This is a theology of grace embedded in a single Hebrew verb: repentance requires divine initiative.
19. Ephraim's confession continues. Striking the thigh (*safaqti al yarekh*) is a gesture of grief, shame, and self-reproach — comparable to beating the breast in other cultures. The 'disgrace of my youth' (*cherpat ne'urai*) refers to the sins of the nation's early history — idolatry, rebellion, the golden calves of Jeroboam. The word *niklami* ('humiliated, disgraced') is stronger than simple embarrassment — it is the shame of public exposure.
20. The rhetorical questions expect an emphatic 'yes' — Ephraim is God's precious son, the child of delight. The phrase *hamu me'ai* ('my inner being churns') describes an involuntary physical response — the intestines/bowels twisting with emotion. This is not a calm decision to show mercy but an uncontrollable parental instinct. The verb *rachem arachamenu* ('I will surely have compassion') is the emphatic infinitive absolute of r-ch-m, which shares its root with *rechem* ('womb'). God's mercy for Ephraim is womb-love — the primal, visceral compassion of a parent for the child of their body. This verse is among the most intimate depictions of divine emotion in the Hebrew Bible, paralleled by Hosea 11:8-9.
21. The command shifts to practical preparation for the return journey. The *tsiyunim* ('road markers, cairns') and *tamrurim* ('signposts, guideposts') — note the same word *tamrurim* used for 'bitter weeping' in v. 15, here meaning something entirely different (guideposts) — mark the way home. The command *shuvi* ('return!') is addressed to personified Israel as a young woman being called to come home. The way she went into exile becomes the road home.
22. This is one of the most debated verses in Jeremiah. The phrase *neqevah tesovev gaver* ('a woman will surround/embrace a man') has generated centuries of interpretive dispute. The verb *sovev* can mean 'to surround, encircle, court, protect, embrace.' The meaning may be: (1) Israel (the faithless woman) will return to court/embrace God (the man) — a reversal of the normal pattern where the man pursues; (2) a woman will protect a warrior — a reversal of gender roles signaling a new era; (3) a reference to restored fertility and normalcy. The Hebrew is genuinely ambiguous, and we render the most natural reading while documenting the alternatives. The word *chadashah* ('new, unprecedented') emphasizes that whatever this means, it is without precedent.
23. The oracle now shifts from northern Israel to Judah. The phrase *neveh tsedeq* ('pasture/dwelling of righteousness') depicts Jerusalem as a place where righteousness resides naturally, like sheep in a green pasture. The parallel title *har haqqodesh* ('holy mountain') refers to Mount Zion, the temple mount. The phrase *shuvti et shevutam* ('I restore their fortunes') uses a wordplay on *shuv* — the same root that means 'return/repent' here means 'restore' in the causative sense.
24. The vision of restoration includes both settled agriculture (*ikkarim*, 'farmers, plowmen') and pastoral nomadism (those who travel with flocks). Both ways of life will coexist peacefully in the restored land — a picture of social harmony and economic completeness.
25. The word *nephesh* ('soul, life, being') appears twice and is rendered according to context — the 'weary soul' becomes 'the weary' (the whole exhausted person) and the 'sorrowful soul' becomes 'every one who languishes.' The verb *milleti* ('I will fill') depicts God pouring fullness into emptiness — the opposite of the famine and deprivation of exile.
26. This enigmatic verse suggests the preceding oracles came as a dream or night vision. Jeremiah awakens refreshed — his sleep was *arevah* ('pleasant, sweet') — a sharp contrast to the nightmarish visions elsewhere in the book. The implication is that visions of restoration are so welcome, so

different from his usual burden, that even the prophet's sleep is transformed.

27. The verb zarati ('I will sow') reverses the metaphor of judgment: where exile scattered and depleted the population, God will now plant new life — both human and animal — in the land. Both kingdoms (Israel and Judah) are named together, continuing the reunification theme of the chapter. The agricultural metaphor is deliberate: God is the farmer who plants his people in the soil of the promised land.
28. This verse directly echoes Jeremiah's commissioning in 1:10, where God set him 'over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.' The five verbs of destruction are now matched by two verbs of restoration (build, plant). The verb shaqadti ('I watched over') puns on the almond branch (shaqed) vision of 1:11-12: God is 'watching' (shoqed) over his word to fulfill it — first for judgment, now for restoration. The same vigilance that executed judgment will now execute rebuilding.
29. This proverb (also quoted in Ezekiel 18:2) expressed the complaint that the present generation was suffering for the sins of previous generations — an objection to collective, intergenerational punishment. God declares that this proverb will become obsolete in the new era. The word bozer ('sour/unripe grapes') describes fruit that is not yet ready — the metaphor suggests premature, inappropriate consequences falling on the wrong generation.
30. Individual responsibility replaces collective punishment. This principle — that each person bears the consequences of their own sin — prepares for the new covenant theology of verses 31-34, where the relationship with God becomes individual ('they will all know me') rather than mediated through collective institutions. The shift from communal to individual accountability is one of the most significant theological developments in the prophetic literature (cf. Ezekiel 18).
31. The phrase berit chadashah appears only here in the entire Hebrew Bible (31:31). The verb karati ('I will cut') retains the ancient idiom of covenant-making — 'cutting' a covenant by sacrificing and dividing animals. Both houses are named: this is not a covenant with Judah alone (the surviving southern kingdom) but with all Israel reunited. The word chadashah is unambiguously 'new' — the same adjective used for a 'new song' (shir chadash, Psalm 33:3) or a 'new thing' (chadashah, Isaiah 43:19). It is not the word for 'renew' (chadesh). The theological weight of this verse is immense: it is quoted at length in Hebrews 8:8-12 and 10:16-17, and the phrase 'new covenant' (novum testamentum in Latin, he kaine diatheke in Greek) gave the Christian scriptures their name.
32. The phrase hecheziki veyadam ('I took them by the hand') is tender and parental — the image of God gripping the hand of a small child to lead them through danger. The verb heferu ('they broke') is emphatic: they didn't merely neglect the covenant but actively annulled it. The clause va'anokhi ba'alti vam is debated: ba'alti can mean 'I was husband to them' (from ba'al, 'to be husband/lord') or 'I rejected them' (from ba'al in a different conjugation, or an Aramaic cognate). We follow the majority reading 'I was a faithful husband to them,' which fits Jeremiah's sustained marriage metaphor (chapters 2-3) and creates the sharpest contrast: God remained faithful; they did not. The added word 'faithful' in the rendering makes explicit what the Hebrew implies through context.
33. The word torah is rendered 'instruction' rather than 'law' to capture the broader semantic range of the Hebrew — torah derives from the root y-r-h ('to teach, to instruct') and encompasses teaching, guidance, and revelation, not merely legal statutes. The phrase beqirbam ('within them,' literally 'in their inner parts') contrasts with the external stone tablets of Sinai. The verb ekhtevannah ('I will write it') uses the same root as the writing on the stone tablets (Exodus 31:18) — God is the author in both cases, but the medium changes from stone to the human heart. The covenant formula 'I will be their God and they will be my people' appears for the third time in this chapter (cf. v. 1), forming an inclusio that frames the entire restoration oracle. Hebrews 8:10 quotes this verse, applying the internalized torah to the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit.
34. The vision of universal, unmediated knowledge of God is the most radical element of the new covenant: no teaching hierarchy, no priestly mediation, no prophetic intermediary — every person in direct relationship with God. The verb yada ('to know') in Hebrew encompasses intimate, experiential, relational knowledge — not merely knowing facts about God but knowing God as a person knows a person. The phrase lo ezkhod ('I will not remember any more') does not mean God will forget (divine omniscience is not in question) but that God will choose not to act on the memory — sin will no longer function as a barrier in the relationship. Hebrews 8:11-12 quotes this verse as the climax of the new covenant prophecy, and Hebrews 10:17 returns to the 'remember no more' clause as the basis for the finality of Christ's sacrifice. Jewish reading: the universal knowledge of God is fulfilled when all Israel returns to Torah and knows God through observance, study, and communal life.
35. The cosmic language grounds the permanence of God's promise in the permanence of the created order. The word chuqqot ('fixed orders, statutes, decrees') is the same word used for the statutes of the Torah — the laws governing the cosmos and the laws governing Israel share the same vocabulary of divine decree. The verb roga ('to stir up, to agitate') depicts God as sovereign over the sea's power — a common ancient Near Eastern motif where the sea represents chaos, and God demonstrates mastery by stirring and calming it at will.
36. The conditional is deliberately impossible: the sun, moon, and stars cannot be removed from their fixed order; therefore, Israel cannot cease to be a nation before God. This is the strongest possible guarantee of national survival — it is tied to the very structure of the cosmos. The word zera ('offspring, seed, descendants') emphasizes biological and national continuity. The phrase kol-hayyamim ('all the days,' rendered 'for all time') reinforces the permanence.
37. A second impossible conditional reinforces the first: the heavens cannot be measured and the foundations of the earth cannot be explored — therefore God will not reject Israel. The verb em'as ('I would reject, spurn') is the word used for God rejecting Saul from kingship (1 Samuel 15:23, 26) — God declares he will never apply that verb to Israel as a whole, no matter what they have done. The phrase al-kol-asher asu ('for all that they have done') acknowledges that Israel's sins are real and severe but declares them insufficient to sever the relationship.

38. The final oracle moves from cosmic guarantees to concrete geography. The Tower of Hananel (migdal Chanan'el) stood at the northeast corner of Jerusalem's walls; the Corner Gate (sha'ar hapinnah) was at the northwest. Together they describe the northern wall of the city — the side most vulnerable to attack and the side from which the Babylonians would breach the walls. God will rebuild precisely where the enemy destroyed.
39. Gareb and Goah are otherwise unknown locations, probably on the western or southwestern outskirts of Jerusalem. The measuring line (qav hammiddah) is the surveyor's tool for planning new construction — the city will be expanded beyond its previous boundaries. The rebuilding is not merely restoration to the former state but enlargement.
40. The 'valley of corpses and ashes' (emeq happegarim vehaddeshen) likely refers to the Hinnom Valley (Ge-Hinnom/Gehenna), the site of child sacrifice and later a refuse dump south of Jerusalem. The deshen ('ashes, fatty ashes') may refer to sacrificial ash dumps or cremation residue. That this defiled space will become 'holy to the LORD' represents the ultimate reversal — the most polluted place in Israel's geography becomes sacred ground. The Kidron Valley runs along Jerusalem's eastern side between the city and the Mount of Olives. The Horse Gate was in the southeastern wall. Together these landmarks trace a circuit around the entire expanded city. The final phrase le'olam ('for all time') closes the chapter with the same duration-word (olam) that opened the love declaration in verse 3 — everlasting love, everlasting city.

32

Summary: *Jeremiah 32 records the most dramatic enacted prophecy in the book: while Jerusalem is under Babylonian siege and Jeremiah himself is imprisoned in the guard court, God commands him to purchase a field at Anathoth from his cousin Hanamel. This is the go'el obligation — the kinsman-redeemer must buy family land to keep it in the clan — but exercised at the worst possible moment, when the land is literally in enemy hands. Jeremiah pays seventeen shekels of silver, signs and seals the deed, has it witnessed by Baruch son of Neriah, and orders the documents stored in a clay jar for long-term preservation. Then Jeremiah prays — a sweeping recitation of God's mighty acts from creation through Egypt through the present catastrophe — and confesses his bewilderment: 'You told me to buy a field, but the city is being handed to the Chaldeans!' God responds with one of the most quoted lines in prophetic literature: 'Is anything too hard for me?' The chapter closes with God's promise of restoration, culminating in the berit olam — the everlasting covenant.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is the ultimate test of prophetic integrity. Jeremiah has spent decades announcing that Babylon will conquer Judah — and now, at the very moment when his words are coming true, God tells him to invest in real estate. The purchase is absurd by every human calculation: the land is in enemy-occupied territory, the buyer is in prison, and the nation is collapsing. But the purchase is an acted parable — the most expensive prophetic sign-act in the Hebrew Bible. By buying land he cannot use, Jeremiah stakes his own money on God's promise of restoration. Baruch son of Neriah, Jeremiah's faithful scribe, appears here as the legal witness; he will later write and preserve Jeremiah's oracles (chapter 36) and accompany Jeremiah into Egyptian exile (chapter 43). The clay jar storage instruction (v. 14) anticipates the Dead Sea Scrolls by six centuries — the same preservation technique that would protect biblical manuscripts for two millennia. Jeremiah's prayer (vv. 17-25) is one of the great prayers of the Hebrew Bible, moving from creation theology to Exodus memory to present crisis with unflinching honesty. God's response introduces the berit olam ('everlasting covenant,' v. 40), linking this chapter to the berit chadashah of chapter 31.*

Translation Friction: *The legal details of the land purchase (vv. 9-14) required careful handling — the Hebrew describes two documents (sealed and open copies), witnesses, and clay jar storage, reflecting authentic ancient Near Eastern property transaction procedures. The word sefer ('document, scroll') is rendered 'deed' in the property context rather than the more general 'book.' Jeremiah's prayer (vv. 17-25) shifts between praise and bewilderment, and we preserved the emotional arc without smoothing the transition. The phrase hayipale mimmeni kol davar (v. 27, 'Is anything too hard/wonderful for me?') uses the verb pala, which means both 'to be wonderful' and 'to be difficult/impossible' — we rendered it 'too difficult' in context but documented the dual meaning. The go'el obligation (kinsman-redemption right) required an expanded rendering because its full significance is lost without cultural context.*

Connections: *The kinsman-redeemer (go'el) obligation connects to Leviticus 25:25-28 (redemption of family land), Ruth 4 (Boaz as go'el), and Isaiah 41:14, 43:14, 44:6 (God as Israel's Go'el). The question 'Is anything too hard for me?' echoes Genesis 18:14 (God's question to Abraham about Sarah's pregnancy) — the same verb pala is used in both. The everlasting covenant (berit olam, v. 40) connects to the new covenant of 31:31-34 and to the*

Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:7), the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 23:5), and the priestly covenant (Numbers 25:13). Baruch son of Neriah appears again in chapters 36, 43, and 45. The clay jar storage instruction connects forward to the Dead Sea Scrolls discovery at Qumran. Jeremiah's prayer echoes Nehemiah 9 and Daniel 9 as one of the great recitals of salvation history.

¹The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. ²At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was confined in the court of the guard, which was in the palace of the king of Judah. ³Zedekiah king of Judah had confined him, saying, "Why do you prophesy, saying, 'This is what the LORD says: I am about to hand this city over to the king of Babylon, and he will capture it; ⁴and Zedekiah king of Judah will not escape from the Chaldeans, but will certainly be handed over to the king of Babylon, and will speak with him face to face and see him eye to eye; ⁵He will take Zedekiah to Babylon, and there he will remain until I attend to him, declares the LORD. If you fight against the Chaldeans, you will not succeed.'" ⁶Jeremiah said: The word of the LORD came to me: ⁷"Hanamel son of Shallum, your uncle's son, is coming to you. He will say: 'Buy my field at Anathoth, for the right of redemption belongs to you as next of kin to purchase it.'" ⁸Then Hanamel, my uncle's son, came to me in the court of the guard, just as the LORD had said, and told me: "Please buy my field at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin, for you have the right of inheritance and the right of redemption — buy it for yourself." Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD. ⁹So I bought the field at Anathoth from Hanamel, my uncle's son, and I weighed out the silver for him — seventeen shekels of silver. ¹⁰I signed the deed, sealed it, called witnesses, and weighed the silver on scales. ¹¹Then I took the deed of purchase — the sealed copy containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy — ¹²and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah, son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans sitting in the court of the guard. ¹³Then I instructed Baruch in their presence: ¹⁴"This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Take these deeds — this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed — and place them in a clay jar so that they will last for a long time." ¹⁵For this is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields, and vineyards will again be bought in this land. ¹⁶After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah, I prayed to the LORD: ¹⁷"Ah, Lord GOD! You yourself made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm. Nothing is too difficult for you. ¹⁸You show faithful love to thousands, yet you repay the iniquity of ancestors into the laps of their children after them — O great and mighty God, the LORD of Hosts is his name! ¹⁹Great in counsel and mighty in deed — your eyes are open to all the ways of humankind, to repay each person according to his ways and according to the fruit of his actions. ²⁰You performed signs and wonders in the land of Egypt — and to this day, both in Israel and among all people — and you made a name for yourself, as it remains today. ²¹You brought your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and with great terror. ²²You gave them this land that you swore to their ancestors to give them — a land flowing with milk and honey. ²³They came in and took possession of it, but they did not obey your voice or walk in your instruction. They did nothing of all you commanded them to do — so you brought all this disaster upon them. ²⁴Look — the siege ramps have reached the city to capture it, and the city is being handed over to the Chaldeans who fight against it, because of sword, famine, and plague. What you spoke has come to pass — and you can see it yourself! ²⁵Yet you yourself said to me, Lord GOD: 'Buy the field with silver and call witnesses' — even though the city is being handed over to the Chaldeans!" ²⁶Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ²⁷"I am the LORD, the God of all living things. Is anything too difficult for me?" ²⁸Therefore, this is what the LORD says: I am about to hand this city over to the Chaldeans and to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will capture it. ²⁹The Chaldeans who are fighting against this city will come and set this city on fire, burning it along with the houses on whose rooftops they burned incense to Baal and poured out drink offerings to other gods, provoking me to anger. ³⁰For the people of Israel and the people of Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth, for the people of Israel have done nothing but provoke me to anger with the work of their hands, declares the LORD. ³¹For this city has been a source of my anger and my fury from the day they built it until this very day, so that I must remove it from my presence — ³²because of all the evil that the people of Israel and the people of Judah have done to provoke me to anger — they, their kings, their officials, their priests, their prophets, the people of Judah, and

the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ³³They turned their backs to me, not their faces. Though I taught them persistently, teaching again and again, they would not listen or accept correction. ³⁴They placed their detestable idols in the house that bears my name, defiling it. ³⁵They built the high places of Baal in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom to make their sons and daughters pass through fire to Molech — something I never commanded and that never entered my mind — committing this abomination and causing Judah to sin. ³⁶"Now therefore, this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says about this city that you say is being handed over to the king of Babylon by sword, famine, and plague: ³⁷I am going to gather them from all the lands where I have driven them in my anger, in my fury, and in great wrath. I will bring them back to this place and make them dwell in safety. ³⁸They will be my people, and I will be their God. ³⁹I will give them one heart and one path, to revere me at all times, for their own good and for the good of their children after them. ⁴⁰I will cut an everlasting covenant with them: I will never turn away from them or cease doing them good. I will place the reverence of me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from me. ⁴¹I will take delight in doing them good, and I will plant them firmly in this land with all my heart and with all my being. ⁴²For this is what the LORD says: Just as I brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I am going to bring upon them all the good that I am promising them. ⁴³Fields will again be purchased in this land about which you say, 'It is desolate, without human or animal — it has been handed over to the Chaldeans.' ⁴⁴Fields will be bought with silver, deeds will be written, sealed, and witnessed — in the territory of Benjamin, in the area around Jerusalem, in the cities of Judah, in the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the lowlands, and in the cities of the Negev. For I will restore their fortunes, declares the LORD."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The double dating system (regal years of both the Judean king and the Babylonian emperor) reflects the political reality of vassal status — Judah's calendar is now synchronized with Babylon's. The tenth year of Zedekiah is approximately 588/587 BCE, during the final siege of Jerusalem. The Hebrew spelling Nevukhadre'tsars alternates with Nevukhadnettsar in the book; we standardize the English to 'Nebuchadnezzar,' the most recognized form.
2. The chatsar hammattarah ('court of the guard') was not a dungeon but a military detention facility within the royal compound — Jeremiah had restricted movement but was not in a pit or cell (contrast 38:6, where he is lowered into a cistern). The juxtaposition is deliberate: Jerusalem is besieged from without, and God's prophet is imprisoned from within. The very king who imprisoned Jeremiah for his prophecies is now watching those prophecies come true.
3. Zedekiah's question 'Why do you prophesy?' reveals the king's frustration — he does not dispute the content of Jeremiah's message but objects to the prophet's insistence on speaking it publicly during a siege. The phrase *notein et ha'ir* ('handing over the city') uses the participial form, indicating an action already in progress — God is in the process of giving Jerusalem to Babylon.
4. The phrase 'mouth to mouth' (*pihu im pihu*) and 'eyes to eyes' (*einav et einav*) describe a personal encounter — Zedekiah will stand before Nebuchadnezzar as a defeated vassal. The emphatic infinitive absolute *hinnaton yinnaten* ('will certainly be handed over') leaves no room for escape. The bitter irony: in 2 Kings 25:7, Zedekiah does see Nebuchadnezzar's eyes — and then his own eyes are gouged out, so it is the last thing he ever sees.
5. The phrase *ad-poqdi oto* ('until I attend to him') uses the verb *paqad*, which can mean 'to visit, to attend to, to punish, to care for.' The ambiguity is deliberate — God's 'attending to' Zedekiah could mean judgment or eventual mercy. The final clause is addressed to the collective 'you' (plural) — all of Judah's resistance will fail. This completes Zedekiah's quotation of Jeremiah's prophecy that led to the prophet's imprisonment.
6. The narrative shifts from the editor's framing (vv. 1-5) to Jeremiah's first-person account. The formula *devar-YHWH* ('the word of the LORD') marks the transition to divine instruction — what follows is not Jeremiah's idea but God's command.
7. The Hebrew *dod* ('uncle') makes Hanamel Jeremiah's cousin (son of his father's brother). Anathoth was Jeremiah's hometown (1:1), a Levitical city in the territory of Benjamin. The phrase *mishpat hage'ullah* ('right of redemption') is the legal term from Leviticus 25:25 for the kinsman-redeemer's prerogative. God tells Jeremiah in advance what will happen, confirming it as a divinely orchestrated sign-act, not a coincidental family transaction.
8. The confirmation formula *va'eda ki devar-YHWH hu* ('then I knew that this was the word of the LORD') reveals that Jeremiah had waited to see whether God's prediction would come true. When Hanamel appeared exactly as foretold, Jeremiah recognized the divine origin of the command. The location is specified precisely — Anathoth in Benjamin — establishing the legal record. The phrase *mishpat hayyerushah* ('right of inheritance') is distinct from *ge'ullah* ('redemption') — Jeremiah has both the inheritance claim and the kinsman-redemption right, making his legal obligation unambiguous.
9. The price — seventeen shekels of silver (approximately seven ounces / 196 grams) — is remarkably low, reflecting the depressed value of land during a siege. For comparison, Abraham paid four hundred shekels of silver for the cave of Machpelah (Genesis 23:15-16). The verb *shaqal* ('to weigh') indicates that silver was weighed out on scales rather than counted as coins — coined money was not yet standard in Judah at this period. The transaction is executed with full legal formality despite the absurdity of the circumstances.

10. The verb *katav* ('to write') here means to draw up or sign a legal document. The *sepher* ('document, deed') is the bill of sale. The sealing (*chatam*) involved pressing a cylinder or stamp seal into clay to authenticate the document — equivalent to a notarized signature. The witnesses (*edim*) provided legal testimony to the transaction's validity. Every element follows standard ancient Near Eastern property law, giving the purchase full legal standing even under siege conditions.
11. Two copies of the deed were produced: a sealed copy (*hechatom*) that could not be tampered with, and an open copy (*haggalui*) that could be consulted for reference. This dual-document practice is attested in ancient Near Eastern legal archives — the sealed copy was the authoritative legal record, while the open copy allowed public access to the terms. The words *mitsvah* and *chuqqim* ('commands and statutes' or 'terms and conditions') describe the stipulations of the sale.
12. Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah is Jeremiah's personal scribe and most trusted companion. His name means 'blessed' (*barukh*). An actual clay seal impression (*bullā*) bearing the inscription 'Belonging to Berekyahu son of Neryahu the scribe' was discovered in a Jerusalem antiquities market in 1975, providing possible archaeological confirmation of this biblical figure. The public nature of the transaction — 'in the presence of all the Judeans' — ensures maximum witness coverage, turning a private land deal into a public prophetic declaration.
13. The verb *tsivveh* ('commanded, charged, instructed') indicates a formal directive, not a casual request. Jeremiah gives Baruch specific archival instructions in the hearing of all the witnesses — the storage method matters as much as the purchase itself.
14. The preservation instruction is remarkable: a clay jar (*keli chares*) would protect papyrus or leather documents from moisture, insects, and decay. This is precisely the storage method used for the Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered at Qumran in 1947 — documents preserved in sealed clay jars for approximately two thousand years. The phrase *yamin rabbim* ('many days') acknowledges that the exile will be prolonged, but the deeds must survive because the land will eventually be reclaimed. The documents are evidence of ownership that will outlast the exile.
15. This single sentence is the theological key to the entire chapter. While Babylon besieges the walls, while the army camps in the fields, while vineyards are being trampled and houses burned — God declares that normal economic life will resume. The verb *qiqanu* ('will be bought') is passive: buying will happen again, as naturally and routinely as it always did before the catastrophe. The three categories — houses, fields, vineyards — represent the full spectrum of property ownership in an agrarian society.
16. The transition from legal transaction to prayer is abrupt — Jeremiah moves directly from signing papers to addressing God. The verb *hitpallel* ('to pray') is reflexive, suggesting deep introspection. What follows (vv. 17-25) is one of the great prayers of the Hebrew Bible, moving from theology of creation through salvation history to bewildered honesty about the present.
17. The exclamation *ahahh* ('ah!') expresses awe, distress, or overwhelm — it is not praise but the sound of a person staggering under the weight of what they are experiencing. The phrase *zeroakha hannotuyah* ('your outstretched arm') is Exodus language (Deuteronomy 4:34, 5:15) — the same arm that defeated Egypt created the cosmos. The declaration *lo yippale mimmekha kol davar* ('nothing is too difficult/wonderful for you') uses the verb *pala*, which means both 'to be wonderful' and 'to be beyond ability.' Jeremiah affirms God's unlimited power at the outset — which makes his closing confusion (v. 25) all the more honest.
18. The phrase *chesed la'alaphim* ('faithful love to thousands') echoes the divine self-revelation at Sinai (Exodus 34:6-7), where God declares himself 'maintaining faithful love to thousands' but also 'visiting the iniquity of ancestors on children.' Jeremiah quotes this creedal statement almost verbatim. The word *cheiq* ('bosom, lap, fold of garment') is where gifts or payments were placed — ancestral guilt is 'deposited' into the children's laps. The divine titles — *ha'El haggadol haggibor* ('the great, the mighty God') — are formal worship language, elevating the prayer to liturgical register. The full title *YHWH Tseva'ot* ('LORD of Hosts/Armies') identifies God as commander of heavenly forces.
19. The parallelism of 'counsel' (*etsah*) and 'deed' (*aliliyyah*) presents God as both planner and executor — divine wisdom and divine action are inseparable. The phrase *einakha pequchot* ('your eyes are open') depicts God's comprehensive awareness of all human conduct — nothing escapes his sight. The principle of proportional recompense (each person according to his ways) connects to the individual accountability theme of 31:29-30.
20. The phrase *otot umophetim* ('signs and wonders') is the standard Exodus terminology (Deuteronomy 4:34, 6:22). Jeremiah extends God's sign-working beyond Egypt — 'to this day, both in Israel and among all people' — asserting that God's mighty acts continue into the present. The phrase 'made a name for yourself' (*ta'aseh lekha shem*) echoes Nehemiah 9:10 and Isaiah 63:12-14, placing Jeremiah's prayer in the tradition of great salvation-history recitals.
21. The five-fold description of the Exodus — signs, wonders, strong hand, outstretched arm, great terror — echoes the Deuteronomic creed (Deuteronomy 26:8) almost verbatim. The word *mora gadol* ('great terror') refers to the fear God struck into the Egyptians. Jeremiah is not innovating theology here but reciting the traditional confession, grounding his prayer in the oldest layer of Israel's faith.
22. The covenant promise formula *erets zavata chalah udevash* ('a land flowing with milk and honey') encapsulates the agricultural abundance of the promised land. Milk represents pastoral wealth (herds); honey represents either wild bee honey or, more likely, the thick syrup of dates — together they signify a land of overflowing provision. The bitter irony is that this land is now being devastated by the very siege Jeremiah is describing.
23. The prayer reaches its pivot: Israel received the land but failed to keep the covenant. The three-fold negation — they did not obey, did not walk, did nothing of what was commanded — is emphatic and comprehensive. The word *torah* here is rendered 'instruction' per project standard to preserve the broader meaning beyond legal statutes. The result clause (*vattaqre otam*) means literally 'you caused to meet them' — disaster did not happen randomly but was the direct consequence of covenant violation.

24. The solelot ('siege ramps, earthworks') were massive earthen mounds built against the city walls to allow attackers to breach the fortifications. The three instruments of siege destruction — cherev ('sword,' military violence), ra'av ('famine,' starvation from blockade), and dever ('plague,' disease from overcrowding and contamination) — form a recurring triad in Jeremiah (14:12, 21:7, 24:10, 27:8). The final clause 'and you can see it yourself' (vehinneka ro'eh) is startlingly direct — Jeremiah points out to God what God already knows, building to his bewildered question in the next verse.
25. This is the climax of Jeremiah's prayer — and it is a question disguised as a statement. Jeremiah does not directly ask 'Why?' but the bewilderment is unmistakable: God told him to invest in land that is falling to the enemy. The juxtaposition of 'buy the field' and 'the city is given to the Chaldeans' in the same sentence captures the apparent absurdity. The prayer ends without resolution — Jeremiah has stated his faith (v. 17, 'nothing is too difficult for you'), recited the history (vv. 18-23), and pointed to the crisis (vv. 24-25). Now he waits for God's answer, which comes in verses 26-44.
26. The standard prophetic reception formula marks the transition from Jeremiah's prayer to God's response. The narrative device creates a pause — the reader has heard Jeremiah's bewildered prayer and now awaits the divine answer.
27. The question hayipale mimmenni kol davar ('Is anything too difficult for me?') uses the same verb pala that Jeremiah used in his prayer (v. 17, 'nothing is too difficult for you'). God throws Jeremiah's own confession back as a question: you said nothing is too hard for me — do you believe it? The phrase Elohei kol basar ('God of all flesh/living things') expands God's sovereignty beyond Israel to encompass all creation, including Babylon and its armies. The rhetorical question expects the answer 'No — nothing is too difficult,' but the force lies in making Jeremiah (and the reader) articulate that conviction in the face of impossible circumstances.
28. God confirms rather than contradicts Jeremiah's prophecy of doom — the city will fall. The divine response does not begin with comfort but with truth: judgment is real and imminent. God names Nebuchadnezzar specifically as the instrument of judgment. The word lakhen ('therefore') connects the fall to everything Jeremiah recited in his prayer — Israel's disobedience has consequences.
29. The rooftop altars (gaggotehem) were high places for unauthorized worship — roofs provided open-air access to the sky where astral deities and Baal were worshiped. The houses that served as platforms for idolatry will be the very houses consumed by fire. The verb qitteru ('burned incense') is the technical term for offering fragrant smoke to a deity; its use for Baal worship underscores the betrayal — incense rituals proper to YHWH were redirected to a foreign god. The phrase lema'an hakh'iseni ('to provoke me to anger') implies deliberate provocation, not accidental offense.
30. The word akh ('only, nothing but') is emphatic and sweeping — Israel's entire history, from its 'youth' (ne'urothem, the early period of nationhood) to the present, is characterized as unbroken evil. The 'work of their hands' (ma'aseh yedechem) is a frequent Jeremiah phrase for idols — handmade objects treated as gods. The indictment encompasses both kingdoms (Israel and Judah), emphasizing that the northern kingdom's fall to Assyria should have served as a warning that Judah ignored.
31. The startling claim that Jerusalem has provoked God's anger from the day it was built encompasses the entire Davidic-Solomonic era — not even the golden age was free from provocation. The words ap ('anger,' literally 'nostril,' the flaring of nostrils in rage) and chamah ('fury, heat') represent two intensities of divine wrath. The phrase lehasirah me'al panai ('to remove it from my presence/face') — continuing into the next verse — uses the same language as the expulsion from the garden in Genesis.
32. The catalogue of offenders is comprehensive: kings (malkehem), officials (sarehem), priests (kohanehem), prophets (nevi'ehem), and the common people. Every level of society is implicated. The word sarim ('officials, princes, commanders') refers to the ruling class — those with political and military authority. No one is exempt from guilt: the leadership that should have guided the people toward covenant faithfulness instead led them toward Baal.
33. The idiom 'turned their back, not their face' (oref velo fanim) is a physical image of rejection — turning away from someone who is speaking to you. The phrase hashkem velammud ('rising early and teaching' = 'teaching persistently') is the same Jeremican idiom seen in 7:13, 7:25, 11:7, 25:3 — God's tireless, dawn-to-dusk effort to instruct his people. The word musar ('correction, instruction, discipline') encompasses both teaching and the consequences of ignoring it.
34. The shiqqutsehem ('their detestable things, abominations') refers to idols and pagan cult objects placed inside the Jerusalem temple itself — not merely alongside it but within the very building where God's name dwelt. The phrase niqra shemi alav ('upon which my name is called / which bears my name') indicates ownership and presence — the temple belongs to God, and his reputation is attached to it. Placing idols there is not merely disobedience but desecration of God's own house. Historical reference: Manasseh placed an Asherah pole in the temple (2 Kings 21:7).
35. The Valley of Ben-Hinnom (Gei Ben-Hinnom, later Gehenna) south of Jerusalem was the site of child sacrifice. The verb he'evir ('to make pass through') describes the ritual of passing children through fire — whether this meant actual immolation or a fire-passing ritual is debated, but the context implies lethal sacrifice. God's triple denial is emphatic: 'I never commanded it' (lo tsivvitim), 'it never entered my mind' (lo aletah al-libbi), and it is a to'evah ('abomination'). This passage is repeated almost verbatim from 7:31 and 19:5, showing how deeply this sin troubles the prophetic message.
36. The phrase 'now therefore' (ve'attach lakhen) marks the transition from God's recitation of sins to the declaration of hope. The people's own words ('it is being handed over') are quoted back — they state the obvious reality of the siege. God does not deny it but is about to reframe it: the fall of the city is not the end of the story. The triad of destruction — sword, famine, plague — appears again as in verse 24.
37. Three words for divine wrath — ap ('anger'), chamah ('fury'), and qetsef gadol ('great wrath') — describe the intensity that drove the scattering. But the same God who scattered will gather. The verb hashvotim ('I will bring them back') uses the root shuv ('return') in its causative form — God will cause the return. The word lavetach ('in safety, securely') promises not just physical return but psychological security — no more fear of exile or invasion.

38. The covenant formula in its most compact form — six Hebrew words that summarize the entire covenantal relationship. This same formula appeared in 31:1, 31:33, and now here, forming a refrain throughout the Book of Consolation (chapters 30-33). Its repetition after the catalogue of sins (vv. 29-35) is stunning: despite everything, the relationship will be restored.
39. The phrase *lev echad* ('one heart') means unity of purpose and desire — the divided heart that chased multiple gods will be made singular in its devotion. The word *derekh* ('way, path, road') echoes the 'two ways' tradition of Deuteronomy 30:15-20 — God will give them one clear road instead of the constant wavering between YHWH and Baal. The verb *yirah* ('to revere, to fear') denotes not terror but covenantal awe — the proper human response to the holy God. The motive clause 'for their own good' (*letov lahem*) reveals that covenant obedience is not arbitrary demand but is genuinely beneficial to the people.
40. The phrase *berit olam* ('everlasting covenant') links this promise to the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:7), the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 23:5), and the priestly covenant (Numbers 25:13). The two uses of *shuv* create a beautiful reciprocity: God will not *shuv* ('turn away') from them, and he will ensure they do not *sur* ('turn aside') from him — the double turning that plagued the old covenant is healed from both directions. The phrase *yir'ati* ('my reverence, the fear of me') placed 'in their hearts' (*bilvavam*) parallels 31:33 where *torah* is placed 'within them' and written 'on their hearts' — the new and everlasting covenants share the same mechanism of internal transformation.
41. The verb *sasti* ('I will take delight, I will rejoice') depicts God experiencing joy over his people — not merely tolerating or rescuing them but genuinely delighting in their restoration. The verb *natati* ('I will plant') echoes the commission language of 1:10 — the planting that follows uprooting. The adverb *be'emet* ('in truth, faithfully, firmly') means this is not a temporary resettlement but a permanent planting. The phrase *bekhol-libbi uvekhol-nafshi* ('with all my heart and with all my being') is extraordinary as applied to God — it attributes to God the wholehearted covenantal devotion that Deuteronomy demands of Israel, creating a perfect reciprocity.
42. The parallel structure is exact: the same God who executed *ra'ah* ('disaster, evil, harm') will execute *tovah* ('good, benefit, blessing'). The word *ka'asher...ken* ('just as...so') creates a proportion — the magnitude of the coming good will match the magnitude of the past disaster. The phrase *dober alehem* ('speaking/promising concerning them') uses the participial form, indicating that the promise is active and ongoing — God is currently in the process of declaring good over them.
43. God's response circles back to the field purchase that prompted Jeremiah's bewildered prayer. The people's assessment — *shemamah* ('desolation, wasteland') — is accurate for the present but not for the future. The phrase *me'ein adam uvehemah* ('without human or animal') describes total depopulation — the opposite of the divine promise in 31:27 to sow the land 'with the seed of humans and the seed of animals.' What the people see as permanent ruin, God sees as temporary devastation.
44. The chapter closes with a comprehensive geographical catalogue: Benjamin (Jeremiah's own tribal territory), Jerusalem's environs, the Judean hill country, the Shephelah (western foothills), and the Negev (southern desert region). Every region of Judah is named — the restoration will be total, not partial. The legal vocabulary from Jeremiah's own transaction — buy with silver, write, seal, witness — becomes the vocabulary of the restored future. What Jeremiah did as a lone prophetic act in a prison courtyard will become the normal activity of a recovered nation. The final phrase *ashiv et shevutam* ('I will restore their fortunes') closes the chapter with the verb *shuv* in its most hopeful form — the great return, the great reversal.

33

Summary: *Jeremiah 33 completes the Book of Consolation (chapters 30–33) with a second revelation received while Jeremiah remains confined in the court of the guard. God invites the prophet to call upon him and promises to reveal 'great and inaccessible things' (v. 3). The chapter moves from the devastation of siege to the restoration of joy, health, and prosperity in Jerusalem and Judah. Its theological climax is the reaffirmation of the Davidic covenant through the metaphor of cosmic permanence: just as God's covenant with day and night cannot be annulled, neither can his promises to David's line and the Levitical priesthood (vv. 20–26). The Righteous Branch reappears (v. 15, cf. 23:5–6), and Jerusalem itself receives the name 'The LORD Is Our Righteousness.'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains some of the most extraordinary covenant theology in the Hebrew Bible. Verse 3 — 'Call to me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and inaccessible things that you do not know' — is one of the most quoted verses in Jeremiah, yet its context is often overlooked: Jeremiah is a prisoner when God speaks these words. The promise comes not in freedom but in confinement. The Righteous Branch title *tsemach tsaddiq* reappears from 23:5–6, but with a striking variation: in 23:6 it is the king who bears the name 'The LORD Is Our Righteousness' (YHWH *tsidqenu*), while here in 33:16 it is Jerusalem — the city itself — that receives this name. The covenant-with-day-and-night passage (vv. 20–26) is unparalleled in prophetic literature: God stakes his promises to David on the reliability of the created order itself, making the alternation of day and night into a perpetual witness. We note that 33:14–26 is absent from the Septuagint, suggesting these verses may be a later addition to the Hebrew tradition — a significant text-critical issue that we document transparently.*

Translation Friction: The adjective *betsurot* (v. 3, from *batsar*, 'to cut off, fortify, make inaccessible') is variously rendered 'mighty,' 'hidden,' 'unsearchable,' or 'fortified.' We chose 'inaccessible' because the root conveys walled-off knowledge — things beyond human reach without divine revelation. The phrase *tsemach tsaddiq* (v. 15) could be 'righteous branch' or 'righteous shoot/sprout' — we retained 'branch' for consistency with 23:5. The shift of the name YHWH *Tsidqenu* from the king (23:6) to the city (33:16) required careful notation, as it represents a theological development within the book itself. Verses 14–26 are absent from the LXX, raising the question of whether they belong to the earliest text; we include them as part of the Masoretic tradition while noting the discrepancy.

Connections: The Righteous Branch (*tsemach tsaddiq*) connects to 23:5–6 and forward to Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12. The covenant formula 'David will never lack a man on the throne' echoes 2 Samuel 7:12–16 (the Davidic covenant) and 1 Kings 2:4. The covenant with day and night recalls Genesis 8:22 (God's post-flood promise of perpetual seasons) and Jeremiah 31:35–37 (the fixed order of sun, moon, and stars as guarantee of Israel's permanence). The Levitical covenant connects to Numbers 25:12–13 (the covenant of perpetual priesthood with Phinehas) and Malachi 2:4–7. The restoration imagery of joy and thanksgiving echoes 30:19 and 31:4, 12–13. The phrase 'the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride' reprises 7:34 and 16:9 in reverse — what was taken away in judgment is restored in consolation.

1The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah a second time while he was still confined in the court of the guard: 2This is what the LORD says — he who made it, the LORD who shaped it to establish it, whose name is the LORD: 3Call to me and I will answer you; I will tell you great and inaccessible things that you have not known. 4For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the houses of this city and the houses of the kings of Judah that are torn down for siege ramps and for the sword: 5They come to fight against the Chaldeans only to fill them with the corpses of the people whom I have struck down in my anger and my wrath — those on account of whose wickedness I have hidden my face from this city. 6I am going to bring healing and remedy to her, and I will heal them; I will reveal to them an abundance of peace and faithfulness. 7I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and I will rebuild them as they were at the beginning. 8I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they sinned against me, and I will forgive all their iniquities by which they sinned against me and rebelled against me. 9This city will become for me a name of joy, a praise and a splendor before all the nations of the earth, who will hear of all the good I am doing for them. They will tremble and be shaken on account of all the good and all the peace that I am bringing about for her. 10This is what the LORD says: In this place — of which you say, 'It is a ruin, without person or animal' — in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without person, without inhabitant, without animal, 11there will again be heard the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the sound of the bridegroom and the sound of the bride, the sound of those saying, 'Give thanks to the LORD of Hosts, for the LORD is good, for his faithful love endures forever' — those bringing thanksgiving offerings to the house of the LORD. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were at the beginning, says the LORD. 12This is what the LORD of Hosts says: In this place that is desolate — without person or animal — and in all its cities, there will again be pastures for shepherds resting their flocks. 13In the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the lowland, in the cities of the Negev, in the land of Benjamin, in the surroundings of Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, flocks will again pass under the hands of the one who counts them, says the LORD. 14The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the good word that I spoke concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15In those days and at that time, I will cause a righteous branch to sprout for David, and he will execute justice and righteousness in the land. 16In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is what she will be called: 'The LORD Is Our Righteousness.' 17For this is what the LORD says: David will never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel. 18And the Levitical priests will never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to prepare sacrifices — for all time. 19The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: 20This is what the LORD says: If you could break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night no longer come at their appointed time, 21then also my covenant with David my servant could be broken, so that he would have no son reigning on his throne — and my covenant with the Levites, the priests who minister to me. 22Just as the host of heaven cannot be counted and the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the offspring of David my servant and the Levites who minister to me. 23The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: 24Have you not observed

what this people are saying — 'The two families that the LORD chose, he has rejected them'? They treat my people with contempt, as if they were no longer a nation in their sight. ²⁵This is what the LORD says: If I have not established my covenant with day and night, if I have not set in place the fixed orders of heaven and earth — ²⁶then I would also reject the offspring of Jacob and of David my servant, so as not to take from his offspring rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But I will restore their fortunes and have compassion on them.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word 'second time' (shenit) links this oracle to chapter 32, where the first word came during the same imprisonment. The term matara ('guard') is distinct from the dungeon (bor) where Jeremiah was later thrown (38:6); this is a military courtyard used for detention, not a pit. We render le'mor as a colon introducing direct speech.
2. The threefold repetition of YHWH in a single verse is emphatic and liturgical. The verbs 'asah ('made') and yatsar ('shaped, formed') are creation vocabulary — the same yatsar used for God forming humanity from clay in Genesis 2:7. The ambiguous pronoun 'it' likely refers to the earth or Jerusalem; the Hebrew leaves the referent deliberately open, suggesting that the God who shaped creation can reshape his city.
3. The KJV renders betsurat as 'mighty,' but the root batsar means 'to cut off, fortify, enclose' — the same root used for 'fortified cities' (arei mivtsar). We render 'inaccessible' to capture the sense of walled-off, unreachable knowledge. The invitation 'Call to me' is addressed to a prisoner — Jeremiah has no freedom of movement, but he has unlimited access to God. The verb 'aggidah ('I will tell/declare') implies formal revelation, not casual conversation.
4. The participle nethutsim ('torn down, demolished') describes houses already being demolished during the siege — residents were dismantling their own buildings to construct defensive siege ramps (solelot) against the Babylonian assault. The grim irony is that the city is destroying itself trying to survive.
5. The syntax is difficult: 'fill them' (male'am) likely refers to filling the demolished houses (v. 4) with corpses, not filling the Chaldeans. The image is horrific — the torn-down buildings become mass graves. The idiom histir panim ('to hide the face') is the ultimate expression of divine withdrawal in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Deuteronomy 31:17–18; Isaiah 54:8).
6. The nouns arukah ('healing, restoration') and marpe ('remedy, cure') are near-synonyms piled for emphasis — the city's wound is so severe that one word for healing is not enough. The verb gala ('reveal, uncover') is striking: peace and faithfulness are not merely given but revealed, as if they had been hidden behind the judgment. We render emet as 'faithfulness' here rather than 'truth' because the context is covenantal restoration, and emet in covenant contexts carries the sense of God's reliable fidelity.
7. The phrase shavti et-shevut is debated: it could mean 'restore the captivity' (return the exiles) or 'restore the fortunes' (a broader restoration). The latter reading, supported by cognate evidence and the Septuagint, better fits the context of comprehensive renewal. Both kingdoms — Judah and Israel — are included in the restoration, even though the northern kingdom had been dispersed for over a century.
8. Three sin-terms appear: avon ('iniquity' — the guilt and its consequence), chat'u ('sinned' — from chata, to miss the mark), and pash'u ('rebelled' — from pasha, willful transgression). The Hebrew preserves the full taxonomy of sin: missing the mark, bearing twisted guilt, and deliberate rebellion. Cleansing (tihar) is ritual-purification language, while forgiveness (salach) is relational-restoration language — both are needed.
9. The triad shem sason, tehillah, tiferet ('name of joy, praise, splendor') describes Jerusalem's transformed reputation among the nations. The verbs pachadu veragzu ('they will tremble and be shaken') describe the nations' response — not terror in the negative sense but awe at the overwhelming reversal of Jerusalem's fortunes. The nations who watched Jerusalem's destruction will now be stunned by its restoration.
10. The threefold repetition of me'ein ('without') — without person, without inhabitant, without animal — hammers the totality of the desolation. This exact formula appeared as a threat in 32:43; here it is quoted only to be reversed. The word charev ('ruin, waste') is the same root used for the destruction of the temple.
11. This verse reverses the judgment formula from 7:34 and 16:9, where the sounds of joy and wedding celebration were silenced. Five occurrences of qol ('sound, voice') create an overwhelming cascade of restored celebration. The liturgical quotation 'for the LORD is good, for his faithful love endures forever' appears in 2 Chronicles 5:13, 7:3, Ezra 3:11, and Psalm 136 — it is Israel's core worship refrain. The word todah ('thanksgiving offering') means both the sacrifice and the attitude of gratitude.
12. The image of shepherds resting flocks (marbitsei tso'n) is pastoral peace restored. The verb rabats ('to lie down, rest') describes animals at ease, without threat — the opposite of a land terrorized by invasion. The destroyed landscape will return to productive pastoral life.
13. The geographical survey — hill country, lowland (shephelah), Negev, Benjamin, Jerusalem, Judah — covers the entire territory of the southern kingdom. The image of sheep passing under the counter's hands (al yedei moneh) evokes Leviticus 27:32, where every tenth animal passing under the rod belongs to the LORD. Counting implies ownership, order, and care — the restored land will be managed, not chaotic.
14. This verse begins a section (vv. 14–26) absent from the Septuagint (LXX), suggesting it may be a later addition to the Hebrew text. We include it as part of the Masoretic tradition while noting this significant text-critical issue. The phrase hadavar hatov ('the good word/thing') refers back to the promises of chapters 30–32 — God is about to specify exactly which promises he means.

15. This verse closely parallels 23:5 but uses *tsemach tsedaqah* ('branch of righteousness') rather than *tsemach tsaddiq* ('righteous branch'). The variation may reflect a subtle theological shift: in 23:5 the branch himself is righteous; here the branch produces righteousness. The verb *atmiyach* ('I will cause to sprout') emphasizes divine agency — this is not natural political succession but God's direct intervention in history.
16. The striking difference from 23:6 is the pronoun: there the masculine *yiqra'o* ('he will be called') applies the name to the king; here the feminine *yiqra-lah* ('she will be called') applies it to Jerusalem. Whether this is a deliberate theological expansion or a scribal variation is debated, but the Masoretic text clearly assigns the name to the city. The verb *tishkon* ('will dwell') shares the root *sh-k-n* with *Shekhinah* — Jerusalem's secure dwelling echoes God's own dwelling presence.
17. The phrase *lo yikkaret* ('will not be cut off') uses the same verb (*karat*) as 'cutting' a covenant — the line will not be severed. This restates the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7:12–16, where God promised David an eternal dynasty. Despite the apparent end of the monarchy with Zedekiah's capture, the promise stands.
18. The phrase *hakkohanim haleviyim* ('the priests, the Levites' or 'the Levitical priests') uses the Deuteronomic designation that identifies priests specifically as members of the tribe of Levi (cf. Deuteronomy 18:1). Three types of sacrifice are named: *olah* (burnt offering, entirely consumed), *minchah* (grain offering), and *zevach* (fellowship/peace sacrifice). The promise of perpetual priestly service parallels the perpetual Davidic throne — both institutions are declared permanent.
19. A fresh reception formula marks a new oracle unit. The following section (vv. 20–26) will anchor the Davidic and Levitical promises in the permanence of the created order.
20. The concept of a 'covenant with day and night' has its roots in Genesis 8:22, where God promises the perpetual cycle of seasons after the flood, and in 31:35–37, where the fixed order of celestial bodies guarantees Israel's permanence. The verb *taferu* ('you could break, annul') is the same verb used for breaking covenant in 11:10 — God is saying the cosmic order and the Davidic promise share the same covenantal status, and both are equally unbreakable.
21. The conditional structure (if ... then) makes the Davidic covenant as certain as the sunrise. The phrase *avdi* ('my servant') is an honorific title — David is God's designated agent, not merely a subject. The Levitical priesthood is paired with the Davidic monarchy as co-recipients of irrevocable covenant — both throne and altar are guaranteed.
22. The twin images of uncountable stars and immeasurable sand echo the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 15:5, 22:17). God transfers the Abrahamic abundance promise to the Davidic and Levitical lines, weaving all three covenants — Abrahamic, Davidic, Levitical — into a single fabric. The word *zera* ('offspring, seed') is the same word used in the promises to Abraham.
23. Another reception formula introduces the final oracle of the chapter (vv. 23–26), which responds to the despair of the people who believe God has rejected both his chosen families — the Davidic dynasty and the nation of Israel.
24. The 'two families' (*shtei hamishpachot*) likely refers to the royal house of David and the priestly house of Levi — or possibly the two kingdoms, Israel and Judah. The verb *ma'as* ('rejected') is the same verb used for God's rejection of Saul (1 Samuel 15:23, 26). The people are saying God has done to David what he did to Saul — permanently discarded his chosen line. God's response in the following verses is a vehement denial.
25. The *chuqqot* ('fixed orders, statutes, decrees') of heaven and earth are the same word used for the statutes of the Torah. The laws governing nature and the laws governing the covenant community share the same vocabulary — both are divine decrees. The conditional 'if not' (*im lo*) introduces an oath formula: 'If I have not done X, then I will not do Y' — meaning 'As certainly as X is true, Y is guaranteed.'
26. The verse completes the oath formula begun in v. 25: since God's covenant with day and night is unbreakable, his covenant with David and Jacob is equally unbreakable. The three patriarchs — Abraham, Isaac, Jacob — are invoked together, linking the Davidic promise back to the Abrahamic covenant. The final verb *richamtim* ('I will have compassion on them') is from the root *r-ch-m*, related to *rechem* ('womb') — God's compassion is maternal, visceral, from the depths of his being. The chapter ends not with a threat but with tenderness.

34

Summary: *Jeremiah 34* narrates two distinct but thematically connected episodes during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. In the first (vv. 1–7), God sends Jeremiah to tell King Zedekiah that Jerusalem will fall and he will be captured — but he will die in peace, not by the sword. In the second (vv. 8–22), the narrative turns to the covenant of liberty: Zedekiah and the nobles proclaimed the release of all Hebrew slaves as required by Torah law (Exodus 21, Deuteronomy 15), but when the Babylonian siege was temporarily lifted (likely by the approach of an Egyptian army), the slave owners seized their freed slaves and re-enslaved them. God's response is devastating: since they violated the covenant of liberty, he will proclaim 'liberty' to them — liberty to the sword, plague, and famine. The covenant-cutting ceremony with the calf (vv. 18–19) explicitly echoes the ritual of Genesis 15, where God himself passed between the halves.

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains one of the most vivid and terrifying covenant texts in the Hebrew Bible. The wordplay on deror ('liberty, release') in verse 17 is brilliant and savage: because the people refused to proclaim liberty to their slaves, God will proclaim liberty to them — liberty to be consumed by sword, plague, and famine. The covenant-cutting ritual in verses 18–19, where the parties passed between the halves of a slaughtered calf, is the only explicit description of this ceremony outside Genesis 15. The implied threat is unmistakable: those who break the covenant have symbolically invoked the fate of the cut animal upon themselves. We preserved the raw violence of the covenant curse — the bodies given to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth — because this is covenant theology at its most visceral. The chapter also reveals the moral calculus of Jerusalem's elite: they freed their slaves when they were desperate for divine favor during the siege, then re-enslaved them the moment the military pressure eased. God sees through the performance.*

Translation Friction: *The verb shuv in verse 11 ('they turned back and took back') uses the same root that elsewhere means 'repent' — here it means the opposite, turning back from a righteous act to re-enslave. The phrase karat berit (v. 18, 'cut a covenant') is both the standard covenant idiom and a literal description of cutting the calf. We rendered avdu-vam ('they enslaved them,' v. 11) plainly without softening — the Hebrew verb kavash ('to subdue, force into servitude') in verse 16 is even harsher than avad, carrying connotations of forceful subjugation. The phrase 'before me' (lefanai, v. 15) in the temple context means the covenant was made in God's own presence, making the violation a personal affront.*

Connections: *The slave-release law connects to Exodus 21:2–6 and Deuteronomy 15:12–18, the seventh-year manumission requirement. The covenant-cutting ceremony echoes Genesis 15:9–17, where God passed between the halves as a self-imprecation. The 'liberty' proclamation connects to Leviticus 25:10 (the Jubilee 'liberty throughout the land'). Zedekiah's fate prophecy (vv. 2–5) connects forward to 39:4–7 and 52:7–11. The bodies exposed to birds and beasts echoes the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28:26. The temporary lifting of the siege connects to 37:5–11, where the Egyptian army's approach caused the Babylonians to withdraw briefly.*

1The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon — with all his army, all the kingdoms of the lands under his rule, and all the peoples — was fighting against Jerusalem and all its surrounding cities: 2This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Go and speak to Zedekiah king of Judah. Say to him — This is what the LORD says: I am going to hand this city over to the king of Babylon, and he will burn it with fire. 3And you will not escape from his hand. You will certainly be seized and handed over to him. Your eyes will see the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he will speak to you face to face, and you will go to Babylon. 4Yet hear the word of the LORD, Zedekiah king of Judah. This is what the LORD says concerning you: You will not die by the sword. 5You will die in peace. And just as they burned spices for your ancestors, the former kings who preceded you, so they will burn spices for you, and they will mourn for you, saying, 'Alas, lord!' For I myself have spoken this word, declares the LORD. 6Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words to Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem, 7while the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the remaining cities of Judah — against Lachish and Azekah, for these were the only fortified cities left among the cities of Judah. 8The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD after King Zedekiah had cut a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to proclaim liberty to them — 9that each person should release his male servant and his female servant — any Hebrew man or Hebrew woman — setting them free, so that no one would enslave a fellow Judean, his own brother. 10All the officials and all the people who had entered the covenant obeyed — each releasing his male servant and his female servant, setting them free and no longer enslaving them. They obeyed and released them. 11But afterward they reversed course and took back the male servants and female servants whom they had set free, and they forced them back into servitude as slaves. 12Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 13This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I myself cut a covenant with your ancestors on the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, saying: 14At the end of seven years, each of you must release his Hebrew brother who has been sold to you; after he has served you for six years, you must send him away free from you. But your ancestors did not listen to me or incline their ear. 15You yourselves recently turned and did what was right in my eyes by proclaiming liberty to one another, and you cut a covenant before me in the house that bears my name. 16But then you reversed course and profaned my name. Each of you took back his male servant and his

female servant whom you had set free according to their desire, and you forced them into subjection to be your slaves again. ¹⁷Therefore this is what the LORD says: You have not obeyed me by proclaiming liberty to one another — each to his brother and each to his neighbor. So now I am proclaiming liberty for you, declares the LORD — liberty to the sword, to the plague, and to the famine. I will make you a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. ¹⁸I will hand over the people who violated my covenant, who did not uphold the terms of the covenant that they cut before me — the calf that they cut in two and passed between its halves — ¹⁹the officials of Judah, the officials of Jerusalem, the court officers, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the halves of the calf — ²⁰I will hand them over to their enemies, to those who seek their lives. Their corpses will become food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth. ²¹And Zedekiah king of Judah and his officials I will hand over to their enemies, to those who seek their lives, and to the army of the king of Babylon — the ones who have withdrawn from you. ²²I am about to give the command, declares the LORD, and I will bring them back to this city. They will fight against it, capture it, and burn it with fire. The cities of Judah I will make a desolation without inhabitant.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The scope of the Babylonian force is emphasized by the triple kol ('all'): all his army, all the kingdoms, all the peoples. Nebuchadnezzar's empire drew soldiers from vassal kingdoms across the Near East — the siege of Jerusalem was a multinational military operation. The phrase *erets memshelat yado* ('lands under the rule of his hand') describes Nebuchadnezzar's domain as an extension of his personal grip.
2. The double messenger formula — 'This is what the LORD says ... Say to him, This is what the LORD says' — emphasizes the divine origin of the message Jeremiah must deliver personally to the king. The verb *noten* ('giving, handing over') presents Jerusalem's fall as God's own act — Babylon is merely the instrument. The verb *seraphah* ('he will burn it') foreshadows 2 Kings 25:9 and Jeremiah 52:13, the historical burning of the city and temple.
3. The emphatic infinitive absolute *tafos tittafes* ('you will certainly be seized') removes all ambiguity — there is no escape. The phrase 'your eyes will see his eyes' is intimate and terrifying: Zedekiah will stand personally before Nebuchadnezzar. Tragically, according to 39:7 and 52:11, Nebuchadnezzar blinded Zedekiah after forcing him to watch his sons' execution — the last thing his eyes saw was Nebuchadnezzar's face. The phrase *piv et-pikha* ('his mouth with your mouth,' i.e., face to face) indicates a personal audience, not communication through intermediaries.
4. The particle *akh* ('yet, however, but') introduces an unexpected qualification — despite the dire prophecy, Zedekiah's death will not be violent. The promise is limited but real: he will be a captive, not a casualty. According to 52:11, Zedekiah was imprisoned in Babylon until his death.
5. The 'burnings' (*misrefot*) refer to the burning of spices or incense at royal funerals, a customary honor for deceased kings (cf. 2 Chronicles 16:14, 21:19). The mourning cry *hoi adon* ('Alas, lord!') parallels the funeral lament in 22:18 for Jehoiakim, though there the lament was denied. The emphatic *ani dibbarthi* ('I myself have spoken') seals the oracle as irrevocable divine decree.
6. The narrative frame confirms that Jeremiah delivered the oracle as commanded. The title *hannavi* ('the prophet') emphasizes Jeremiah's official role — he is not offering personal opinion but delivering authorized divine speech to the king.
7. Lachish and Azekah were the last fortified outposts of Judah still holding out. The Lachish Letters — ostraca discovered in the ruins of Lachish — include a message from a military outpost stating 'we are watching for the signals of Lachish, because we cannot see Azekah,' suggesting Azekah had already fallen. This archaeological evidence dramatically confirms the historical situation described here. The phrase *arei mitvsar* ('fortified cities') indicates cities with defensive walls — the rest of Judah's towns had already been overrun.
8. We render *karat berit* as 'cut a covenant' rather than 'made a covenant' because the literal cutting is central to the chapter — the covenant-cutting ceremony with the calf (v. 18) makes the etymology visible. The word *deror* ('liberty, release') is a technical term for the freeing of Hebrew slaves; it appears on the Liberty Bell inscription (Leviticus 25:10). The covenant was public and binding, involving the king and 'all the people' — making the subsequent violation collective, not merely individual.
9. The law distinguishes Hebrew slaves from foreign slaves — the manumission requirement applied specifically to Israelites enslaved by fellow Israelites. The word *achiv* ('his brother') is loaded: enslaving a fellow covenant member violates the kinship created by the covenant itself. The term *chofshim* ('free') is the standard legal term for manumission — a freed slave's legal status changes permanently.
10. The verb *shama* ('heard/obeyed') appears twice, framing the verse with compliance: they heard and they obeyed. The initial obedience was genuine — the covenant was honored, at least temporarily. The phrase *ba'u vaberit* ('entered the covenant') uses the standard idiom for covenant participation. The repetition of *vayyishme'u vayyeshallechu* ('they obeyed and released') emphasizes the completeness of the initial compliance, which makes the reversal in v. 11 all the more damning.
11. The verb *shuv* ('turn, return') is used twice with devastating irony: *vayyashuvu* ('they turned back') and *vayyashivu* ('they brought back'). The same root that means 'repent' in prophetic usage here means the opposite — turning back from righteousness to wickedness. The verb *kavash* ('forced into subjection') is violent language — it implies physical coercion, not merely legal re-classification. These are people being physically dragged back into slavery after tasting freedom.

12. The reception formula introduces God's furious response to the covenant violation. The double mention of YHWH ('the word of the LORD ... from the LORD') emphasizes the divine origin of what follows — this is not Jeremiah's outrage but God's.
13. God speaks in the first person emphatic: *anokhi* ('I myself'). The phrase *beit avadim* ('house of slavery/bondage') for Egypt is standard Exodus language (Exodus 13:3, 14; 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6). The irony is devastating: God freed Israel from slavery in Egypt, and the covenant he made on that day included the requirement that Israelites never permanently enslave one another — yet that is precisely what they have done.
14. The law summarized here combines elements from Exodus 21:2 and Deuteronomy 15:12. The phrase 'your brother the Hebrew' (*achikha ha'ivri*) insists on the kinship dimension — a fellow covenant member cannot be treated as permanent property. God notes that even the ancestors failed to keep this law, establishing a pattern of persistent violation that the current generation has continued.
15. The phrase *hayashar be'einai* ('what was right in my eyes') is the Deuteronomic evaluation formula used for righteous kings. For a brief moment, Zedekiah and the people acted like faithful covenant partners. The covenant was cut *lefanai* ('before me') — in the temple, in God's direct presence. The phrase *asher niqra shemi alav* ('upon which my name is called') indicates God's personal ownership of the temple — violating a covenant made there is a direct affront to the divine name.
16. The verb *chillelu* ('profaned, desecrated') is sacrilege language — by breaking a covenant made in the temple under God's name, they have desecrated the divine name itself. The phrase *lefanai* in v. 15 and *et-shemi* here create a direct link: the covenant was made 'before me' and the violation 'profaned my name.' The phrase *lenafshan* ('according to their desire/at their will') may modify the freed slaves (who desired their freedom) or the slave owners (who freed them at their own discretion). We follow the reading that the slaves were freed 'according to their desire,' emphasizing that the re-enslavement overrode the freed people's own will.
17. The rhetorical structure is devastating: 'You did not proclaim liberty ... so I am proclaiming liberty for you.' The irony of *deror* applied to sword, plague, and famine is intentionally horrifying — these forces are 'released' against the people who refused to release their slaves. The triad *cherev, dever, ra'av* ('sword, plague, famine') is Jeremiah's signature formula for total devastation (cf. 14:12, 21:7, 24:10, 27:8, 29:17-18). The word *za'avah* ('horror, object of trembling') describes what the exiled people will become — a cautionary spectacle for other nations.
18. The verb *karat* ('cut') appears three times in this verse, creating a cascade of cutting: they cut a covenant, they cut the calf, they cut it in two. The word *betarav* ('its halves, its pieces') is from the same root as Genesis 15:10 (*betarim*). The phrase *va'ya'avru bein betarav* ('they passed between its halves') describes the self-imprecatory ritual: walking between the severed animal invokes its fate upon the oath-taker if the covenant is broken. The people have now triggered that curse.
19. The list of participants is comprehensive: *sarei Yehudah* (officials of Judah), *sarei Yerushalayim* (officials of Jerusalem), *hassarim* (court officers — the Hebrew *sarisim* can mean 'eunuchs' or 'court officials'; in this context, royal courtiers is the likely sense), *hakkohanim* (the priests), and *kol am ha'arets* (all the people of the land). Every social class participated in the covenant and is therefore implicated in its violation. No one is exempt.
20. The punishment fulfills the self-imprecation of the covenant ritual: those who passed between the halves of the calf will themselves be torn apart like the calf. The phrase *nivlatam lema'akhal* ('their corpses as food') echoes Deuteronomy 28:26, the covenant curse: 'Your carcasses will be food for all the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth, and no one will frighten them away.' Denial of burial was considered the ultimate dishonor in ancient Israelite culture — the body left exposed to scavengers.
21. The participle *ha'olim me'aleikhem* ('the ones going up from upon you,' i.e., withdrawing from you) reveals the historical moment: the Babylonian army has temporarily lifted the siege (cf. 37:5, when Egypt's army caused a Babylonian withdrawal). This withdrawal is exactly what emboldened the slave owners to re-enslave their freed servants — they thought the crisis was over. God's message is clear: the Babylonians are coming back.
22. The verb *tsivveh* ('command') presents the Babylonian return as God's own military order — Nebuchadnezzar's army moves at God's command, not its own initiative. The verb *hashivotim* ('I will bring them back') uses the same root *shuv* that described the people's reversal in v. 11 — as they 'turned back' to enslave, God 'turns back' the army to destroy. The chapter ends with the very desolation that chapter 33 promised to reverse, creating a stark contrast: the Book of Consolation's promises stand, but the present generation's covenant violation ensures present judgment.

35

Summary: Jeremiah 35 records a divine object lesson using the Rechabites, a clan descended from Jonadab son of Rechab, who had commanded his descendants to never drink wine, never build houses, never plant vineyards, and to live as nomads in tents. God instructs Jeremiah to bring the Rechabites into the temple chambers and offer them wine. They refuse categorically, citing their ancestor's command. God then uses their unwavering obedience to a human father as a devastating contrast with Judah's refusal to obey the divine word — despite God's persistent, repeated appeals through the prophets. The chapter closes with a blessing on the Rechabites for their faithfulness and a judgment on Judah for its disobedience.

What Makes This Remarkable: *The literary structure is brilliantly simple: a test that the Rechabites are meant to pass, followed by a rhetorical question that Judah cannot answer. The Rechabites have obeyed a human ancestor's command for over two centuries without deviation; Judah will not obey God for a single generation. The temporal setting is during Jehoiakim's reign, when the Babylonian and Aramean raids have forced the Rechabites temporarily into Jerusalem — they are in the city against their own principles, pushed there by military necessity, yet still will not break their ancestor's command even under these extreme circumstances. The phrase hashkem veshalach ('rising early and sending,' v. 15) reprises the characteristic Jeremiah idiom for God's tireless persistence, making the contrast between divine effort and human indifference all the more stark. We rendered the Rechabites' speech in verses 6-10 with the repetitive cadence of the Hebrew, preserving the rhythmic quality of a family creed recited from memory across generations.*

Translation Friction: *The verb tsivvah ('commanded') is used for both Jonadab's human command (vv. 6-7) and God's divine command (vv. 14-16), creating a deliberate parallel that had to be preserved in English — the same verb for a lesser authority whose commands are obeyed and a greater authority whose commands are ignored. The word mishkenot in verse 7 could mean 'dwellings' or 'tents,' and we chose 'tents' because the context specifically contrasts permanent houses with nomadic dwelling. The chapter's setting 'in the days of Jehoiakim' (v. 1) places it chronologically earlier than the surrounding narrative chapters, illustrating Jeremiah's non-chronological arrangement.*

Connections: *The Rechabites trace to Jonadab son of Rechab, who appears in 2 Kings 10:15-23 as the zealous supporter of Jehu's purge of Baal worship — their ancestral command to live apart from Canaanite agricultural culture was rooted in anti-idolatry conviction. The 'rising early and sending' formula connects to 7:13, 7:25, 11:7, 25:3-4, 26:5, 29:19, 32:33, and 44:4. The covenant-obedience contrast anticipates the new covenant passage in 31:31-34, where God will solve the problem of disobedience by writing the law on hearts. The blessing formula for the Rechabites in verse 19 ('Jonadab son of Rechab will never lack a man to stand before me') echoes the Davidic and Levitical permanence formulas in 33:17-18.*

1The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah: 2Go to the house of the Rechabites and speak with them. Bring them into the house of the LORD, into one of the side chambers, and offer them wine to drink. 3So I took Jaazaniah son of Jeremiah son of Habazziniah, along with his brothers, all his sons, and the entire house of the Rechabites. 4I brought them into the house of the LORD, to the chamber of the sons of Hanan son of Igdaliah, the man of God, which was beside the chamber of the officials and above the chamber of Maaseiah son of Shallum, the keeper of the threshold. 5I set before the members of the house of the Rechabites bowls full of wine and cups, and said to them, "Drink wine." 6They said, "We will not drink wine, because Jonadab son of Rechab, our ancestor, commanded us: 'You and your descendants must never drink wine — 7You must not build a house, you must not sow seed, and you must not plant a vineyard or own one. Instead, you must live in tents all your days, so that you may live a long time on the land where you are sojourners.' 8We have obeyed the voice of Jonadab son of Rechab, our ancestor, in everything he commanded us — to drink no wine all our days, we ourselves, our wives, our sons, and our daughters; 9and not to build houses to live in. We have no vineyard, no field, and no seed. 10We have lived in tents and have obeyed and done everything that Jonadab our ancestor commanded us. 11But when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against the land, we said, 'Come, let us go into Jerusalem to escape the Chaldean army and the Aramean army.' So we have been living in Jerusalem. 12Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: 13This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Go and say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem — Will you not accept correction and obey my words? declares the LORD. 14The words of Jonadab son of Rechab have been upheld — he commanded his sons not to drink wine, and to this day they have not drunk any, because they obeyed their ancestor's command. But I have spoken to you persistently, and you have not obeyed me. 15I sent to you all my servants the prophets, sending them persistently, saying: 'Turn back, each of you, from your evil way! Make your deeds right and do not go after other gods to serve them, and you will live on the land that I gave to you and your ancestors.' But you did not incline your ear or obey me. 16The sons of Jonadab son of Rechab have upheld the command their ancestor gave them, but this people has not obeyed me. 17Therefore, this is what the LORD, the God of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: I am about to bring on Judah and on all the inhabitants of Jerusalem every disaster that I have spoken against

them, because I spoke to them and they did not listen, and I called to them and they did not answer. ¹⁸To the house of the Rechabites, Jeremiah said: This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says — Because you have obeyed the command of Jonadab your ancestor, kept all his instructions, and done everything he commanded you, ¹⁹Therefore, this is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Jonadab son of Rechab will never lack a man to stand before me for all time.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The temporal marker 'in the days of Jehoiakim' places this episode during Jehoiakim's reign (609-598 BCE), likely during the Babylonian-Aramean incursions of 601-598 BCE that forced the Rechabites into Jerusalem (see v. 11). The Hebrew *le'mor* ('saying') introduces direct speech and is rendered as a colon.
2. The *leshakhot* ('side chambers') were rooms attached to the temple complex used for various purposes — storage, meetings, priestly functions. The setting is significant: God stages this object lesson in the temple itself, the center of Judah's covenant relationship, making the contrast between Rechabite obedience and Judahite disobedience all the more pointed.
3. The Jeremiah named here as Jaazaniah's father is a different person from the prophet Jeremiah — a common name in this period. The three-generation lineage (Jaazaniah-Jeremiah-Habazziniah) establishes Jaazaniah as the clan's current leader. The Hebrew 'all his sons and the entire house of the Rechabites' emphasizes that the full clan is assembled as witnesses to the test.
4. The detailed spatial description locates this room precisely within the temple complex — beside the officials' chamber and above Maaseiah's room. Hanan is called *ish ha-Elohim* ('man of God'), a title for prophets and holy men (cf. 1 Samuel 9:6, 1 Kings 13:1). Maaseiah's title *shomer ha-miftan* ('keeper of the threshold') designates one of the senior temple gatekeepers, a position of considerable authority (cf. 2 Kings 12:10, 25:18). The level of topographic detail suggests this is drawn from Baruch's eyewitness narrative.
5. The *gevi'im* are large bowls or pitchers — the same word used for Joseph's silver divination cup (Genesis 44:2). The abundance of wine (full bowls plus individual cups) makes the offer emphatic and generous, heightening the drama of the refusal. The command *shetu yayin* ('drink wine') is deliberately blunt — a two-word test.
6. The emphatic *lo nishteh-yayin* ('we will not drink wine') is an absolute refusal. The verb *tsivvah* ('commanded') is the same word used for God's commands — the parallel is deliberately set up by the narrative. The phrase *ad-olam* ('for ever') indicates a perpetual, cross-generational obligation. The Rechabites do not hesitate, negotiate, or ask for an exception despite being in the temple with a prophet.
7. The fourfold prohibition (no houses, no sowing, no vineyards, no ownership) represents a total rejection of settled Canaanite agricultural civilization. The Rechabites were to remain *gerim* ('sojourners, resident aliens') — living in the land but not assimilated into its culture. The promise 'that you may live a long time on the land' echoes the Deuteronomic longevity promise (Deuteronomy 5:16, 25:15), suggesting Jonadab modeled his family code on covenant language.
8. The phrase *vanishma beqol* ('we obeyed the voice of') uses the same construction *shim'u beqoli* ('obey my voice') that God uses for his own covenant demands (v. 13, 11:4, 7:23). The comprehensive list — 'we ourselves, our wives, our sons, and our daughters' — shows total household compliance across every generation and gender. The contrast being set up is devastating: a human ancestor commands once, and his entire extended family obeys for centuries.
9. The terse listing — 'no vineyard, no field, no seed' — reads like an inventory of what they have deliberately refused to possess. Each item represents a pillar of settled Canaanite life that the Rechabites have voluntarily renounced.
10. The phrase *vanishma vanna'as* ('we obeyed and we did') pairs hearing with doing — the covenantal ideal expressed in Israel's own pledge at Sinai: *na'aseh venishma*, 'we will do and we will hear' (Exodus 24:7). The Rechabites embody precisely the obedience that Israel promised but failed to sustain.
11. The Rechabites explain their presence in Jerusalem as a concession forced by military necessity — the Chaldean and Aramean raids made tent-dwelling in the open countryside impossible. Even this breach of their normal practice is minimal: they moved into the city but still refused to drink wine, build houses, or plant fields. The Hebrew *mippenei* ('from the face of, because of') expresses the immediate military threat. Nebuchadnezzar is spelled differently here (*nevukhadre'tstsar*) than in some other passages (*nevukhadnetstsar*) — both are attested Hebrew transliterations of the Babylonian *Nabu-kudurri-usur*.
12. The standard prophetic reception formula marks the transition from the narrative test (vv. 1-11) to the divine application (vv. 13-19). God will now interpret what has just happened.
13. The rhetorical question *halo tiqchu musar* ('will you not accept correction/discipline?') uses *musar*, a wisdom-tradition term meaning 'discipline, correction, instruction' (prominent in Proverbs). God is not merely commanding but asking why they refuse to learn. The question is devastating in context: the Rechabites have just demonstrated flawless obedience to a human command, and God must ask his own people whether they will even consider obeying him.

14. The verb *huqam* ('have been upheld, established') emphasizes the durability of the Rechabites' obedience — Jonadab's words still stand because his descendants still honor them. The idiom *hashkem vedabber* ('rising early and speaking') is the characteristic Jeremiah formula for God's tireless prophetic outreach (see 7:13, 7:25, 11:7, 25:3). The contrast is explicit: a human father commands once and is obeyed for centuries; God speaks persistently through generations of prophets and is ignored.
15. The verb *shuvu* ('turn back, return') is the key Jeremiah word for repentance — here it appears as God's plea through the prophets. The appeal is comprehensive: turn from evil, improve conduct, abandon idolatry, and the covenant promise of land remains. The phrase *lo hittitem et-ozenekhem* ('you did not incline your ear') is a recurring Jeremianic accusation (7:24, 7:26, 11:8, 17:23, 25:4, 34:14, 44:5) depicting willful deafness to divine speech.
16. The verdict is delivered with devastating simplicity. The verb *heqimu* ('they upheld') and the contrasting *lo sham'u* ('they did not obey') create a stark binary. *Ha'am hazzeh* ('this people') carries a note of estrangement — God refers to his own covenant people with the distancing demonstrative 'this,' as if they have become strangers to him through their disobedience.
17. The *hinneni mevi* ('I am about to bring') construction expresses imminent divine action. The double failure — 'I spoke and they did not listen, I called and they did not answer' — echoes Isaiah 65:12 and 66:4, depicting a God who has exhausted every avenue of communication. The word *ra'ah* ('disaster, calamity, evil') refers to the covenant curses that were always the stated consequence of disobedience.
18. The triad *shema'tem...tishmer'u...ta'asu* ('you obeyed...you kept...you did') is emphatic — three verbs to describe the completeness of their compliance. The word *mitsvotav* ('his instructions, commands') is the same term used for God's commandments (*mitsvot*), reinforcing the parallel between human and divine authority that structures this chapter.
19. The blessing formula *lo yikkaret ish...omed lefanai* ('he will never lack a man standing before me') is a permanence promise identical in structure to the Davidic promise (33:17) and the Levitical promise (33:18). To 'stand before' God means to serve in his presence — a priestly and prophetic vocation. God rewards the Rechabites' faithfulness to a human ancestor with permanent standing before the divine presence, the highest honor available. The phrase *kol-hayyamim* ('all the days') extends this promise without a visible endpoint.

36

Summary: *Jeremiah 36 is one of the most dramatic narratives in all prophetic literature — the story of a scroll written, read, and destroyed. In Jehoiakim's fourth year, God commands Jeremiah to dictate all his oracles onto a scroll, and Baruch son of Neriah writes them down. Since Jeremiah is banned from the temple, Baruch reads the scroll publicly on a fast day. Officials hear of it and summon Baruch for a private reading; they are alarmed and report to King Jehoiakim. The king has the scroll read before him in his winter quarters, and as each three or four columns are read, he cuts them off with a scribe's knife and throws them into the fire in the brazier until the entire scroll is consumed. He shows no fear, no repentance, and no grief. God responds through Jeremiah with a judgment oracle against Jehoiakim, and Jeremiah dictates the scroll again to Baruch — this time with additional material.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is the closest the Hebrew Bible comes to describing the physical process of prophetic literary composition. We see the tools: a megillat sefer (scroll), deyo (ink), a ta'ar hasofer (scribe's knife), an ach (brazier). We see the layers of transmission: God speaks to Jeremiah, Jeremiah dictates to Baruch, Baruch reads to the people, officials relay to the king. The repeated readings create mounting dramatic tension — three audiences, three reactions. The people listen. The officials tremble. The king burns. Jehoiakim's act of cutting and burning the scroll is a deliberate act of royal contempt for prophetic authority, a symbolic annulment of the divine word. But the final verse delivers the theological punchline: the scroll is rewritten with additions. The word of God cannot be destroyed by fire. We preserved the pacing of the Hebrew narrative, which builds slowly through procedural detail before erupting in the king's defiant act of destruction.*

Translation Friction: *The word megillah ('scroll') appears throughout and must be distinguished from sefer ('book, document, writing'). The compound megillat-sefer in verse 2 is literally 'scroll of a book/document' — we rendered it as 'a scroll' since in this period a scroll was the standard book format. The term delathot ('columns, doors') in verse 23 describes the sections of the scroll — literally 'doors' but technically the columns of text visible when the scroll was unrolled to a given point. We rendered this as 'columns' with a note on the Hebrew image. The verb qara ('he tore, cut') in verse 23 could mean either 'tore' or 'cut,' but the presence of the scribe's knife indicates deliberate cutting, not ripping. Jehoiakim's lack of reaction required careful handling — the Hebrew emphasizes what did NOT happen (no tearing of garments, no fear) as powerfully as what did.*

Connections: The contrast between Jehoiakim and his father Josiah is unmistakable. When a scroll was read to Josiah (2 Kings 22:11), he tore his garments in grief and repentance; when a scroll is read to Jehoiakim, he cuts and burns it. The phrase 'they were not afraid and did not tear their garments' (v. 24) deliberately invokes Josiah's opposite response. Baruch son of Neriah reappears in chapters 32, 43, and 45, and is increasingly recognized as the editor or compiler of significant portions of the book of Jeremiah. The promise that Jehoiakim's dead body will be 'thrown out to the heat of day and the frost of night' (v. 30) connects to 22:18-19 where Jeremiah prophesied that Jehoiakim would receive 'the burial of a donkey.' The theological principle that the word of God survives destruction anticipates the broader biblical theme of scripture's indestructibility.

1In the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 2"Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I first spoke to you — from the days of Josiah — until today. 3Perhaps the house of Judah will hear of all the disaster I intend to bring on them, and each person will turn back from his evil way, and I will forgive their iniquity and their sin." 4Jeremiah summoned Baruch son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote on a scroll, at Jeremiah's dictation, all the words of the LORD that he had spoken to him. 5Then Jeremiah instructed Baruch: "I am restricted — I cannot enter the house of the LORD. 6So you must go and read from the scroll — the words of the LORD that you wrote at my dictation — in the hearing of the people in the house of the LORD on a day of fasting. Read them also in the hearing of all the people of Judah who come in from their cities. 7Perhaps their plea for mercy will come before the LORD and each of them will turn back from his evil way, because the anger and the fury that the LORD has declared against this people are great." 8Baruch son of Neriah did everything that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading the words of the LORD from the scroll in the house of the LORD. 9In the fifth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, in the ninth month, a fast was proclaimed before the LORD for all the people in Jerusalem and all the people coming in from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem. 10Baruch read the words of Jeremiah from the scroll in the house of the LORD, in the chamber of Gemariah son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper court at the entrance of the New Gate of the house of the LORD, in the hearing of all the people. 11When Micaiah son of Gemariah son of Shaphan heard all the words of the LORD from the scroll, 12he went down to the royal palace, to the chamber of the scribe, and there all the officials were sitting: Elishama the scribe, Delaiah son of Shemaiah, Elnathan son of Achbor, Gemariah son of Shaphan, Zedekiah son of Hananiah, and all the other officials. 13Micaiah reported to them all the words he had heard when Baruch read from the scroll in the hearing of the people. 14All the officials sent Jehudi son of Nethaniah son of Shelemiah son of Cushi to Baruch, saying, "Take the scroll from which you read in the hearing of the people and come." So Baruch son of Neriah took the scroll in his hand and came to them. 15They said to him, "Sit down and read it to us." So Baruch read it in their hearing. 16When they heard all the words, they turned to one another in alarm and said to Baruch, "We must certainly report all these words to the king." 17They questioned Baruch: "Tell us — how did you write all these words? Was it at his dictation?" 18Baruch answered them, "He dictated all these words to me from his mouth, and I wrote them on the scroll with ink." 19The officials said to Baruch, "Go and hide — you and Jeremiah. No one must know where you are." 20They went to the king in the court, but first they deposited the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe. Then they reported all the words to the king. 21The king sent Jehudi to fetch the scroll. He took it from the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and Jehudi read it in the hearing of the king and all the officials standing beside the king. 22The king was sitting in the winter quarters — it was the ninth month — with a fire burning in the brazier before him. 23Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns, the king would cut them off with a scribe's knife and throw them into the fire in the brazier, until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire in the brazier. 24They showed no fear and did not tear their garments — neither the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words. 25Even though Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah urged the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them. 26The king commanded Jerahmeel the king's son, Seraiah son of Azriel, and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to seize Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet. But the LORD hid them. 27After the king had burned the scroll and the words that Baruch had written at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: 28"Take another scroll and write on it all the previous words that were on the first scroll — the one that Jehoiakim king of Judah burned. 29And concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah, you are to say: This is what the LORD says — You burned this

scroll, saying, 'Why did you write on it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land and eliminate from it both human and animal?' ³⁰Therefore, this is what the LORD says concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: He will have no one to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body will be thrown out, exposed to the heat by day and the frost by night. ³¹I will punish him, his offspring, and his servants for their iniquity. I will bring on them, on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and on the people of Judah every disaster I have spoken against them — but they would not listen." ³²Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch son of Neriah, the scribe. Baruch wrote on it, at Jeremiah's dictation, all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire — and many similar words were added to them besides.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The fourth year of Jehoiakim is 605/604 BCE — the same year Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt at Carchemish (cf. 46:2) and established Babylonian dominance over the region. The timing is significant: God commands the scroll's composition at the precise moment when the geopolitical crisis Jeremiah had been warning about becomes irreversible. The Hebrew *vayyehi* ('and it was') is the standard narrative opening, rendered naturally without the archaic 'and it came to pass.'
2. *Megillat-sefer* is literally 'a scroll of a book/document' — the standard writing format of the period, made from animal skins or papyrus sewn together. The scope of the writing is comprehensive: every oracle from the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry (c. 627 BCE under Josiah) to the present (605 BCE) — over twenty years of prophetic speech. The threefold 'against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations' covers the full range of Jeremiah's oracles, including the oracles against the nations collected in chapters 46–51.
3. The word *ulai* ('perhaps') is extraordinary — God expresses hope rather than certainty, leaving space for human response. The purpose of the scroll is not merely to record but to provoke repentance (*yashuvu*, from *shuv*). The distinction between *avon* ('iniquity' — the guilt/distortion of wrongdoing) and *chattat* ('sin' — missing the mark, failing to meet the standard) is preserved. God's willingness to forgive is contingent on their turning back — the scroll is an instrument of mercy, not merely judgment.
4. The phrase *mippi Yirmeyahu* ('from the mouth of Jeremiah') describes oral dictation — Jeremiah speaks, Baruch writes. This is one of the few biblical passages that explicitly describes the mechanism of prophetic literary composition. Baruch was a trained scribe from a prominent family — his brother Seraiah held a court position (51:59). The word order in Hebrew emphasizes Baruch as the agent of transcription while Jeremiah remains the source of the divine words.
5. The word *atsur* ('restricted, confined, shut up') indicates that Jeremiah was barred from the temple, though the text does not specify why. Possible reasons include: official ban by the temple authorities after his temple sermon (chapter 7/26), ritual impurity, or some form of house arrest. The restriction necessitates Baruch as his proxy — the scroll becomes Jeremiah's voice when the prophet himself cannot be present.
6. The *be'oznei* ('in the ears of') construction emphasizes public, audible proclamation — not private reading but public performance of the prophetic word. The 'day of fasting' (*yom tsum*) would draw large crowds from across Judah to the temple, maximizing the audience. Jeremiah strategically chooses a moment of national assembly to deliver twenty years of accumulated oracles.
7. Again *ulai* ('perhaps') — Jeremiah echoes God's own hopeful uncertainty from verse 3. The word *techinnah* ('plea for mercy, supplication') is from the root *chanan* ('to be gracious') — it is a plea that throws itself entirely on the hearer's grace. The pairing of *af* ('anger') and *chemah* ('fury, heat') describes the full intensity of divine wrath, making the urgency of repentance clear.
8. The phrase *kekhol asher tsivvahu* ('according to everything he commanded him') echoes the obedience language of the Rechabites in the preceding chapter (35:10, 18), creating a literary link: Baruch, like the Rechabites, obeys fully. Jeremiah is here called *hannavi* ('the prophet'), a title that reinforces his authority as the source of authentic divine speech.
9. The ninth month (*Kislev*, approximately November-December) places this during the cold season, which becomes significant when the winter brazier appears in verse 22. The fast may have been called in response to the Babylonian threat following the battle of Carchemish the previous year. Nearly a year has passed since the command to write the scroll (v. 1, fourth year), suggesting the scroll's composition was not rushed. The passive 'a fast was proclaimed' (*qar'u tsum*) leaves the initiative ambiguous — it may have been the king's or the religious authorities' decision.
10. Gemariah son of Shaphan belongs to a family that repeatedly supported Jeremiah — his father Shaphan was the scribe who read the discovered scroll to King Josiah (2 Kings 22:8–10), and his brother Ahikam protected Jeremiah from execution (26:24). The location is strategic: the upper court at the New Gate would have been a high-traffic area during a public fast, giving Baruch maximum exposure. The chamber's use suggests Gemariah was sympathetic to Jeremiah's message.
11. Micaiah is Gemariah's son — three generations of the Shaphan family now intersect with prophetic scrolls. His grandfather Shaphan read the discovered book of the law to Josiah; now the grandson hears Jeremiah's scroll read. The verb *shama* ('heard') begins the chain of transmission: Micaiah hears, then reports to the officials, who summon Baruch, who reads to them, and they report to the king.
12. The list of officials names specific individuals who can be cross-referenced with other biblical and extra-biblical sources. Elnathan son of Achbor was sent by Jehoiakim to extradite the prophet Uriah from Egypt for execution (26:22) — his presence here creates tension about where his loyalties lie. Gemariah son of Shaphan is the same official in whose chamber Baruch read; his presence among the officials confirms his involvement. The Hebrew *hinneh* ('there') conveys the narrative immediacy of finding the officials already assembled — the information reaches the right people at the

right moment.

13. The verb *higgid* ('reported, declared') indicates a formal report, not casual gossip. Micaiah functions as a relay in the chain of transmission: God to Jeremiah to Baruch to the people to Micaiah to the officials — five links before the words reach the political leadership.
14. Jehudi's name means 'the Judean' or 'the Jew' — he functions as an intermediary throughout this chapter, later reading the scroll to the king (v. 21). His grandfather's name Cushi ('the Cushite/Ethiopian') may indicate African ancestry, a detail that reflects the ethnic diversity of Judean court life. The officials' request is respectful — they ask Baruch to come with the scroll, not seize it. Their posture toward the prophetic word is initially open, in contrast to the king's response.
15. The invitation *shev na* ('sit down, please') is courteous — the officials treat Baruch with respect and give him a proper hearing. The particle *na* adds politeness. This is the second reading of the scroll (after the public reading in v. 10), and the narrative builds through repetition — each successive reading brings the words closer to the king.
16. The officials' reaction is fear — *pachadu ish el re'ehu* ('they were alarmed, each toward his neighbor') — a communal, shared dread at the content of the scroll. Their response is the proper one: alarm at divine judgment, followed by action. The emphatic infinitive absolute *hagged naggid* ('we must certainly report') shows resolve — they feel obligated to inform the king. Their fear contrasts sharply with Jehoiakim's total lack of fear in verse 24.
17. The officials want to verify the chain of transmission — are these Jeremiah's own compositions or direct prophetic dictation? The question *eikh katavta* ('how did you write?') probes the mechanism of composition, anticipating the modern scholarly question about the relationship between prophetic speech and written text. The phrase *mippiv* ('from his mouth') is both literal (oral dictation) and metaphorical (prophetic authority).
18. Baruch's answer is precise and revealing: *mippiv yiqra elai* ('from his mouth he would call out to me') describes an ongoing process of oral dictation. The mention of *deyo* ('ink') is one of the few references to writing materials in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Ezekiel 9:2-3) — a concrete physical detail that grounds the narrative in material reality. The ink was likely a carbon-based mixture of soot and gum. This verse provides the clearest biblical description of how prophetic texts were physically produced.
19. The officials' warning reveals their awareness that the scroll's content will provoke the king's wrath. Their counsel to hide (*histater*, from the root *s-t-r*, 'to conceal') shows they expect violence. This group of officials occupies a precarious middle position — they take the prophetic word seriously enough to be alarmed, but they serve a king who will not tolerate it. Their protective instinct toward Jeremiah and Baruch echoes Ahikam son of Shaphan's protection of Jeremiah in 26:24.
20. The officials take a precaution — they leave the physical scroll in safekeeping before going to the king, perhaps hoping to control the king's access to it or protect it from immediate destruction. The verb *hifqidu* ('they deposited, entrusted') implies careful placement for safekeeping. They report the contents orally (*vayyaggidu be'oznei hammelekh*, 'they reported in the king's ears') rather than bringing the scroll itself — a buffer that proves insufficient, as the king will demand the scroll.
21. The king demands the physical scroll — the officials' attempt to maintain a buffer fails. Jehudi now performs the third reading, this time directly to the king and his entire court. The verb *yiqra'eha* ('he read it') is singular — Jehudi reads aloud while the king and officials listen. The phrase *ha'omedim me'al hammelekh* ('standing beside/above the king') describes the court formation, with officials standing while the king is seated.
22. The *beit hachoref* ('winter house/quarters') was a section of the palace used in the cold months (cf. Amos 3:15). The ninth month (Kislev) corresponds to November-December, when Jerusalem can be cold enough to require heating. The *ach* is a portable brazier or fire-pot, not a built-in hearth — a metal or ceramic container holding burning charcoal, placed in the room for warmth. This detail sets the physical scene for the burning: the fire is already lit, available, within arm's reach. The narrative's attention to the brazier is ominous — it tells the reader exactly how the scroll will be destroyed before the destruction happens.
23. The *delathot* ('doors, columns') refers to the columns of text visible on the scroll when partially unrolled — each 'door' is a panel of writing. The *ta'ar hasofer* ('scribe's knife') was a blade used for cutting and trimming parchment or scraping off errors — Jehoiakim turns a tool of literary production into a tool of literary destruction. The iterative construction (reading three or four columns, then cutting, then throwing) indicates a prolonged, deliberate act — not a single impulsive throw but systematic, column-by-column destruction. The king slices apart the word of God with the same tool a scribe would use to prepare it. The repetition of 'the fire in the brazier' at the end hammers the image home.
24. This verse is constructed entirely as negation — what did NOT happen. The phrase *lo fachadu* ('they were not afraid') directly contrasts with the officials' alarm in verse 16 (*pachadu*). The phrase *lo qar'u et-bigdeihem* ('they did not tear their garments') is a devastating allusion to Josiah's response when a scroll was read to him: 'the king tore his garments' (2 Kings 22:11). Josiah ripped his clothes in grief and repentance; his son Jehoiakim rips the scroll in contempt. Father and son hear the word of God and respond with tearing — but what they tear reveals everything about their character.
25. The verb *hifgi'u* ('they urged, interceded, pleaded') indicates intense personal advocacy — these three officials tried to stop the king. Gemariah is the same official in whose chamber Baruch first read the scroll; his opposition to burning it is consistent with his earlier support. Elmathan's intercession is complex — this is the same man who brought the prophet Uriah back from Egypt for execution (26:22), yet here he tries to save the scroll. The phrase *velo shama aleihem* ('he would not listen to them') echoes the recurring accusation against Judah: God spoke and they did not listen. Now the king refuses to listen even to his own advisors.
26. *Ben-hammelekh* ('son of the king') may mean a literal prince or could be a court title. Jehoiakim's order to arrest Baruch and Jeremiah confirms the officials' fear in verse 19 — their warning to hide was well-founded. The final clause *vayyastirem YHWH* ('but the LORD hid them') is abrupt and

theologically decisive. No explanation is given for how God concealed them; the narrative simply states divine protection as a fact. The verb s-t-r ('to hide, conceal') echoes the officials' command histater ('hide yourselves') in verse 19 — what the officials advised in human wisdom, God accomplished in divine power.

27. The prophetic reception formula marks a new divine communication in response to the king's act. The phrase 'the scroll and the words' treats the physical scroll and its verbal content as two distinct things — the king burned the object, but the words persist. The narrative's structure enacts its own theology: the king destroys the scroll, and immediately God speaks again.
28. The command shuv qach ('again take') uses the verb shuv ('return, again') — the key verb of Jeremiah's theology now applied to the act of writing itself. The word returns. God's response to the burning is not grief or defeat but repetition — take another scroll, write again. The phrase megillah acheret ('another scroll') emphasizes material replacement, but the content is restored: 'all the previous words.' The king destroyed the medium; God restores the message.
29. God quotes Jehoiakim's own objection back to him — the king burned the scroll because it prophesied Babylonian invasion. The emphatic infinitive absolute bo yavo ('will certainly come') is the very prediction the king tried to annul by burning. The verb hishbit ('eliminate, cause to cease') is comprehensive — total depopulation, both human and animal. Jehoiakim's act was not merely censorship but an attempt at sympathetic magic: by destroying the written prediction, he hoped to prevent the predicted event. The theology of this chapter refutes that: destroying the word does not prevent the reality.
30. The judgment has two parts. First, dynastic termination: lo yihyeh-lo yoshev al-kisse David ('he will have no one sitting on David's throne'). Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin did briefly reign (three months, 2 Kings 24:8) before deportation to Babylon, raising questions about fulfillment — the brevity of his reign may be the point, or the prophecy may refer to lasting dynastic rule. Second, the denial of proper burial: his corpse will be 'thrown out' (mushleket) to the elements. This connects to 22:18-19 where Jeremiah prophesied Jehoiakim would receive 'the burial of a donkey — dragged and thrown beyond the gates of Jerusalem.' The pairing of chorev ('heat') and qerach ('frost') creates a merism — his body will be exposed to every extreme, with no one to gather it.
31. The verb paqadti ('I will punish, visit upon') carries the full weight of divine reckoning — it means to pay attention to, to take account of, to hold accountable. The judgment extends concentrically: from Jehoiakim, to his offspring and servants, to all Jerusalem, to all Judah. The final clause velo shame'u ('but they did not listen') is the chapter's epitaph — the same indictment repeated throughout Jeremiah, now applied specifically to the king who burned the scroll. The irony is total: the king who refused to hear the words will now experience the reality those words described.
32. The final verse is the theological climax of the chapter. The scroll is reconstituted — every word the king burned is restored. But the last phrase delivers the punchline: ve'od nosaf aleihem devarim rabbim kaheimah ('and many similar words were added to them besides'). The king's attempt to silence the prophetic word resulted in MORE words. The scroll grew. Fire could not diminish it; destruction only multiplied it. This principle — that the word of God survives and exceeds every attempt to destroy it — becomes a foundational theme in biblical theology. The verb nosaf ('were added') is in the passive, suggesting divine rather than merely human initiative in the expansion.

37

Summary: *Jeremiah 37 opens with Zedekiah's installation as king by Nebuchadnezzar, noting immediately that neither the king nor his officials heeded the LORD's words through Jeremiah. When a temporary Egyptian military advance causes the Chaldeans to lift the siege of Jerusalem, Zedekiah sends a delegation asking Jeremiah to pray for the nation. The LORD's response is blunt: Egypt will retreat and the Chaldeans will return and burn the city. Jeremiah attempts to leave Jerusalem to claim a property inheritance in Benjamin, is arrested at the Benjamin Gate, accused of deserting to the Chaldeans, beaten, and imprisoned in the house of Jonathan the scribe. After many days in the dungeon, Zedekiah secretly summons Jeremiah to ask: 'Is there any word from the LORD?' Jeremiah's answer is unchanged: 'You will be handed over to the king of Babylon.' Jeremiah then pleads not to be sent back to Jonathan's dungeon, and Zedekiah transfers him to the court of the guard with a daily ration of bread.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter captures the paradox at the heart of Zedekiah's reign — a king who cannot stop consulting the prophet he cannot bring himself to obey. Zedekiah's secret question, 'Is there any word from the LORD?' (hayesh davar me'et YHWH, v. 17), is one of the most poignant moments in the book: a man who desperately wants a different answer but keeps asking a prophet who will not give him one. The temporary Egyptian relief (v. 5) creates a false hope that Jeremiah's prophecy has failed — but God immediately corrects this, declaring that even if the Chaldean army were reduced to wounded men lying in their tents, they would still rise and burn Jerusalem (v. 10). This hyperbolic statement underscores that Jerusalem's destruction is a divine decree, not a military calculation. Jeremiah's arrest on charges of desertion (v. 13) is bitterly ironic: the prophet who told others to surrender is accused of surrendering himself. The dungeon of Jonathan the scribe (beit ha-bor) is described in language suggesting a cistern-pit within a house,*

anticipating the literal cistern of chapter 38.

Translation Friction: *The verb nachal in verse 12 is debated — it may mean 'to receive a portion' (inheritance division), 'to slip away,' or 'to conduct business.' We rendered it as 'to claim his portion' following the context of property division among kinspeople, which connects to Jeremiah's land purchase in chapter 32. The phrase 'falling away to the Chaldeans' (nofel el ha-kasdim, v. 13) uses the participle of nafal ('to fall'), a technical term in this period for military desertion — we rendered it 'deserting to the Chaldeans' to capture the military accusation. Zedekiah's request in verse 21 for daily bread from 'the bakers' street' (chuts ha-ofim) is a specific topographic detail — we preserved this as a place name rather than a generic description.*

Connections: *Zedekiah's secret consultation with Jeremiah connects to 21:1-7 (his first inquiry) and anticipates 38:14-28 (his final meeting). The Egyptian army's approach and withdrawal echoes Ezekiel 17:15-17, where Ezekiel independently condemns Zedekiah's alliance with Egypt. The charge of desertion against Jeremiah parallels the charge against the soldiers in 38:19 and 39:9. Jeremiah's plea for his life (v. 20) echoes the petition form found in the Psalms of individual lament. The transfer to the court of the guard (chatsar ha-mattarah) positions Jeremiah for the events of chapters 38 and 39.*

¹King Zedekiah son of Josiah reigned in place of Coniah son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had installed as king in the land of Judah. ²But neither he, nor his officials, nor the people of the land listened to the words of the LORD that he spoke through the prophet Jeremiah. ³King Zedekiah sent Jehucal son of Shelemiah and Zephaniah son of Maaseiah the priest to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "Please pray to the LORD our God on our behalf." ⁴At that time Jeremiah was still moving freely among the people, for they had not yet placed him in the prison. ⁵Meanwhile, Pharaoh's army had marched out of Egypt, and when the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard the report, they withdrew from Jerusalem. ⁶Then the word of the LORD came to the prophet Jeremiah: ⁷This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: This is what you are to say to the king of Judah, who sent you to consult me — Pharaoh's army, which has marched out to help you, will return to its own land, to Egypt. ⁸The Chaldeans will return and attack this city. They will capture it and burn it with fire. ⁹This is what the LORD says: Do not deceive yourselves by thinking, 'The Chaldeans will surely leave us.' They will not leave. ¹⁰For even if you were to strike down the entire Chaldean army fighting against you and only wounded men remained among them, each lying in his tent — they would still rise up and burn this city with fire. ¹¹Now when the Chaldean army had withdrawn from Jerusalem because of Pharaoh's army, ¹²Jeremiah set out from Jerusalem to go to the territory of Benjamin, to claim his portion there among the people. ¹³When he reached the Benjamin Gate, the officer of the guard stationed there — a man named Irijah son of Shelemiah, son of Hananiah — seized the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "You are deserting to the Chaldeans!" ¹⁴Jeremiah said, "That is a lie! I am not deserting to the Chaldeans." But Irijah would not listen to him. He seized Jeremiah and brought him before the officials. ¹⁵The officials were furious with Jeremiah. They beat him and imprisoned him in the house of Jonathan the scribe, which they had converted into a prison. ¹⁶When Jeremiah had been placed in the pit-dungeon, in the vaulted cells, he remained there many days. ¹⁷Then King Zedekiah sent for him and had him brought out. The king questioned him secretly in his palace and asked, "Is there any word from the LORD?" Jeremiah answered, "There is." Then he said, "You will be handed over to the king of Babylon." ¹⁸Then Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, "What crime have I committed against you, or against your officials, or against this people, that you have put me in prison? ¹⁹And where are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, 'The king of Babylon will not come against you or against this land'? ²⁰Now please hear me, my lord the king. Let my plea come before you: do not send me back to the house of Jonathan the scribe, or I will die there." ²¹So King Zedekiah gave orders, and they placed Jeremiah in the court of the guard. A loaf of bread was given to him daily from the Bakers' Street, until all the bread in the city was gone. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Hebrew himlikh ('caused to reign, installed') emphasizes that Zedekiah's kingship was Nebuchadnezzar's doing — he is a vassal, not a sovereign. 'Coniah' (Konyahu) is the shortened form of Jeconiah/Jehoiachin, who reigned only three months before being deported (2 Kings 24:8-17). We rendered himlikh as 'installed' rather than the KJV's 'made king' to highlight the political reality of puppet kingship.

2. The phrase *be-yad* ('by the hand of') is the standard idiom for prophetic mediation — God's words come 'through' or 'by the hand of' the prophet. The indictment covers three levels of society: king, court officials (*avadav*, literally 'his servants'), and the common people (*am ha-arets*). All three are culpable.
3. The delegation includes both a court official (*Jehucal*) and a priest (*Zephaniah son of Maaseiah*), representing both civil and religious authority. *Jehucal* reappears in 38:1 as one of the officials who demand *Jeremiah's* death — his role shifts from supplicant to accuser. The request *hitpalle-na* ('please pray') uses the polite particle *na*, revealing desperation beneath the royal dignity.
4. The narrative provides a temporal marker: *Jeremiah* still had freedom of movement — 'coming and going' (*ba vayotse*) is a Hebrew idiom for unrestricted daily activity. The word *keliy* ('prison, place of confinement') anticipates the imprisonments that follow in this chapter and the next.
5. The Pharaoh is *Hophra* (*Apries*, r. 589–570 BCE), mentioned by name in 44:30. His military expedition created temporary relief for *Jerusalem* and false hope that the siege was over. The verb *va-ye'alu* ('they went up,' i.e., 'withdrew') indicates a tactical retreat, not a defeat — the *Chaldeans* pulled back to deal with the *Egyptian* threat. The word *shim'am* ('their report, the news of them') is a cognate accusative construction emphasizing the hearing of intelligence.
6. The standard prophetic reception formula. The word *le'mor* ('saying') is rendered as a colon introducing the divine speech that follows.
7. The verb *lidroshehi* ('to consult me, to seek me out') is the standard verb for seeking a prophetic oracle. God addresses the delegation rather than *Zedekiah* directly — the answer must pass through the same mediators who brought the question. The emphatic announcement that *Egypt* will retreat demolishes the political calculation behind *Zedekiah's* revolt.
8. Three verbs in rapid succession — return, capture, burn — create a compressed military narrative of *Jerusalem's* inevitable fate. The finality of the sequence leaves no room for negotiation or alternative outcomes. The verb *saraf* ('burn') foreshadows the literal burning of the temple and city described in 52:13.
9. The idiom *al tashshi'u nafshoteikhem* (literally 'do not lift up your souls') means 'do not delude yourselves' or 'do not raise false hopes.' We rendered it as 'do not deceive yourselves' to capture the self-deception God warns against. The infinitive absolute *halokh yelekhu* ('going they will go,' i.e., 'surely leave') expresses the people's confident expectation, which God flatly denies.
10. This is one of the most striking hyperbolic statements in the prophets: even a *Chaldean* army reduced entirely to wounded men would still carry out God's decree against *Jerusalem*. The word *meduqqarim* ('pierced, wounded') describes men run through with weapons, barely alive. The point is theological, not military — *Jerusalem's* fall is divinely ordained and no human calculation can prevent it.
11. The temporal clause sets the scene for *Jeremiah's* arrest. The verb *he'alot* ('going up, withdrawing') is the same used in verse 5 for the *Chaldean* withdrawal, creating narrative cohesion. The withdrawal was tactical — because of (*mippenei*, literally 'from before the face of') Pharaoh's approaching forces.
12. The verb *lachaloq* ('to divide, to receive a portion') is debated. The KJV's 'to separate himself' misses the likely meaning: *Jeremiah* was going to handle a property matter — the division or claiming of an inheritance among his kinspeople in *Anathoth* (in *Benjamin*). This connects to his purchase of the field in chapter 32. The phrase *betokh ha-am* ('among the people') indicates he was participating in a communal property distribution, not fleeing.
13. The phrase *nofel el ha-kasdim* ('falling to the *Chaldeans*') is the technical term for military desertion in wartime, literally 'falling over' to the enemy side. The accusation was plausible on the surface because *Jeremiah* had publicly urged surrender (21:9, 38:2). The *ba'al pequddut* ('master of oversight') was a military officer responsible for controlling movement through the city gates during the siege. *Irijah* is identified by his grandfather *Hananiah* — possibly the same false prophet *Hananiah* of chapter 28, which would make the arrest personally vindictive.
14. *Jeremiah's* protest *sheqer* ('falsehood, lie') uses the same word he applies to the false prophets throughout the book (cf. *navi sheqer*, 'prophet of falsehood'). The irony is sharp: the prophet of truth is accused on the basis of a *sheqer*. The officials (*sarim*) are the royal court administrators who function as a judicial body during wartime.
15. The verb *vaiqtsefu* ('they were furious') indicates a rage beyond judicial displeasure — this is personal hostility. The officials beat *Jeremiah* (*hikku*, from *nakah*, 'to strike') before any formal proceeding, indicating extrajudicial violence. *Jonathan* the scribe's house had been repurposed as a place of confinement (*beit ha-kele*), likely because the regular prison was overwhelmed during the siege. The conversion of a scribe's house into a dungeon symbolizes the perversion of literate, administrative order into instruments of oppression.
16. The *beit ha-bor* ('house of the pit') indicates an underground chamber — likely a cistern or cellar beneath the house, damp and dark. The *chanuyyot* ('vaulted cells, arched chambers') describes the specific architectural feature of the underground confinement: arched stone cells, cramped and suffocating. The phrase *yamim rabbim* ('many days') is deliberately vague, conveying an indefinite period of suffering.
17. The word *basseter* ('in secret') reveals *Zedekiah's* political cowardice — he cannot afford to be seen consulting *Jeremiah*, whom his officials have imprisoned. The question *hayesh davar me'et YHWH* ('Is there any word from the LORD?') is almost plaintive, as though the king hopes that confinement might have changed the prophet's message. *Jeremiah's* one-word answer *yesh* ('there is') precedes the devastating repetition of the same judgment he has delivered consistently: you will be handed over (*tinnatein*, *niphal* of *natan*) to *Babylon*.
18. The verb *chatati* ('I have sinned, offended') is from the root *ch-t-a*, the standard word for sin in Hebrew. *Jeremiah* turns the tables: if imprisonment is punishment, what is the offense? The threefold address — you, your officials, this people — mirrors the threefold indictment of verse 2, creating a structural parallel between the nation's guilt before God and the prophet's innocence before his accusers.

19. Jeremiah's rhetorical question is devastating: the false prophets who promised peace have been proven wrong by events. The word *ayyeh* ('where?') demands an accounting. The prophets who predicted no Babylonian invasion (cf. Hananiah in chapter 28) are conspicuously absent now that Nebuchadnezzar has arrived. Jeremiah does not need to argue his case — the siege itself vindicates him.
20. Jeremiah addresses Zedekiah as *adoni ha-melekh* ('my lord the king'), the formal court address, showing proper deference even while protesting his treatment. The word *techinnati* ('my supplication, my plea') is from the root *ch-n-n* ('to be gracious, to show favor') — Jeremiah is asking for mercy from the king even as he delivers God's message of judgment. The warning *velo amut sham* ('or I will die there') is a plain statement that the conditions in Jonathan's dungeon are lethal.
21. The *chatsar ha-mattarah* ('court of the guard') was an open courtyard attached to the royal palace where soldiers were garrisoned — a significant improvement over the underground dungeon. The *chuts ha-ofim* ('Bakers' Street') was a specific commercial lane in Jerusalem where bakers had their shops, mentioned only here in the Hebrew Bible. The detail 'until all the bread in the city was gone' foreshadows the famine conditions of the final siege (52:6). Zedekiah shows enough compassion to improve Jeremiah's conditions but not enough courage to release him or follow his counsel.

38

Summary: *Jeremiah 38 narrates the prophet's lowest physical point and his final exchange with Zedekiah. Four officials hear Jeremiah's continued message that only surrender to Babylon will save lives, and they petition the king to have him executed for undermining military morale. Zedekiah capitulates, handing Jeremiah over to the officials, who lower him into the cistern of Malkijah son of the king, where he sinks into the mud. Ebed-Melech, a Cushite official in the royal palace, intervenes — he appeals directly to Zedekiah, who authorizes a rescue. Ebed-Melech lowers rags and worn cloth for Jeremiah to pad the ropes, then pulls him out. In the chapter's second half, Zedekiah summons Jeremiah one final time, swearing a secret oath not to kill him. Jeremiah delivers his last counsel: surrender to the officers of Babylon and you will live; refuse, and the city will burn and you will not escape. Zedekiah confesses his real fear — not the Babylonians, but the Judeans who have already deserted, who might abuse him. Jeremiah assures him this will not happen if he surrenders. The king swears Jeremiah to secrecy about their conversation, and Jeremiah remains in the court of the guard until Jerusalem falls.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains one of the most vivid rescue scenes in the Hebrew Bible. The detail of Ebed-Melech lowering worn rags and old cloth (*selavot beloyei secharavot*, v. 11-12) for Jeremiah to pad under his arms before being pulled up is extraordinarily specific — it reflects both physical compassion and practical wisdom. Ebed-Melech is a Cushite (Ethiopian), a foreign official who shows more moral courage than any Judean in the narrative. His name means 'servant of the king,' but he serves the true King by rescuing the true prophet. God rewards his faith explicitly in 39:15-18. The chapter also reveals the full tragedy of Zedekiah: a man who privately agrees with the prophet, who even tries to protect him, but who is controlled by his own officials and paralyzed by fear. His confession in verse 19, 'I am afraid of the Judeans who have deserted to the Chaldeans,' is devastating — the king of Judah fears his own defectors more than he fears God.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase 'the king cannot do anything against you' (v. 5) uses the Hebrew *eyn ha-melekh yukhal etkhem davar*, which is difficult — it could mean 'the king is unable to oppose you' (political weakness) or 'the king will not refuse you anything' (passive consent). We rendered it to capture Zedekiah's abdication of authority. The word *selavot* (v. 11) is rare and its exact meaning debated — possibly 'rags,' 'worn-out cloths,' or 'tattered garments.' Paired with *beloyei* ('worn out'), the phrase emphasizes the threadbare, discarded nature of the material. The verb *tava* (v. 6, 'he sank') describes sinking into the *tit* ('mud, mire') at the bottom of the cistern — we preserved the visceral quality of the image. Zedekiah's final instruction to Jeremiah to mislead the officials (vv. 25-26) raises an ethical question about deception that we document without resolving.*

Connections: *Ebed-Melech's rescue of Jeremiah from the cistern contrasts with the brothers who threw Joseph into a *bor* (Genesis 37:24) — both are pits, but Ebed-Melech reverses the crime of Joseph's brothers. God's explicit promise of safety to Ebed-Melech (39:15-18) echoes the reward given to Rahab the Canaanite (Joshua 6:25) — both are foreigners who protect God's people and are saved from the destruction that follows. Zedekiah's fear of the Judean deserters (v. 19) connects to the broader theme of *nafal* ('to fall/desert') that runs through chapters 37-39. The final counsel to surrender connects directly to 21:8-10, where Jeremiah first publicly offered the choice between the way of life and the way of death. Jeremiah's continued confinement in the court of the guard until the city's fall (v. 28) sets up the narrative of chapter 39.*

¹Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jehucal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malkijah heard the words that Jeremiah was speaking to all the people: ²This is what the LORD says: Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, by famine, or by plague. But whoever goes out to the Chaldeans will live — his life will be his plunder, and he will survive. ³This is what the LORD says: This city will certainly be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon, and he will capture it. ⁴The officials said to the king, "Let this man be put to death, because he is weakening the resolve of the soldiers who remain in this city and the resolve of all the people by speaking these words to them. This man does not seek the welfare of this people but their ruin." ⁵King Zedekiah answered, "He is in your hands. The king can do nothing to oppose you." ⁶They took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern of Malkijah, a son of the king, which was in the court of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah down with ropes. There was no water in the cistern — only mud. And Jeremiah sank into the mud. ⁷When Ebed-Melech the Cushite, a court official in the royal palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern — the king was sitting at the Benjamin Gate at the time — ⁸Ebed-Melech left the royal palace and spoke to the king: ⁹"My lord the king, these men have done a terrible thing in all they have done to the prophet Jeremiah. They have thrown him into the cistern, and he will die there from starvation, for there is no more bread in the city." ¹⁰Then the king commanded Ebed-Melech the Cushite, "Take thirty men from here under your authority and pull the prophet Jeremiah up out of the cistern before he dies." ¹¹Ebed-Melech took the men under his command and went into the royal palace, to a storeroom beneath the treasury. From there he took worn-out rags and tattered scraps of cloth, and lowered them down to Jeremiah in the cistern by ropes. ¹²Ebed-Melech the Cushite called down to Jeremiah, "Put the worn rags and scraps of cloth under your arms, beneath the ropes." And Jeremiah did so. ¹³They pulled Jeremiah up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard. ¹⁴King Zedekiah sent for the prophet Jeremiah and had him brought to the third entrance of the house of the LORD. The king said to Jeremiah, "I am going to ask you something. Do not hide anything from me." ¹⁵Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I tell you, will you not certainly put me to death? And if I give you counsel, you will not listen to me." ¹⁶King Zedekiah swore secretly to Jeremiah, "As the LORD lives — the one who gave us this life — I will not put you to death, and I will not hand you over to those men who are seeking your life." ¹⁷Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "This is what the LORD, the God of Armies, the God of Israel, says: If you will go out and surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, you will live. This city will not be burned with fire, and you and your household will survive. ¹⁸But if you do not go out to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be handed over to the Chaldeans. They will burn it with fire, and you yourself will not escape from their hands." ¹⁹King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "I am afraid of the Judeans who have deserted to the Chaldeans — they might hand me over to them, and they will abuse me." ²⁰Jeremiah answered, "They will not hand you over. Please listen to the voice of the LORD in what I am telling you, and it will go well for you, and you will live. ²¹But if you refuse to go out, this is what the LORD has shown me:

²²All the women remaining in the palace of the king of Judah will be led out to the officers of the king of Babylon, and those women will say:

'Your trusted friends misled you
and overpowered you.
Your feet are sunk in the mud —
they have turned their backs on you.'

²³All your wives and children will be led out to the Chaldeans. You yourself will not escape from their grasp but will be seized by the king of Babylon. And this city will be burned with fire." ²⁴Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "Let no one know about this conversation, and you will not die. ²⁵If the officials hear that I have spoken with you and they come to you and say, 'Tell us what you said to the king and what the king said to you — do not hide it from us, and we will not kill you' — ²⁶then say to them, 'I was presenting my plea to the king, asking him not to send me back to Jonathan's house to die there.'" ²⁷All the officials came to Jeremiah and questioned him. He told them exactly what the king had commanded him to say. They stopped pressing him, because the conversation had not been overheard. ²⁸Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard until the day Jerusalem was captured. He was still there when Jerusalem fell.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Four officials are named — a formal accusation requires multiple witnesses. Jehucal (Jucal) is the same man Zedekiah sent to Jeremiah in 37:3 as a supplicant; he now turns accuser. Pashhur son of Malkijah appeared in 21:1 in a similar diplomatic role. The verb *medabber* (participle, 'was speaking') indicates continuous, ongoing public preaching — Jeremiah had not stopped despite his recent imprisonment.
2. The triad *cherev, ra'av, dever* ('sword, famine, plague') is one of Jeremiah's most characteristic formulas, appearing over a dozen times in the book as covenant-curse language. The striking phrase *nafsho le-shalal* ('his life will be his plunder') means that the deserter's only spoil of war will be his own survival — he will escape with nothing but his life, as though he had plundered it from the wreckage. This is the same message as 21:9.
3. The infinitive absolute *hinnaton tinnaten* ('being given it will be given') creates emphatic certainty — the construction doubles the verb to remove all doubt. The outcome is not conditional or negotiable. The verb *lakad* ('capture, seize') is a military term for the fall of a fortified position.
4. The idiom *merappeh et yedei* ('weakening the hands of') is a military expression for undermining morale — literally making the warriors' hands go slack so they cannot grip their weapons. Remarkably, this exact phrase appears in the Lachish Letters (Letter VI, c. 588 BCE), a contemporary military correspondence complaining that officials in Jerusalem were 'weakening the hands' of the people — possibly a direct reference to Jeremiah's preaching. The officials frame their accusation in patriotic terms: Jeremiah seeks *ra'ah* ('ruin, disaster') rather than *shalom* ('welfare') for the people.
5. Zedekiah's capitulation is staggering. The statement *eyn ha-melekh yukhal etkhem davar* ('the king cannot do anything against you') is an open admission of royal impotence. The king refers to himself in the third person, as if distancing himself from his own powerlessness. He does not condemn Jeremiah or endorse the death sentence — he simply abandons the prophet to the officials' will. This is the portrait of a king who has lost all authority over his own court.
6. The *bor* ('cistern, pit') was a bell-shaped water-storage chamber cut into rock, common in Judean architecture. When empty of water, thick mud collected at the bottom. The phrase *vayyitba Yirmeyahu battiyt* ('and Jeremiah sank into the mud') is viscerally descriptive — the verb *tava* ('to sink, to be swallowed') conveys slow submersion. Without rescue, Jeremiah would have suffocated or died of exposure in the mud. The phrase *ben ha-melekh* ('son of the king') may mean a literal prince or a royal official bearing that title.
7. *Ebed-Melech* ('servant of the king') is identified as a *Kushi* ('Cushite'), meaning he was from the region of Cush (modern Sudan/Ethiopia). The word *saris* can mean 'eunuch' or simply 'court official' — the term had evolved by this period to designate high-ranking officials regardless of physical status. We rendered it 'court official' as the narrative emphasizes his role and access rather than physical condition. The detail of the king sitting at the Benjamin Gate places Zedekiah in a public judicial setting where *Ebed-Melech* can approach him.
8. The verb *vayyetse* ('he went out') indicates urgency — *Ebed-Melech* left the palace compound to find the king at the city gate. He acts immediately, without waiting for a convenient moment or seeking permission through intermediaries.
9. *Ebed-Melech* uses the formal court address *adoni ha-melekh* ('my lord the king') and frames his appeal in moral terms: *here'u* ('they have done evil, acted wickedly'). He does not merely report the situation but passes judgment on the officials' actions. The phrase *vayyamot tachtav* ('he will die in his place,' literally 'beneath him') may refer to Jeremiah dying where he is, stuck in the mud. The famine detail — 'there is no more bread in the city' — explains why the daily ration from the Bakers' Street (37:21) has ceased.
10. The number thirty is surprisingly large for a rescue operation — it may indicate the depth of the cistern or the difficulty of extracting a man from thick mud, or it may serve as a royal guard escort to prevent the officials from interfering. The phrase *beterem yamut* ('before he dies') reveals that Zedekiah acts under the threat of Jeremiah's imminent death — he does not initiate the rescue but responds to *Ebed-Melech*'s moral pressure. The phrase *be-yadekha* ('under your hand/authority') gives *Ebed-Melech* command over the operation.
11. The detailed description of *Ebed-Melech* gathering *beloyei sechabot u-beloyei melachim* ('worn-out rags and tattered scraps') from a palace storeroom is one of the most humanizing moments in the prophetic literature. He thinks ahead to the practical problem: ropes alone under the armpits of a weakened man stuck in mud would cut into the flesh. The storeroom 'beneath the treasury' (*tachat ha-otsar*) suggests a basement or cellar area where discarded materials were kept.
12. The phrase *tachat atsilot yadekha* ('under the hollows of your arms,' i.e., your armpits) is anatomically precise. *Ebed-Melech*'s instruction reveals practical compassion — he understands that Jeremiah, weakened and possibly injured, would be further hurt by rough ropes cutting into bare skin. The rags serve as padding. The simple conclusion *vayyaas Yirmeyahu ken* ('and Jeremiah did so') conveys the prophet's trust and compliance without embellishment.
13. The rescue is described with understated brevity — *vayyimshekhu* ('they pulled') and *vayyaalu* ('they brought up'). After the detailed preparation, the actual extraction is narrated without drama. Jeremiah is returned to the court of the guard (*chatsar ha-mattarah*), the same relatively favorable confinement he occupied before (37:21). He is not freed but his conditions are significantly improved.
14. The *mavo ha-shelishi* ('third entrance') of the temple is an architectural detail mentioned only here — it was apparently a private or restricted entry point suitable for a secret meeting. Zedekiah chooses the temple rather than the palace, perhaps seeking sacred ground for this consultation. His demand *al tekhached mimmenni davar* ('do not conceal anything from me') echoes his earlier secret consultation in 37:17 but is more insistent, using the verb *kachad* ('to hide, conceal').

15. Jeremiah's response reveals the impossible position of the prophet: speaking truth risks execution, but the king will not follow advice anyway. The infinitive absolute *hamot temiteni* ('killing you will kill me') expresses certainty — Jeremiah expects death if he speaks plainly. The second clause is not a question but a bitter statement of fact: 'you will not listen to me.' Jeremiah has learned from experience that Zedekiah wants reassurance, not truth.
16. Zedekiah swears by the LORD — invoking the very God whose word he refuses to obey. The oath formula *chay YHWH* ('as the LORD lives') is the strongest available, and the qualifying phrase *asher asah lanu et ha-nefesh ha-zot* ('who made us this life/soul') adds theological weight by acknowledging God as creator. The irony is acute: the king invokes God's authority to protect the prophet while simultaneously defying God's counsel through that same prophet. The *basseter* ('in secret') again marks this as a private meeting hidden from the officials.
17. The full divine title *YHWH Elohei Tsevaot Elohei Yisrael* ('the LORD, God of Armies, God of Israel') is deployed at this critical moment — the most extended form of the divine name, conveying maximum authority. The verb *yatso tetsu* ('going out you will go out') uses the infinitive absolute for emphasis. 'Going out' to the enemy officers is the euphemism for formal surrender. The promise is conditional and comprehensive: personal survival, the city spared from burning, and the household preserved.
18. The conditional structure creates a stark binary: surrender and live, or resist and lose everything. The verb *lo timmalet* ('you will not escape') uses the *niphal* of *malat*, emphasizing the futility of any attempt at flight. The direct address *ve-attah* ('and you yourself') makes the consequence personal — Zedekiah individually will be captured.
19. Zedekiah's confession reveals his deepest fear: not the Babylonians themselves, but his own people who have already defected. The word *do'eg* ('afraid, anxious') expresses genuine dread. The verb *hit'alelu* ('mock, abuse, mistreat') is the same root used for the Philistines' abuse of Samson (Judges 16:25) — it implies public humiliation, mockery, and physical mistreatment. The Judean deserters would regard Zedekiah as a traitor who prolonged the war unnecessarily, costing lives. The king fears retribution from those who followed Jeremiah's counsel before he did.
20. Jeremiah's *lo yittenu* ('they will not hand you over') is a direct prophetic assurance — not speculation but divine guarantee. The plea *shema na* ('please listen') uses the same verb *shama* that dominates the book's vocabulary — the fundamental call to obey. The phrase *veyitav lekha* ('and it will go well for you') echoes the Deuteronomic promise formulas (Deuteronomy 4:40, 5:16, 6:3).
21. The verb *hir'ani* ('he has shown me') indicates a visionary experience — Jeremiah has been given a vision of what will happen if Zedekiah refuses to surrender. The shift from verbal oracle to visual revelation heightens the urgency. The verb *ma'en* ('to refuse') carries connotations of obstinate resistance, not mere hesitation.
22. The women's taunt is presented as poetry — a mocking song composed by the royal women as they are led away as captives. The phrase *anshei shelomekha* ('your men of peace,' i.e., 'your trusted friends, your allies') refers to the officials who gave Zedekiah bad counsel. The image *hotebu babits raglekha* ('your feet are sunk in the mud') creates a devastating parallel to Jeremiah's literal sinking in the cistern mud (v. 6) — the king who let the prophet sink in mud will himself be stuck in the mire of his own political situation. The verb *hissitukha* ('they misled you, incited you') is from the root *s-w-t*, the same verb used for divine testing or incitement (cf. 1 Chronicles 21:1).
23. The consequences escalate: family captured, king seized personally, city burned. The verb *tittafes* ('you will be seized') is from the root *t-p-s* ('to seize, capture'), a military term for taking a prisoner. The phrase *ve-et ha-ir ha-zot tisrof ba-esh* ('and this city you will cause to be burned with fire') uses the *hiphil* form, potentially implying Zedekiah's refusal to surrender will be the cause of the city's burning — his inaction bears responsibility.
24. Zedekiah's immediate response is not to obey the divine counsel but to demand secrecy. The conditional *velo tamut* ('and you will not die') is ambiguous — it could be a promise of protection or a veiled threat: keep silent or face consequences. The king's priorities are laid bare: controlling information matters more to him than responding to God's word.
25. Zedekiah anticipates the officials' interrogation of Jeremiah, revealing how thoroughly the officials control information at court. The demand *al tekhached* ('do not conceal') from the officials would mirror the king's own words in verse 14, creating a situation where Jeremiah is pressured by both sides.
26. Zedekiah instructs Jeremiah to give a partial truth: Jeremiah did indeed make this plea (37:20). The king does not ask the prophet to lie outright but to reveal only a portion of the conversation. The verb *mappil* ('presenting, casting') combined with *techinnah* ('plea, supplication') means literally 'casting my plea before' — the same petition language of 37:20. The ethical complexity of this guided deception is left in the text without editorial comment.
27. The verb *vayyacharishu* ('they fell silent, they stopped') indicates the officials accepted Jeremiah's account and ceased their interrogation. The phrase *ki lo nishma ha-davar* ('because the matter was not heard') confirms that the private conversation between king and prophet remained secret. Jeremiah complies with the king's instruction — the text reports this without moral commentary, leaving the reader to assess Zedekiah's manipulation of the prophet.
28. The chapter ends with a grim *inclusio*: Jeremiah remains confined in the court of the guard as Jerusalem falls around him. The verb *nilkedah* ('was captured') from *lakad* ('to seize, capture') is repeated twice for emphasis — the city was taken, and when it was taken, the prophet was still imprisoned. The redundancy is deliberate, bridging to the fall narrative in chapter 39. Jeremiah, who told the truth about the city's fate, experiences that fate from inside a prison. The prophet was vindicated, but the vindication came as catastrophe.

39

Summary: *Jeremiah 39 records the event Jeremiah has prophesied for decades: the fall of Jerusalem. In the ninth year of Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar besieges the city; by the eleventh year, the wall is breached. Babylonian officials take their seat in the Middle Gate — a symbol of judicial authority over a conquered city. Zedekiah flees by night toward the Jordan valley but is overtaken at Jericho. His sons are executed before his eyes, and then his eyes are put out — the last thing he ever sees is the death of his dynasty. The city is burned and its people deported. Yet within the catastrophe, two acts of deliverance occur: Jeremiah is released from the court of the guard and entrusted to Gedaliah son of Ahikam, and Ebed-Melech the Cushite receives a personal oracle of survival because he trusted in God.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter compresses the most catastrophic event in ancient Judah's history into eighteen verses. The narrative is spare and brutal — no laments, no prophetic commentary, just the bare facts of siege, breach, flight, capture, blinding, burning, and deportation. The Babylonian officials named in verse 3 — Nergal-Sharezer, Samgar-Nebo, Sarsechim the Rab-saris, Nergal-Sharezer the Rab-mag — are attested in cuneiform records, anchoring the text in verifiable history. The detail that Zedekiah's sons were killed 'before his eyes' (le'enav) and then his eyes were blinded is devastatingly precise: the last image burned into his vision was the extinction of his line. We preserved the starkness of the Hebrew without narrative padding. The oracle to Ebed-Melech (verses 15-18) rewards the one Gentile who acted with compassion toward Jeremiah in chapter 38, creating an ironic contrast — a foreign slave survives while a Davidic king is destroyed.*

Translation Friction: *The list of Babylonian officials in verse 3 presents textual difficulties. The names and titles are partially corrupted in the Masoretic tradition, and scholars disagree on how many individuals are listed and which words are names versus titles. We followed the most defensible parsing while noting uncertainties. The phrase 'in the Middle Gate' (beshar hattavekh) is geographically uncertain — its exact location in Jerusalem's wall system is debated. The transition between the fall narrative (vv. 1-10) and the Jeremiah deliverance (vv. 11-14) and the Ebed-Melech oracle (vv. 15-18) involves apparent chronological displacement, since the oracle to Ebed-Melech is introduced as occurring 'while Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard' — that is, before the fall. We preserved the text's own sequence without rearranging.*

Connections: *The fall of Jerusalem fulfills Jeremiah's repeated warnings throughout chapters 1-38, particularly the explicit predictions in 21:3-10, 32:3-5, 34:2-3, and 38:17-23. Zedekiah's capture at Jericho (v. 5) fulfills 32:4 and 34:3. The blinding of Zedekiah reconciles two seemingly contradictory prophecies: Jeremiah said he would see the king of Babylon's face (32:4, 34:3) while Ezekiel said he would not see Babylon (Ezekiel 12:13) — he saw Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah but was blinded before reaching Babylon. The parallel account appears in 2 Kings 25:1-12 and Jeremiah 52:4-16. Ebed-Melech's deliverance connects to his rescue of Jeremiah from the cistern in 38:7-13, and the phrase 'because you trusted in me' (ki batachta bi) links to the fundamental prophetic demand for trust in God rather than political alliances.*

¹In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came with his entire army against Jerusalem and laid siege to it. ²In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, the city wall was breached. ³All the officials of the king of Babylon entered and took their seats in the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezer, Samgar-Nebo, Sarsechim the chief officer, Nergal-Sharezer the chief magus, and all the rest of the officials of the king of Babylon. ⁴When Zedekiah king of Judah and all the soldiers saw them, they fled, going out from the city at night by way of the king's garden, through the gate between the two walls, and he went out toward the Arabah. ⁵But the Chaldean army pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. They seized him and brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he pronounced judgment on him. ⁶The king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah at Riblah before his eyes, and the king of Babylon also slaughtered all the nobles of Judah. ⁷Then he blinded the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in bronze shackles to bring him to Babylon. ⁸The Chaldeans burned the king's palace and the houses of the people with fire, and they tore down the walls of Jerusalem. ⁹Nebuzaradan

the captain of the guard deported to Babylon the rest of the people who remained in the city, the deserters who had gone over to him, and the rest of the population that remained. ¹⁰But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left behind some of the poorest people who had nothing, in the land of Judah, and he gave them vineyards and fields on that day. ¹¹Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave orders concerning Jeremiah through Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard: ¹²Take him and watch over him. Do nothing harmful to him — rather, do for him whatever he asks you. ¹³So Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard sent word, along with Nebushazban the chief officer, and Nergal-Sharezer the chief magus, and all the senior officials of the king of Babylon. ¹⁴They sent for Jeremiah and took him from the court of the guard, and they entrusted him to Gedaliah son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, to bring him out to his home. And he lived among the people. ¹⁵The word of the LORD had come to Jeremiah while he was still confined in the court of the guard: ¹⁶Go and say to Ebed-Melech the Cushite: This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says — I am bringing my words against this city for disaster, not for good, and they will be fulfilled before your eyes on that day. ¹⁷But I will rescue you on that day, declares the LORD, and you will not be handed over to the men you fear. ¹⁸For I will certainly save you, and you will not fall by the sword. Your life will be your plunder, because you trusted in me, declares the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The date formula places the beginning of the siege in January 588 BCE. The verb *vayyatsuru* ('they besieged') is from *tsur*, meaning to press in, to confine, to besiege — the military image of surrounding a city and cutting off all supply lines. The Hebrew uses the fuller form *Nevukhadre'ttsar* for the Babylonian king's name, reflecting the original Akkadian *Nabu-kudurri-usur* ('Nabu, protect the boundary stone').
2. The siege lasted approximately eighteen months — from January 588 to July 586 BCE. The passive verb *hovqe'ah* ('was breached') is from *baqa'*, meaning to split open, to break through. The text records the breach with devastating brevity — no battle description, no heroic resistance, just the bare fact that the wall was split open. The ninth of Tammuz became a day of mourning in Jewish tradition.
3. The Babylonian officials '*sit*' (*vayyeshvu*) in the gate — this is an act of judicial and administrative authority, not casual rest. City gates in the ancient Near East served as courtrooms and government seats. The names and titles in this verse present significant textual difficulties. *Rab-saris* ('chief officer' or 'chief eunuch') and *Rab-mag* ('chief magus') are titles, not personal names. The name *Nergal-Sharezer* appears twice, likely referring to two different officials; one may be identifiable with *Neriglissar*, who later became king of Babylon (560-556 BCE). The '*Middle Gate*' (*sha'ar hattavekh*) likely refers to a gate between the upper and lower sections of Jerusalem, though its exact location is debated.
4. The Hebrew *vayyehi* ('and it was') is a narrative transition marker, rendered naturally without the archaic 'and it came to pass.' The escape route — through the king's garden and the gate between the double walls — was at the southeastern corner of the city, near the junction of the Kidron and Hinnom valleys. The *Arabah* refers to the Jordan Rift Valley, indicating Zedekiah was heading east toward the Jordan and possibly seeking refuge across the river. The flight at night underscores the desperation — the king of Judah fleeing his own capital like a fugitive.
5. The verb *vayyassigu* ('they overtook') is from *nasag*, meaning to reach, to catch up with — Zedekiah's flight was intercepted before he could cross the Jordan. *Riblah* in the land of Hamath was Nebuchadnezzar's field headquarters in central Syria, strategically located on the Orontes River — far from Jerusalem, requiring a long forced march for the captive king. The phrase *vaydabber itto mishpatim* ('he spoke judgments with him') is a legal idiom meaning he pronounced a judicial sentence, not merely that they had a conversation.
6. The verb *shachat* ('slaughtered') is from the same root used for sacrificial slaughter — its use here is brutally visceral, not the more neutral verb *harag* ('killed'). The phrase *le'enav* ('before his eyes') is devastatingly precise: Zedekiah was forced to watch the execution of his own sons. The *chorei Yehudah* ('nobles of Judah') — the political and military leadership — were eliminated alongside the royal house, ensuring no organized resistance could continue.
7. The verb *ivver* ('blinded') describes the physical act of putting out the eyes. The juxtaposition with the previous verse is devastating — the last thing Zedekiah saw was his sons being killed, and then he was blinded. The *nechúshṭayim* ('bronze shackles,' literally 'double bronze') indicates heavy fetters. This detail fulfills both Jeremiah's prophecy that Zedekiah would see the king of Babylon face to face (34:3) and Ezekiel's prophecy that he would be brought to Babylon but would not see it (Ezekiel 12:13) — the two prophecies are reconciled by the sequence: he saw Nebuchadnezzar, then was blinded before the journey.
8. The verb *sarefu* ('they burned') is followed by *ba'esh* ('with fire'), which is technically redundant but emphatic — the destruction was total, consuming. The verb *natátsu* ('they tore down, demolished') for the walls indicates systematic dismantling, not merely damage from the siege. The demolition of the walls removed Jerusalem's military viability and its symbolic identity as a fortified city of God. The Hebrew *bet hammelekh* is literally 'house of the king' — rendered as 'palace' for clarity, since 'house' in English does not convey the scale of a royal compound.
9. Nebuzaradan's title *rav-tabbachim* literally means 'chief of the butchers' or 'chief of the slaughterers' — an ancient title that had evolved to mean 'captain of the guard' or 'chief executioner.' The *nophelim* ('those who fell away, deserters') refers to those who had surrendered to the Babylonians during the siege — even they were deported, not rewarded for their defection. The repetition of *hannish'arim* ('those remaining') emphasizes the thoroughness of the deportation.

10. The dallim ('poor, destitute') were left behind precisely because they posed no political or economic threat. The irony is sharp: those with nothing suddenly received the confiscated vineyards and fields of the deported elite. The word yigevim ('fields' or 'cisterns') is rare — it may refer to agricultural plots or water catchment areas, both essential for subsistence farming. Babylonian imperial policy typically left an agricultural underclass to keep the land productive and prevent it from becoming a wilderness.
11. The verb tsivvah ('he commanded, gave orders') indicates a formal royal directive. That Nebuchadnezzar personally issued orders about Jeremiah suggests the Babylonians knew of his prophecies urging surrender — information likely reported by the Judean deserters (v. 9). The Hebrew le'mor ('saying') is rendered as a colon introducing direct speech.
12. The phrase ve'einekha sim alav ('set your eyes on him') is an idiom meaning to watch over, to care for — not surveillance but protection. The royal command grants Jeremiah a remarkable status: a conquered people's prophet receiving personal protection from the conquering emperor. The instruction 'do for him whatever he asks' (ka'asher yedabber elekha ken aseh immo) gives Jeremiah an astonishing degree of freedom and personal agency under Babylonian authority.
13. Three high-ranking Babylonian officials are dispatched to handle Jeremiah's release, underscoring the importance Nebuchadnezzar placed on the prophet's treatment. Rab-saris and Rab-mag are titles rather than personal names: rab-saris is 'chief of the eunuchs/officials' and rab-mag is 'chief magus/diviner.' The Hebrew rabbei melekh Bavel ('senior officials of the king of Babylon') indicates the broader command structure was involved.
14. The chatsar hammattarah ('court of the guard') was the military detention area within the royal compound where Jeremiah had been held since 37:21 — not a dungeon, but a form of house arrest. Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan came from a family with a history of protecting Jeremiah: his father Ahikam had saved the prophet from execution after the temple sermon (26:24), and his grandfather Shaphan was the scribe who read the discovered Torah scroll to King Josiah (2 Kings 22:10). The phrase vayyeshev betokh ha'am ('he lived among the people') indicates Jeremiah was not deported but remained in Judah — a free man among the surviving remnant.
15. This verse marks a chronological flashback — the oracle to Ebed-Melech occurred during Jeremiah's confinement, before the fall of the city. The verb atsur ('confined, restrained') is from atsar, meaning to shut up, to imprison. The pluperfect 'had come' reflects the temporal sequence: this word was given prior to the events of verses 1-14. The Hebrew le'mor ('saying') is rendered as a colon.
16. Ebed-Melech ('servant of the king') is identified as ha-Kushi ('the Cushite'), indicating he was from the region of modern Sudan/Ethiopia. The name may be a title or epithet rather than a birth name. The phrase mevi et-devarai ('bringing my words') is significant: God's spoken prophecies are not merely predictions but active agents — they arrive, they are fulfilled, they accomplish their purpose. The contrast lera'ah velo letovah ('for disaster and not for good') echoes 21:10 and makes clear that the prophetic word Jeremiah has spoken against Jerusalem will be realized in full.
17. The verb hitsaltikha ('I will rescue you') is from natsal, meaning to deliver, to snatch away, to rescue from danger. The promise is specific and personal — amid national catastrophe, one individual receives a divine guarantee of survival. The phrase yagor mippenhem ('you fear from their faces') uses yagor, which implies dread or terror — Ebed-Melech had reason to fear retribution from the pro-war faction who had opposed Jeremiah and resented those who aided him.
18. The infinitive absolute construction mallet amallettekha ('I will certainly save you') is emphatic — an absolute divine guarantee. The idiom nafshekha leshalal ('your life as plunder') is unique to Jeremiah and deeply ironic: in a scene of total looting, the greatest plunder is simply to walk away alive. The reason for Ebed-Melech's deliverance is stated plainly: ki batachta bi ('because you trusted in me'). This is the only place in the chapter where trust (bitachon) in God is explicitly named, and it belongs not to a king or priest or prophet but to a foreign court official who pulled Jeremiah out of a cistern (38:7-13).

40

Summary: *Jeremiah 40 narrates the immediate aftermath of Jerusalem's fall. Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard releases Jeremiah at Ramah, where deportees were being assembled for the march to Babylon. The Babylonian commander delivers a striking theological speech, attributing Judah's destruction to their sin against their own God. Jeremiah is given the choice to go to Babylon with full provision or to remain in the land — he chooses to stay. Gedaliah son of Ahikam is appointed governor over the remnant at Mizpah. Judean military commanders and scattered refugees gather to him, and he urges them to settle down, serve the king of Babylon, and harvest the land. Finally, Johanan son of Kareah brings intelligence that Baalis king of Ammon has sent Ishmael son of Nethaniah to assassinate Gedaliah. Gedaliah refuses to believe it and forbids Johanan from striking preemptively — a fateful decision that will cost him his life in chapter 41.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The most remarkable element is the Babylonian commander's theological speech (vv. 2-3). A pagan military officer correctly interprets Judah's fall as the fulfillment of their own God's judgment — the very message Jeremiah had preached for forty years and been persecuted for. The irony is layered: the enemy understands what Israel's own kings, priests, and prophets refused to accept. Gedaliah's appointment represents a thread of hope — a governor from a*

family loyal to the covenant (grandson of Shaphan, son of Ahikam who protected Jeremiah), governing a remnant in the land. But the chapter's final verses cast a shadow over this fragile restoration: the assassination plot is revealed, warned against, and dismissed. We rendered Gedaliah's refusal to believe the intelligence report with careful attention to his exact words — he does not merely doubt but actively forbids action, sealing his own fate.

Translation Friction: *The relationship between 39:14 (Jeremiah entrusted to Gedaliah) and 40:1-6 (Jeremiah released at Ramah) presents a chronological tension — it appears Jeremiah was released twice, or the two accounts describe different stages of the same process. We rendered each passage as the Hebrew presents it without harmonizing. The verb 'found' (matsa) in verse 1 is unusual — Nebuzaradan 'found' Jeremiah among the deportees at Ramah, suggesting the prophet had been swept up in the mass deportation despite the earlier order to protect him. The list of locations where scattered Judeans gathered (v. 11-12) required careful handling of geography.*

Connections: *Nebuzaradan's theological speech (vv. 2-3) echoes Jeremiah's own words throughout the book, particularly 25:3-11 and 35:17. Gedaliah's appointment connects to his family's protection of Jeremiah in 26:24 and the broader Shaphan family's role in Josiah's reform (2 Kings 22:3-14). The assassination plot foreshadowed here is carried out in chapter 41 and triggers the flight to Egypt in chapters 42-43. Ishmael son of Nethaniah is 'of the royal seed' (41:1), suggesting dynastic motivation for the assassination. Johanan's warning and Gedaliah's refusal to hear it creates a tragic parallel with all the unheeded warnings throughout the book — now it is not a king rejecting a prophet but a good governor rejecting sound intelligence.*

¹The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard released him from Ramah, having found him bound in chains among all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah who were being deported to Babylon. ²The captain of the guard took Jeremiah aside and said to him, "The LORD your God declared this disaster against this place. ³The LORD has brought it about and has done just as he said. Because you sinned against the LORD and did not obey his voice, this thing has come upon you. ⁴Now, I am freeing you today from the chains on your hands. If it seems good to you to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will watch over you. But if it seems wrong to you to come with me to Babylon, then do not. Look — the whole land is before you. Go wherever seems good and right to you." ⁵While Jeremiah had not yet turned away, he said, "Return to Gedaliah son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon has appointed over the cities of Judah, and live with him among the people — or go wherever seems right to you." Then the captain of the guard gave him provisions and a gift and sent him on his way. ⁶So Jeremiah went to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah and lived with him among the people who remained in the land. ⁷When all the commanders of the forces in the open country — they and their men — heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam over the land, and that he had entrusted to him the men, women, and children from the poorest of the land who had not been deported to Babylon, ⁸they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah — Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan and Jonathan sons of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, and Jezaniah the son of the Maacathite — they and their men. ⁹Gedaliah son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, swore an oath to them and their men, saying, "Do not be afraid of serving the Chaldeans. Settle in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go well for you. ¹⁰As for me, I will stay at Mizpah to represent you before the Chaldeans who come to us. But you — gather wine, summer fruit, and oil, store them in your vessels, and settle in the towns you have occupied." ¹¹Likewise, all the Judeans who were in Moab, among the Ammonites, in Edom, and in all the other lands heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant in Judah and had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, over them. ¹²All the Judeans returned from all the places where they had been scattered and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and they gathered wine and summer fruit in great abundance. ¹³Then Johanan son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces in the open country came to Gedaliah at Mizpah. ¹⁴They said to him, "Are you aware that Baalis king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael son of Nethaniah to take your life?" But Gedaliah son of Ahikam did not believe them. ¹⁵Johanan son of Kareah spoke to Gedaliah privately at Mizpah, saying, "Let me go and strike down Ishmael son of Nethaniah — no one will know. Why should he take your life, so that all the Judeans gathered around you are scattered and the remnant of Judah perishes?" ¹⁶But Gedaliah son of Ahikam said to Johanan son of Kareah, "You must not do this. You are speaking falsely about Ishmael."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Ramah, located about five miles north of Jerusalem, served as the Babylonian assembly point for deportees — the same Ramah associated with Rachel's weeping in 31:15. The detail that Jeremiah was *asur ba'aziqim* ('bound in chains') among the captives suggests a breakdown in the chain of command: despite Nebuchadnezzar's personal order to protect him (39:11-12), Jeremiah had been swept up in the mass deportation. The verb *shalach* ('released, sent away') indicates an official discharge from custody.
2. The verb *vayyiqqach* ('he took') implies Nebuzaradan singled Jeremiah out from the line of deportees for a personal conversation. A Babylonian military commander attributes the fall of Jerusalem to YHWH *Elohekha* ('the LORD your God') — using Israel's own covenant name for God. The word *ra'ah* ('disaster, calamity') is the same word Jeremiah used throughout his prophecies to describe what God would bring upon Jerusalem. The pagan commander speaks as if he has read Jeremiah's own oracles.
3. Nebuzaradan completes his theological analysis with remarkable precision: *sin* (*chata'tem*), failure to obey God's voice (*lo shema'tem beqolo*), and consequent judgment (*hayah lakhem haddavar hazzeh*). This mirrors the exact prophetic formula Jeremiah used throughout his ministry — the Babylonian commander is essentially preaching Jeremiah's own sermon. The phrase 'did not obey his voice' uses the same *shama beqol* construction that appears throughout the covenant-obedience passages in Deuteronomy and in Jeremiah 11:4, 7.
4. The verb *pittachtikha* ('I have opened/released you') is from *patach*, meaning to open, to release — the chains are literally opened from his wrists. Nebuzaradan offers Jeremiah an extraordinary choice: the comfort and security of Babylon under official protection, or freedom in the devastated land. The phrase *kol ha'arets lefanekha* ('the whole land is before you') echoes God's words to Abraham in Genesis 13:9 and 20:15 — the land is spread before him to choose. The idiom *asim et-eini alekha* ('I will set my eye on you') repeats the protective promise from 39:12.
5. The opening clause *ve'odenu lo yashuv* ('while he had not yet turned back') is syntactically difficult — it may mean Jeremiah was hesitating to leave, or that Nebuzaradan spoke again before Jeremiah had turned to go. The verb *hifqid* ('he appointed') is from *paqad*, meaning to appoint, to entrust with authority — Gedaliah is the Babylonian-appointed governor, not a king. The *aruchah* ('provisions, food rations') and *mas'et* ('gift, portion') represent both practical sustenance and a mark of official favor. Nebuzaradan's generosity toward Jeremiah reflects the prophet's vindication — the enemy commander treats him with more honor than his own people ever did.
6. *Mizpah* (*hammitspah*, 'the watchtower'), located about eight miles north of Jerusalem, became the administrative center for the remnant community because Jerusalem itself was destroyed. The site had deep associations in Israel's history — Samuel judged Israel there (1 Samuel 7:5-6) and Saul was chosen king there (1 Samuel 10:17). Jeremiah's choice to stay with Gedaliah and the remnant rather than accept Babylonian patronage reflects his lifelong commitment to the people of the land, even after their rejection of his message.
7. The *sarei hachayalim* ('commanders of the forces') refers to Judean military officers who had escaped the fall by fleeing into the countryside (*bassadeh*, 'in the field/open country') with their units. These were guerrilla bands who had avoided capture. The phrase *middallat ha'arets* ('from the poorest of the land') echoes 39:10 — the Babylonians left the destitute as an agricultural labor force while deporting the skilled and wealthy.
8. This list of military commanders names the key players in the events of chapters 40-43. *Ishmael* son of *Nethaniah*, listed first, is the man who will assassinate Gedaliah in chapter 41 — his presence at this gathering is ominous in retrospect. *Johanan* son of *Kareah* will emerge as the leader who warns Gedaliah and later leads the remnant to Egypt. The *Netophathite* designation indicates origin from *Netophah*, a town near Bethlehem. The *Maacathite* designation refers to the region of *Maacah* in northern Transjordan — this commander had come from far away to join the remnant.
9. The verb *vayyishava'* ('he swore') indicates a formal oath — Gedaliah binds himself by covenant oath to the reliability of his promise. His counsel to 'serve the king of Babylon' (*ivdu et melekh Bavel*) follows exactly the policy Jeremiah had preached throughout his ministry (27:11-12). The promise *veyitav lakhem* ('it will go well for you') echoes the covenant blessing formula from Deuteronomy. Gedaliah is essentially implementing Jeremiah's prophetic program — submit to Babylon and survive.
10. The phrase *la'amod lifnei* ('to stand before') means to serve as an intermediary or representative — Gedaliah will be the point of contact between the remnant and the Babylonian administration. The list of agricultural products — *yayin* (wine), *qayits* (summer fruit, probably figs), and *shemen* (oil) — indicates the harvest season was approaching and the land could still sustain its inhabitants. The verb *tefastem* ('you have occupied, taken hold of') suggests the scattered commanders had already claimed abandoned towns as bases. Gedaliah legitimizes their presence and redirects them from military resistance to agricultural settlement.
11. The scattered Judeans mentioned here had fled to neighboring territories during or before the siege — Moab to the east, Ammon to the northeast, and Edom to the south. The word *she'erit* ('remnant') is theologically loaded in prophetic literature — it carries the hope that God preserves a surviving core through judgment. The news that Babylon had allowed a remnant to remain rather than deporting everyone signaled a possibility of return and restoration.
12. The verb *vayyashuvu* ('they returned') uses the root *shuv*, Jeremiah's signature word for both repentance and physical return. Here it is literal — the refugees come home — but the resonance with the prophetic call to 'return' to God is present. The phrase *niddechu sham* ('they had been driven/scattered there') uses the passive of *nadach*, meaning to be pushed away, banished, scattered — they did not leave voluntarily but were driven out by the catastrophe. The abundant harvest (*harbeh me'od*, 'very much') suggests the land itself was yielding generously despite the destruction, a quiet sign of God's provision for the remnant.

13. This verse marks a shift in the narrative from the gathering of the remnant to the intelligence report about the assassination plot. Johanan son of Kareah emerges as the military leader among the scattered commanders — his name means 'the LORD is gracious.' The phrase *bassadeh* ('in the field/open country') distinguishes these armed bands from the settled civilian population.
14. The infinitive absolute construction *hayado' teda* ('do you really know?') is emphatic — 'are you fully aware?' The commanders are pressing Gedaliah with urgent intelligence. The verb *lehakkotekha nafesh* ('to strike your life,' i.e., to kill you) uses the verb *nakah* ('to strike') with *nefesh* ('life, soul') — a direct way to say 'assassinate.' Baalis king of the Ammonites had political motivation: a stable Judean remnant under Babylonian authority would threaten Ammonite expansion into Judean territory. The final clause is devastating in its simplicity: *velo he'emin lahem* ('and he did not believe them'). The verb *he'emin* is from the root *aleph-mem-nun*, the same root as 'amen' and *emunah* — Gedaliah lacked the trust to credit the warning.
15. The word *basseter* ('in secret, privately') indicates Johanan understood the sensitivity of what he was proposing — a preemptive assassination. His argument is strategic, not personal: if Gedaliah is killed, the fragile remnant community will scatter (*nafotsu*, from *puts*, 'to disperse') and the *she'erit Yehudah* ('remnant of Judah') will perish. Johanan's reasoning is sound — this is exactly what happens in chapters 41-43. The phrase *ve'ish lo yeda'* ('and no one will know') shows Johanan planned a covert operation to eliminate the threat without destabilizing the community. His logic anticipates the catastrophe with precision, making Gedaliah's refusal all the more tragic.
16. Gedaliah's response is absolute: *al ta'aseh et haddavar hazzeh* ('do not do this thing') — a direct prohibition. His accusation *ki sheqer attah dover* ('for you are speaking falsehood') uses *sheqer*, the same word used throughout Jeremiah for the 'false' prophecies of the *nevi'ei sheqer* ('false prophets'). The irony is cutting: throughout the book, truth-tellers have been accused of lying while liars have been believed. Now Gedaliah — a good man from a family that supported Jeremiah — falls into the same pattern of refusing to hear an unwelcome truth. The chapter ends on this note of tragic refusal, and the reader already knows from the trajectory of the book that refusing to hear warnings leads to destruction.

41

Summary: *Jeremiah 41 records the assassination of Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the Babylonian-appointed governor over the remnant in Judah. Ishmael son of Nethaniah, of royal blood, comes to Gedaliah at Mizpah with ten men and murders him along with the Judeans and Chaldean soldiers present. The next day, before anyone knows of the assassination, eighty men arrive from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria in mourning, bearing grain offerings and incense for the house of the LORD. Ishmael lures them inside and slaughters most of them, sparing ten who reveal hidden stores of wheat, barley, oil, and honey. Ishmael throws the bodies into a large cistern that King Asa had built during his fortification against Baasha of Israel. Ishmael then takes captive all the remaining people at Mizpah, including the king's daughters whom Nebuzaradan had entrusted to Gedaliah, and sets out toward the Ammonites. Johanan son of Kareah and the other military commanders hear of the atrocity, pursue Ishmael, and overtake him at the great pool in Gibeon. The captive people rally to Johanan, but Ishmael escapes with eight men to the Ammonites. Johanan and the remnant, now terrified of Babylonian reprisal for Gedaliah's death, settle near Bethlehem, preparing to flee to Egypt.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The assassination of Gedaliah is one of the most consequential political murders in biblical history. It extinguished the last ember of self-governance in Judah and set in motion the flight to Egypt that Jeremiah had explicitly warned against. The scene of the eighty mourners from the former northern kingdom — beards shaved, clothes torn, bodies gashed — traveling to offer worship at the destroyed Temple site reveals that even after 586 BCE, pilgrims still came to Jerusalem's ruins. Ishmael's massacre of these worshipers is gratuitous evil: he kills men coming to mourn. The cistern of Asa (v.9) connects this atrocity to the northern-southern conflict centuries earlier — a defensive fortification now becomes a mass grave. The Fast of Gedaliah (Tsom Gedaliah), observed on the third of Tishrei, commemorates this event as one of the four fasts of Jewish tradition (Zechariah 8:19).*

Translation Friction: *Ishmael's motive is not fully explained. He is of royal blood (min-zera ha-melukhah), which may suggest dynastic resentment against a non-Davidic governor, but the text also notes that Baalis king of Ammon sent him (40:14). The combination of royal pretension and foreign manipulation makes him simultaneously a political assassin and a foreign agent. We have preserved the narrator's restraint — the text does not psychologize Ishmael but simply records his actions. The ten men who buy their lives with hidden food stores (v.8) raise a moral question the text does not resolve: is their survival pragmatic wisdom or complicity?*

Connections: Gedaliah's assassination parallels the account in 2 Kings 25:25-26 but with far greater detail. The flight toward Egypt (v.17) sets up chapters 42-44 and fulfills the ironic reversal Jeremiah has been warning about: the remnant that survived Babylon's judgment will now voluntarily return to Egypt. The cistern of Asa connects to 1 Kings 15:22, where Asa fortified Mizpah against Baasha. The mourners from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria represent the former northern kingdom — their pilgrimage to the destroyed Temple shows the persistence of worship even after catastrophe. Ishmael's escape to the Ammonites connects to 40:14, where Baalis king of Ammon had commissioned the assassination.

¹In the seventh month, Ishmael son of Nethaniah son of Elishama, of royal blood, along with officers of the king and ten men with him, came to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah. They ate bread together there at Mizpah. ²Then Ishmael son of Nethaniah rose up with the ten men who were with him and struck down Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan with the sword, killing him — the one whom the king of Babylon had appointed over the land. ³Ishmael also killed all the Judeans who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah, along with the Chaldean soldiers who were stationed there. ⁴On the second day after the killing of Gedaliah — before anyone knew of it — ⁵eighty men arrived from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria with their beards shaved, their clothes torn, and their bodies gashed, carrying grain offerings and incense to bring to the house of the LORD. ⁶Ishmael son of Nethaniah went out from Mizpah to meet them, weeping as he walked. When he met them he said, 'Come to Gedaliah son of Ahikam.' ⁷When they entered the city, Ishmael son of Nethaniah and the men with him slaughtered them and threw them into a cistern. ⁸But ten men among them said to Ishmael, 'Do not kill us, for we have hidden stores in the field — wheat, barley, oil, and honey.' So he relented and did not kill them along with their companions. ⁹The cistern into which Ishmael threw all the bodies of the men he had killed was the one King Asa had constructed as a defense against Baasha king of Israel. Ishmael son of Nethaniah filled it with the slain. ¹⁰Then Ishmael took captive all the rest of the people at Mizpah — the king's daughters and all the people who remained at Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had entrusted to Gedaliah son of Ahikam. Ishmael son of Nethaniah took them captive and set out to cross over to the Ammonites. ¹¹When Johanan son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces with him heard of all the evil that Ishmael son of Nethaniah had done, ¹²They gathered all their men and went to fight Ishmael son of Nethaniah. They found him by the great pool at Gibeon. ¹³When all the people whom Ishmael held captive saw Johanan son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces with him, they rejoiced. ¹⁴All the people whom Ishmael had taken captive from Mizpah turned around and went over to Johanan son of Kareah. ¹⁵But Ishmael son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men and fled to the Ammonites. ¹⁶Then Johanan son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces with him took the entire remnant of the people whom he had recovered from Ishmael son of Nethaniah at Mizpah after the murder of Gedaliah son of Ahikam — soldiers, women, children, and court officials whom he had brought back from Gibeon. ¹⁷They set out and stayed at Geruth Chimham near Bethlehem, intending to go on to Egypt, ¹⁸because they were afraid of the Chaldeans, since Ishmael son of Nethaniah had struck down Gedaliah son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had appointed over the land.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The seventh month is Tishrei (September-October 586 BCE), only two months after the destruction of Jerusalem. The phrase *min-zera ha-melukhah* ('of the seed of royalty') establishes Ishmael as a Davidic descendant, giving him a dynastic claim against the non-royal Gedaliah. The shared meal — *va-yokhelu sham lechem yachdav* ('they ate bread together there') — is a covenant act of hospitality and trust. To murder a man with whom you have eaten bread is a violation of the most fundamental social bond in the ancient Near East.
2. The narrator emphasizes the enormity of the act by reciting Gedaliah's full lineage (son of Ahikam son of Shaphan — from a family that had protected Jeremiah, 26:24) and his appointment by the king of Babylon. To kill Gedaliah is to strike against the only remaining political order in Judah and to invite Babylonian retaliation upon the entire remnant.
3. The massacre extends beyond Gedaliah to include all the Judeans at Mizpah and the Chaldean garrison. The killing of Babylonian soldiers makes this not merely a political assassination but an act of rebellion against Babylon itself — guaranteeing reprisal against whoever remains in the land.
4. The phrase *ve-ish lo yada* ('and no man knew') creates dramatic irony: the reader knows what the arriving pilgrims do not. The narrative slows to set up the next atrocity with terrible suspense.
5. These pilgrims come from the former northern kingdom — Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria — cities associated with Israel rather than Judah. Their mourning rituals technically violate Leviticus 19:28 and Deuteronomy 14:1, which prohibit gashing the body for the dead, but the narrator records

them without condemnation. Their destination — *beit YHWH* ('the house of the LORD') — is the destroyed Temple, yet they bring *minchah* (grain offering) and *levonah* (incense) as if it still stands. Worship persists even at ruins.

6. Ishmael's weeping (*halokh halokh u-vokheh*, 'walking, walking, and weeping') is feigned grief designed to lure the pilgrims into the trap. The use of Gedaliah's name as bait — 'Come to Gedaliah' — is doubly cruel since Gedaliah is already dead. Ishmael weaponizes the pilgrims' trust and mourning.
7. The verb *va-yishchatem* ('he slaughtered them') uses the same root (*shachat*) used for sacrificial slaughter. These men came carrying grain offerings and incense for the house of the LORD; they themselves become victims of slaughter. The irony is devastating. The bodies are cast into a *bor* (cistern/pit), identified in verse 9 as the cistern of Asa.
8. The ten survivors buy their lives with *matmonim* (hidden stores/treasures) — supplies cached in the fields. The four staples listed (wheat, barley, oil, and honey) represent significant agricultural wealth. Ishmael's calculation is purely mercenary: these ten are worth more alive than dead. The phrase *be-tokh acheihem* ('among their brothers/companions') reminds the reader that the seventy dead were these men's brothers.
9. The narrator pauses to identify this cistern historically: it was built by King Asa (r. c. 911-870 BCE) during his fortification of Mizpah against Baasha king of Israel (1 Kings 15:22). A defensive structure from the northern-southern conflict centuries earlier now becomes a mass grave. The verb *millē* ('filled') — Ishmael filled the cistern with corpses — is grotesque in its completeness.
10. The king's daughters (*benot ha-melekh*) — royal women of the Davidic house — had been left in Gedaliah's care by Nebuzaradan. Ishmael now takes them as political hostages. His destination is the Ammonites, confirming the connection to Baalis king of Ammon who had commissioned the assassination (40:14). He is taking the remnant of Judah to a foreign king.
11. Johanan had warned Gedaliah about Ishmael's plot and even offered to assassinate Ishmael secretly (40:13-16), but Gedaliah refused to believe him. Now the catastrophe Johanan predicted has occurred. The phrase *kol ha-ra'ah* ('all the evil') encompasses the assassination, the massacre, and the kidnapping.
12. The *mayim rabbim* ('great waters') at Gibeon is the large pool mentioned in 2 Samuel 2:13, where Joab's and Abner's men once fought. Gibeon was approximately five miles southwest of Mizpah. The site has been archaeologically identified with a massive rock-cut pool discovered in the 1950s excavations.
13. The single word *va-yismachu* ('they rejoiced') captures the relief of the captives upon seeing their rescuers. The contrast between captivity under Ishmael and deliverance by Johanan is immediate.
14. The captives actively rally to Johanan — they are not merely liberated but choose to follow him. This group will become the remnant that Jeremiah accompanies, first to the region of Bethlehem (v.17) and eventually to Egypt (43:7).
15. Of the original eleven conspirators (Ishmael plus ten men, v.1), only nine survive — eight men plus Ishmael. Two were apparently killed or deserted. Ishmael escapes to the Ammonites, his patron Baalis's territory. He disappears from the narrative and is never mentioned again. The text offers no punishment, no justice — only escape. The narrator leaves this unresolved.
16. The list — *gevarim anshei ha-milchamah ve-nashim ve-taf ve-sarisim* ('soldiers and women and children and eunuchs/court officials') — catalogs the entire surviving community. The word *sarisim* can mean either 'eunuchs' or 'court officials'; in this context it likely refers to officials from the Judean court who had been left behind by the Babylonians.
17. *Geruth Kimham* (the 'lodging place of Chimham') is near Bethlehem, about six miles south of Jerusalem and on the road toward Egypt. Chimham may be connected to Chimham son of Barzillai, whom David brought to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 19:37-40), suggesting a Davidic-era estate that became a waystation. The remnant pauses here — they have already decided to go to Egypt, though they will consult Jeremiah in chapter 42.
18. The chapter ends with the reason for flight: fear of Babylonian retaliation. The assassination of a Babylonian-appointed governor would inevitably provoke a punitive response. The remnant's logic is understandable — but the following chapters will show that running to Egypt is the one thing God has explicitly forbidden. Their fear of Babylon drives them toward the very disaster Jeremiah has been warning about.

42

Summary: The remnant under Johanan son of Kareah approaches Jeremiah and asks him to pray to the LORD for direction: should they stay in Judah or flee to Egypt? They swear to obey whatever God says. After ten days, the word of the LORD comes to Jeremiah. God's answer is unambiguous: remain in the land, and He will build them up and plant them; He relents of the disaster He brought upon them. They are not to fear the king of Babylon. But if they go to Egypt, the very sword, famine, and pestilence they fear will follow them there, and none will survive. Jeremiah warns them that they have made a fatal error in their hearts — they asked for God's word but never intended to obey it. He tells them plainly: you will die by sword, famine, and pestilence in Egypt.

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter presents one of the most psychologically penetrating moments in the Hebrew Bible: people who ask God for guidance while having already decided what they will do. The ten-day delay (v.7) between the request and the answer is unusual — most prophetic responses in Jeremiah are immediate. The delay may test the remnant's patience and sincerity, or it may simply reflect that the word comes in God's time, not the prophet's. Jeremiah's final accusation (vv.20-22) is devastating: 'You have deceived yourselves' — they sought divine sanction for a decision already made, and when the answer contradicted their plan, they would reject it.*

Translation Friction: *The remnant's pledge of obedience (vv.5-6) appears sincere. We have not retroactively dismissed it as insincere from the start, though Jeremiah's accusation in verse 20 implies they were self-deceived. The tension between genuine petition and predetermined conclusion is preserved without resolution. God's promise to 'relent of the disaster' (v.10, nichamti) raises questions about divine immutability — we note the Hebrew without softening it.*

Connections: *The agricultural metaphors of verse 10 ('I will build you up and not tear you down, I will plant you and not uproot you') reprise the language of Jeremiah's commissioning in 1:10. The warning about sword, famine, and pestilence in Egypt echoes the threefold judgment formula that runs throughout Jeremiah (14:12, 21:7, 24:10, 27:8). The remnant's flight to Egypt will invert the exodus — a theme developed fully in chapters 43-44. God's call to 'not fear the king of Babylon' (v.11) inverts the people's stated fear (41:18).*

¹Then all the commanders of the forces, Johanan son of Kareah, Jezaniah son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least to the greatest approached ²and said to Jeremiah the prophet, 'Let our plea for mercy come before you. Pray for us to the LORD your God — for all this remnant. For we are left as only a few out of many, as your own eyes can see. ³Let the LORD your God tell us the way we should go and what we should do.' ⁴Jeremiah the prophet said to them, 'I have heard you. I am going to pray to the LORD your God as you have asked, and whatever the LORD answers, I will tell you. I will withhold nothing from you.' ⁵They said to Jeremiah, 'May the LORD be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act according to every word that the LORD your God sends through you to us. ⁶Whether it is good or bad, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God, to whom we are sending you, so that it may go well with us when we obey the voice of the LORD our God.' ⁷After ten days, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah. ⁸He summoned Johanan son of Kareah, all the commanders of the forces with him, and all the people from the least to the greatest, ⁹and said to them, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your plea, says: ¹⁰If you will remain in this land, I will build you up and not tear you down; I will plant you and not uproot you. For I relent of the disaster that I have brought upon you. ¹¹Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you now fear. Do not be afraid of him, declares the LORD, for I am with you to save you and to deliver you from his hand. ¹²I will grant you mercy, and he will have compassion on you and let you return to your own land. ¹³But if you say, "We will not remain in this land," and so refuse to obey the voice of the LORD your God, ¹⁴saying, 'No! We will go to the land of Egypt, where we will not see war or hear the sound of the trumpet or be hungry for bread, and there we will live' — ¹⁵now therefore hear the word of the LORD, O remnant of Judah. This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: If you are determined to go to Egypt and you go to settle there, ¹⁶then the sword you fear will overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine you dread will pursue you to Egypt, and there you will die. ¹⁷All the men who are determined to go to Egypt to settle there will die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. None of them will survive or escape the disaster I will bring upon them. ¹⁸For this is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Just as My anger and My wrath were poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so My wrath will be poured out on you when you enter Egypt. You will become an object of cursing, horror, execration, and reproach, and you will never see this place again. ¹⁹The LORD has spoken concerning you, O remnant of Judah: Do not go to Egypt. Know for certain that I have warned you this day. ²⁰For you have deceived yourselves. You sent me to the LORD your God, saying, 'Pray for us to the LORD our God, and whatever the LORD our God says, tell us and we will do it.' ²¹I have told you today, but you have not obeyed the voice of the LORD your God in anything He sent me to tell you. ²²Now therefore know for certain: you will die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence in the place where you desire to go and settle.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The entire community comes — *mi-qaton ve-ad gadol* ('from small to great') — indicating a unified delegation. Jezeiah (also called Azariah in 43:2) son of Hoshaiah is identified as one of the ringleaders who will reject Jeremiah's word.
2. The phrase *nish'arnu me'at me-harbeh* ('we remain a few out of many') is a poignant admission: the once-great nation of Judah has been reduced to a tiny remnant. They address Jeremiah's God as 'the LORD your God' — not 'our God' — a subtle distancing that Jeremiah will correct in verse 4.
3. The request is straightforward: direction (*ha-derekh*, 'the way') and instruction (*ha-davar*, 'the word/thing'). At face value, this is a humble petition for divine guidance. The sincerity of the request will be tested by whether they obey the answer.
4. Jeremiah corrects their distancing: he says 'the LORD your God' (*elohekhem*, not *elohai*), reassigning ownership. He also commits to full transparency — *lo emna mikkhem davar* ('I will not hold back a word from you'). The prophet is the faithful channel, not the filter, of divine speech.
5. They invoke God as a witness — *ed emet ve-ne'eman* ('a true and faithful witness') — binding themselves with an oath. The conditional curse ('if we do not act') makes this a self-maledictory oath: they call God's judgment upon themselves if they disobey. The tragic irony is that they will indeed disobey, making this oath their own condemnation.
6. Now they say 'the LORD our God' (*YHWH elohenu*) — accepting ownership. The phrase *im tov ve-im ra* ('whether good or bad') pledges unconditional obedience. The clause *le-ma'an asher yitav lanu* ('so that it may go well with us') echoes Deuteronomic language (Deuteronomy 5:29, 6:3). But the question is whether words match will.
7. The ten-day delay is significant. Prophetic words in Jeremiah usually come immediately. This delay tests the remnant's patience and commitment to their oath. Ten days of silence, ten days of uncertainty, ten days in which the pull of fear and the road to Egypt grow stronger.
8. Jeremiah assembles the full community — the same group that came to him in verse 1. Everyone must hear the word directly from the prophet; there is no room for secondhand transmission or distortion.
9. The full divine title — *YHWH elohei Yisra'el* ('the LORD, the God of Israel') — gives the response maximum authority. Jeremiah reminds them that they initiated this inquiry: 'to whom you sent me.' The word is the answer they asked for.
10. This verse reprises the four key verbs of Jeremiah's call (1:10): build, tear down, plant, uproot. God promises to reverse the destruction — but only if they remain. The verb *nichamti* ('I have relented') is theologically weighty: God declares a change in His disposition toward the remnant. The disaster phase is over; restoration is offered.
11. The double *al-tire'u* ('do not fear') directly addresses the fear that drove them to Bethlehem (41:17-18). God names their fear and countermands it. The covenantal promise *ki ittkhem ani* ('for I am with you') echoes the assurance given to Jeremiah at his call (1:8) and to Israel throughout the prophets.
12. God promises to move Nebuchadnezzar to show mercy (*rachamim*). The verb *ve-heshiv* ('and he will cause you to return') implies restoration to the land — not exile, not displacement, but a return to their own soil (*admatkem*). This is the positive outcome if they obey.
13. The conditional shifts from promise to warning. God identifies refusal to stay as refusal to obey — the two are equated. *Le-vilti shemo'a be-qol YHWH* ('so as not to obey the voice of the LORD') reveals that the decision to flee is fundamentally a decision of disobedience.
14. God quotes the remnant's own reasoning back to them: Egypt means no war (*milchamah*), no trumpet alarm (*qol shofar*), no famine (*la-lechem lo nir'av*). These are precisely the three forms of suffering they experienced during the siege. Their logic is that Egypt offers what Judah cannot — security, peace, food. God is about to demolish this logic.
15. The full title — *YHWH tseva'ot elohei Yisra'el* ('the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel') — adds military authority. The phrase *som tesimu peneikhem* ('you set, yes set your faces') uses the infinitive absolute for emphasis: if you are absolutely determined.
16. The divine irony is precise: the sword and famine they flee from in Judah will follow them to Egypt. The verb *yidbaq* ('will cling to, will pursue') is the same verb used in Deuteronomy for clinging to God (Deuteronomy 10:20) — but here it is famine that clings to them.
17. The threefold judgment formula — *cherev, ra'av, dever* ('sword, famine, pestilence') — is Jeremiah's signature warning, appearing more than a dozen times throughout the book. The absoluteness — *ve-lo yihyeh lahem sarid u-falit* ('not a survivor or escapee among them') — leaves no room for partial safety in Egypt.
18. The four terms — *alah* (oath-curse), *shammah* (horror/desolation), *qelalah* (curse), *cherpah* (reproach) — form a catalog of humiliation. The final phrase *ve-lo tir'u od et ha-maqom ha-zeh* ('you will not see this place again') is exile made permanent.
19. The phrase *yado'a ted'u* ('know, yes know' — infinitive absolute for emphasis) makes the warning undeniable. The verb *he'idoti* ('I have testified/warned') is legal language — God is placing them on formal notice.
20. Jeremiah's accusation is devastating: *ki hit'etem be-nafshoteikhem* ('you have deceived yourselves / led yourselves astray'). The reflexive form indicates self-deception. They asked for God's word, but their decision was already made. The quoted prayer repeats their own words from verses 5-6, throwing their oath back at them.

21. Jeremiah speaks in the prophetic perfect — the disobedience is so certain that he states it as already accomplished: *ve-lo shema'tem* ('you have not obeyed'), even though they have not yet physically departed for Egypt. The prophet sees through the pretense to the settled will beneath it.
22. The chapter ends with the same emphatic construction — *yado'a ted'u* ('know, yes know') — and the same threefold judgment: sword, famine, pestilence. The final word is *ba-maqom asher chafatstem lavo lagur sham* ('in the place where you desired to go to sojourn') — the place of their desire becomes the place of their death.

43

Summary: *The remnant rejects Jeremiah's word. Azariah son of Hoshaiiah, Johanan son of Kareah, and all the arrogant men accuse Jeremiah of lying and blame Baruch son of Neriah for turning the prophet against them. They refuse to remain in Judah and take the entire remnant — men, women, children, the king's daughters, and Jeremiah and Baruch themselves — to Egypt. They arrive at Tahpanhes, a frontier city in the eastern Nile Delta. There the word of the LORD comes to Jeremiah: take large stones and bury them in the mortar at the entrance to Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the Judean men. Then declare that Nebuchadnezzar will come and set his throne over these very stones, spreading his royal canopy over them. He will strike the land of Egypt — death for those destined for death, captivity for those destined for captivity, sword for those destined for the sword. He will burn the temples of Egypt's gods and carry off their idols. He will wrap Egypt around himself like a shepherd wraps his garment, and depart in peace.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The accusation against Baruch (v.3) is a remarkable deflection: rather than confront Jeremiah's authority directly, they invent a conspiracy theory — the scribe Baruch has manipulated the prophet. This is the first and only time in the book where Baruch is blamed for Jeremiah's message. The forced march to Egypt completes the ironic inversion of the exodus: the people whom God brought out of Egypt now return there voluntarily, dragging the prophet with them. The sign-act at Tahpanhes — burying stones in the pavement — is Jeremiah's last recorded prophetic action. It declares that even Egypt cannot protect them from Babylon. The prophecy was historically fulfilled: Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt in 568/567 BCE.*

Translation Friction: *The text says the people 'did not obey the voice of the LORD' (v.7), yet Jeremiah and Baruch are taken along against their will — the prophet who told them to stay is himself dragged to the place God forbade. We have not resolved this tension. The phrase 'Nebuchadnezzar My servant' (v.10, *avdi*) — God calling the pagan king His servant — is theologically jarring and preserved without softening.*

Connections: *The flight to Egypt inverts the exodus of Exodus 12-15. Tahpanhes (Egyptian: Daphnae) was a garrison city where Greek mercenaries served Pharaoh — the remnant seeks refuge among foreign soldiers. Nebuchadnezzar is again called 'My servant' (*avdi*), as in 25:9 and 27:6 — God uses pagan rulers as instruments of His purpose. The prophecy of Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt connects to Ezekiel 29:19-20 and was fulfilled historically. The burning of Egyptian temples (v.12) parallels the burning of the Jerusalem Temple.*

¹When Jeremiah had finished speaking to all the people all the words of the LORD their God — everything the LORD their God had sent him to tell them — ²Azariah son of Hoshaiiah, Johanan son of Kareah, and all the arrogant men said to Jeremiah, 'You are lying! The LORD our God did not send you to say, "Do not go to Egypt to settle there." ³Baruch son of Neriah is inciting you against us to hand us over to the Chaldeans, so they can kill us or deport us to Babylon!' ⁴So Johanan son of Kareah, all the commanders of the forces, and all the people did not obey the voice of the LORD by remaining in the land of Judah. ⁵Johanan son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces took the entire remnant of Judah — those who had returned from all the nations where they had been scattered to live in the land of Judah: ⁶men, women, children, the king's daughters, and every person whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah son of Ahikam — along with Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch son of Neriah. ⁷They entered the land of Egypt — for they did not obey the voice of the LORD — and they came to Tahpanhes. ⁸The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah at Tahpanhes: ⁹'Take large stones in your hand and bury them in the mortar in the brick pavement at the entrance to Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the Judean men. ¹⁰Then say to them, "This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: I am going to send for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and I will set his throne over these very stones that I have buried. He will

spread his royal canopy over them. ¹¹He will come and strike the land of Egypt — those destined for death, to death; those destined for captivity, to captivity; those destined for the sword, to the sword. ¹²I will kindle a fire in the temples of the gods of Egypt. He will burn them and carry the gods away. He will wrap himself in the land of Egypt as a shepherd wraps himself in his garment, and he will depart from there in peace. ¹³He will shatter the pillars of the temple of the sun in the land of Egypt, and he will burn the temples of the gods of Egypt with fire."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The narrator twice emphasizes 'the LORD their God' (YHWH eloheihem) — the God they claimed to want to obey is still their God, even as they reject His word. The phrase kol ha-devarim ha-elleh ('all these words') underscores that nothing was withheld.
2. The narrator calls them ha-anashim ha-zedim ('the arrogant/presumptuous men') — the only time this label appears in Jeremiah. Their accusation is direct: sheqer attah medabber ('you are speaking falsehood'). They accuse the prophet of fabricating the oracle. Having sworn to obey (42:5-6), they now deny the word came from God at all.
3. The accusation against Baruch is unprecedented. Throughout the book, Baruch has been Jeremiah's faithful scribe (chapter 36). Now the remnant invents a political motive for him: he wants to hand them to the Chaldeans. The word massit ('inciting') is the same root used in Deuteronomy 13:6 for one who entices Israel to worship other gods — a serious charge.
4. The verdict is stated plainly: ve-lo shama ('they did not obey'). The oath of 42:5-6 is broken. The voice of the LORD — the very voice they pledged to follow whether good or bad — is rejected.
5. The phrase asher shavu mi-kol ha-goyim ('who had returned from all the nations') reveals that this remnant included people who had fled to neighboring countries during the Babylonian invasion and then returned to Judah after the destruction. They are now being uprooted a second time.
6. Jeremiah and Baruch are listed at the end, almost as an afterthought — but it is the most significant detail. The prophet who told them not to go to Egypt is himself taken to Egypt. The man who delivered God's prohibition is compelled to accompany those who violate it. Whether by force or by the momentum of events, Jeremiah goes where God said not to go.
7. The narrator repeats the verdict — ki lo shame'u be-qol YHWH ('for they did not obey the voice of the LORD') — embedding the judgment within the narrative. Tahpanhes is the first stop inside Egypt, a border fortress. The people who left Egypt in the exodus now re-enter it in disobedience.
8. Even in Egypt, the word of the LORD comes. God's speech is not confined to the land of Israel. Jeremiah continues to function as a prophet outside the promised land — the word follows the people wherever they go.
9. This is a prophetic sign-act (otot, symbolic actions). The stones are buried ba-melet ba-malben ('in the mortar in the brick pavement/kiln') at the entrance to Pharaoh's palace. The act is performed publicly — le-einei anashim yehudim ('in the sight of Judean men') — so witnesses can testify when the prophecy is fulfilled. Petrie's excavation at Tell Defenneh found a large brick platform before the entrance to the fortress.
10. Nebuchadnezzar is again called avdi ('My servant'), as in 25:9 and 27:6. The stones Jeremiah buried become the foundation for Babylon's throne in Egypt. The shapripo ('royal pavilion/canopy') represents Babylonian sovereignty established on Egyptian soil. This prophecy was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt in 568/567 BCE.
11. The threefold sorting — death, captivity, sword — echoes 15:2 where God similarly assigns fates. The repetitive structure (asher la-mavet la-mavet, 'those for death to death') has the rhythm of an inescapable decree. There is no category for escape.
12. The burning of Egyptian temples mirrors the burning of the LORD's temple in Jerusalem (52:13). Egypt's gods prove as powerless as Judah's Temple was to prevent destruction. The shepherd-garment simile — ka'asher ya'teh ha-ro'eh et bigdo ('as a shepherd wraps his garment') — portrays the conquest as effortless. Nebuchadnezzar wraps Egypt around himself and walks away.
13. Beit Shemesh ('House of the Sun') is Heliopolis (Egyptian: Iunu/On), the great center of solar worship northeast of Cairo. Its obelisks (matsevot, 'sacred pillars/standing stones') were among the most famous monuments in the ancient world. Nebuchadnezzar will shatter them. The chapter ends with the burning of Egypt's temples — the same fate that befell the house of the LORD in Jerusalem.

44

Summary: *Jeremiah 44 records the prophet's final confrontation with the Judean refugees who have fled to Egypt. God speaks through Jeremiah condemning their persistent idolatry — specifically their burning of incense to the Queen of Heaven. The women respond with brazen defiance, insisting they will continue their vows to the Queen of Heaven and arguing that their suffering began when they stopped worshiping her, not when they started. Jeremiah delivers a closing judgment oracle: Egypt will not be a refuge. Nearly all who fled there will perish by sword and famine. This is Jeremiah's last recorded prophetic oracle.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter preserves the most sustained female speech in the prophetic literature. The women's response in verses 15-19 is not merely quoted — it is given as a theological argument with its own internal logic. They claim a direct causal connection between abandoning the Queen of Heaven cult and the disasters that befell Judah. Their reasoning inverts Jeremiah's entire prophetic message: he says disaster came because of idolatry; they say disaster came because they stopped the idolatry. The Hebrew term *melekhet hashamayim* ('Queen of Heaven,' or possibly 'work/host of heaven' — the vocalization is disputed) likely refers to the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar or her Canaanite equivalent Astarte. The chapter's location in Egypt creates a bitter irony: Israel was delivered from Egypt at the Exodus, and now the remnant has voluntarily returned to the place of bondage, bringing their idolatry with them.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase *melekhet hashamayim* (7:18, 44:17-19, 44:25) presents a significant textual problem. The Masoretic vocalization points it as *melekhet* ('work of'), but many scholars repoint it as *malkat* ('queen of'), which better fits the context of a goddess cult. We rendered 'Queen of Heaven' following the scholarly consensus and the ancient versions, but documented the textual issue. The verb *qittar* ('burn incense') and the noun *neseq* ('drink offering') indicate full-scale cultic worship, not casual superstition. The phrase 'we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials' in verse 17 distributes responsibility across all levels of society — the women are claiming this was mainstream state religion, not a fringe practice.*

Connections: *The Queen of Heaven cult was first condemned in 7:18, forming an *inclusio* with this final chapter of Jeremiah's ministry — the same sin that opened his public preaching closes it. The flight to Egypt against prophetic warning was narrated in chapters 42-43. The covenant curses invoked here (sword, famine, pestilence) echo Deuteronomy 28. The remnant's insistence on returning to Egypt reverses the Exodus and fulfills the warning of Deuteronomy 28:68. The pattern of female-led idolatry connects to Ezekiel 8:14 (women weeping for Tammuz). Jeremiah's inability to persuade the people even after Jerusalem's destruction demonstrates the thoroughness of the apostasy he has been denouncing since chapter 1.*

¹The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Judeans living in the land of Egypt — those settled at Migdol, at Tahpanhes, at Memphis, and in the land of Pathros: ²This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: You yourselves have seen all the disaster I brought upon Jerusalem and upon all the cities of Judah. ³This happened because of the evil they committed to provoke me — going to burn incense and serve other gods that neither they nor you nor your ancestors had known. ⁴Yet I sent to you all my servants the prophets, sending them persistently, saying: Do not do this detestable thing that I hate! ⁵But they did not listen or incline their ear to turn from their evil, to stop burning incense to other gods. ⁶So my wrath and my anger poured out and blazed in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, and they became a ruin and a wasteland, as they are today. ⁷So now, this is what the LORD, the God of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Why are you doing such great harm to yourselves — cutting off from Judah man and woman, child and infant, leaving yourselves no remnant? ⁸You provoke me with the works of your hands, burning incense to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have gone to settle — so that you bring destruction on yourselves and become a curse and a disgrace among all the nations of the earth. ⁹Have you forgotten the evil deeds of your ancestors, the evil deeds of the kings of Judah, the evil deeds of their wives, your own evil deeds, and the evil deeds of your wives — all that was done in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? ¹⁰They have not been crushed with remorse to this day. They have not feared, and they have not walked in my instruction or in my statutes that I set before you and before your ancestors. ¹¹Therefore, this is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: I

am setting my face against you for destruction, to cut off all of Judah. ¹²I will take hold of the remnant of Judah who set their faces to enter the land of Egypt to settle there, and they will all meet their end in the land of Egypt. They will fall by the sword and be consumed by famine — from the least to the greatest, they will die by sword and by famine. They will become an object of horror, a desolation, a curse, and a disgrace. ¹³I will punish those living in the land of Egypt just as I punished Jerusalem — by sword, by famine, and by plague. ¹⁴There will be no fugitive or survivor among the remnant of Judah who came to settle in the land of Egypt, to return to the land of Judah where they long to go back and live. None will return — except a few refugees. ¹⁵Then all the men who knew that their wives were burning incense to other gods, and all the women standing there — a large assembly — and all the people living in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah: ¹⁶As for the word you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD — we will not listen to you. ¹⁷Instead, we will certainly carry out every word that has come from our mouths — to burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, just as we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials did in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. We had plenty of food then, we prospered, and we saw no disaster. ¹⁸But from the time we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by sword and famine. ¹⁹And when we burned incense to the Queen of Heaven and poured out drink offerings to her — did we make cakes stamped with her image and pour out drink offerings to her without our husbands' knowledge? ²⁰Then Jeremiah spoke to all the people — to the men, to the women, and to all the people who had answered him — saying: ²¹The incense you burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem — you, your ancestors, your kings, your officials, and the people of the land — did the LORD not remember it? Did it not rise into his mind? ²²The LORD could no longer endure it because of the evil of your actions and the detestable things you committed. That is why your land has become a ruin, a wasteland, and a curse — without an inhabitant — as it is today. ²³It was because you burned incense and sinned against the LORD and did not obey the voice of the LORD or walk in his instruction, his statutes, and his decrees — that is why this disaster has come upon you, as it has today. ²⁴Then Jeremiah said to all the people and to all the women: Hear the word of the LORD, all of Judah who are in the land of Egypt. ²⁵This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: You women and your husbands have spoken with your mouths and fulfilled with your hands, saying, 'We will certainly carry out the vows we made — to burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and pour out drink offerings to her.' Go ahead then — fulfill your vows! Carry out your vows! ²⁶Therefore, hear the word of the LORD, all of Judah living in the land of Egypt: I have sworn by my great name, says the LORD, that my name will never again be invoked by any person of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, 'As the Lord GOD lives.' ²⁷I am watching over them for harm and not for good. All the people of Judah in the land of Egypt will be consumed by sword and by famine until they are finished. ²⁸Those who escape the sword will return from the land of Egypt to the land of Judah, few in number. Then all the remnant of Judah who came to the land of Egypt to settle will know whose word stands — mine or theirs. ²⁹This will be the sign to you, declares the LORD, that I am punishing you in this place, so that you may know that my words will certainly stand against you for harm: ³⁰This is what the LORD says: I am going to hand over Pharaoh Hophra, king of Egypt, to his enemies and to those who seek his life — just as I handed Zedekiah king of Judah over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, his enemy who sought his life.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Hebrew *noph* is the shortened form of the Egyptian city name rendered in Greek as Memphis — the ancient capital of Lower Egypt. We use 'Memphis' as the more recognizable English form. Pathros refers to Upper Egypt (southern Egypt), indicating the Judean refugees had dispersed widely across Egypt. The list of four locations shows the diaspora was already extensive, not concentrated in one settlement.
2. The emphatic pronoun *attem* ('you yourselves') stresses that the refugees are eyewitnesses to the destruction — they cannot claim ignorance. The word *ra'ah* ('disaster, evil, calamity') here refers to the Babylonian destruction of 586 BCE, which these refugees survived and fled.
3. The verb *leha'kiseni* ('to provoke me to anger') is a Deuteronomic formula (cf. Deuteronomy 32:16, 21) describing idolatry as a deliberate provocation of God's jealousy. The phrase 'gods they had not known' echoes Deuteronomy 13:2, 6, 13 — these are foreign deities with no history in Israel's covenant tradition. The inclusive 'they, you, your ancestors' spans all generations of guilt.
4. The idiom *hashkem veshaloch* ('rising early and sending') is Jeremiah's characteristic expression for God's persistent prophetic outreach (cf. 7:25, 25:4, 26:5, 29:19, 35:15). The word *to'evah* ('abomination, detestable thing') is covenantal legal terminology — it designates acts that violate the covenant at its core and are incompatible with the LORD's character.

5. The verb *shuv* ('turn, return') appears here in its negative sense — they refused to turn back from their evil course. The same root carries both 'repentance' (turning to God) and 'apostasy' (turning from God) throughout Jeremiah. Their refusal to *shuv* from idolatry is itself a failure of *teshuvah*.
6. Two verbs describe God's anger: *nittakh* ('was poured out') and *tiv'ar* ('blazed, burned'). The first depicts anger as liquid flooding outward; the second as fire consuming. The result — *charvah* ('ruin') and *shemamah* ('desolation, wasteland') — describes the post-586 BCE landscape the refugees left behind. The phrase 'as at this day' emphasizes present reality: the ruins are still smoking.
7. The phrase *ra'ah gedolah el nafshoteikhem* ('great evil against your own souls/selves') frames their idolatry as self-destruction. The word *nephesh* here means 'selves' in the reflexive sense — they are the agents of their own destruction. The catalog 'man and woman, child and infant' is a merism covering the entire population. The term *she'erit* ('remnant') is theologically loaded — even in judgment, the prophets usually preserve hope for a remnant, but these refugees are destroying even that.
8. The phrase *ma'asei yedeikhem* ('works of your hands') is deliberately ambiguous — it can refer to the acts of worship or to the idols themselves, which are literally handmade objects. The consequence — becoming a *qelalah* ('curse') and *cherpah* ('disgrace') among the nations — reverses the Abrahamic promise that Israel would be a blessing to the nations (Genesis 12:2-3).
9. The fivefold repetition of *ra'ot* ('evil deeds') creates a rhetorical cascade of guilt: ancestors, kings, queens, the people themselves, and their wives. The inclusion of women (*nashav*, 'his wives'; *nesheikhem*, 'your wives') is notable and anticipates the women's defiant response later in the chapter (vv. 15-19). Some manuscripts read 'his officials' (*sarav*) instead of 'his wives' (*nashav*), but the Masoretic text is retained.
10. The verb *dukke'u* ('crushed, contrite') from the root *d-k-* indicates a thorough breaking of the will — not merely feeling sorry but being genuinely broken by grief. The word *torah* here is rendered 'instruction' rather than 'law' to capture its broader Deuteronomic sense of divine teaching. The shift between third person ('they') and second person ('you') is characteristic of prophetic speech addressing both the absent guilty and the present audience.
11. The idiom *sam panay* ('set my face') indicates fixed, unwavering divine intention — once God's face is set against a people, the judgment is determined. The phrase 'for evil' (*lera'ah*) is rendered 'for destruction' because the context makes clear this is not moral evil but punitive disaster. The totality of the threat — 'all of Judah' — means the remnant in Egypt has no exemption from judgment.
12. The verb *tammu* ('they will be consumed, finished, completed') indicates total annihilation. The merism 'from the least to the greatest' (*miqqaton ve'ad gadol*) encompasses the entire community without exception. The fourfold consequence — *alah* ('oath/horror'), *shammah* ('desolation'), *qelalah* ('curse'), *cherpah* ('disgrace') — is a standard prophetic judgment formula that appears throughout Jeremiah (cf. 24:9, 25:18, 29:22, 42:18).
13. The verb *paqad* ('visit, punish, reckon with') indicates divine judicial action. The parallel between Egypt and Jerusalem is devastating — the refugees fled to Egypt to escape the very judgment that will now pursue them there. The triad *cherev/ra'av/dever* ('sword/famine/plague') is Jeremiah's characteristic judgment formula, appearing over twenty times in the book.
14. The word *palit* ('fugitive, escapee') and *sarid* ('survivor') together emphasize the thoroughness of the judgment. The phrase *menass'im et nafsham* ('lifting up their souls') is an idiom for deep longing or desire — they yearn to return to Judah but will not be able to. The final clause 'except a few refugees' (*ki im-peletim*) provides a razor-thin exception to the absolute judgment, preserving the tension between total destruction and the slender thread of remnant theology.
15. The description emphasizes complicity at every level: the men know and do not stop it, the women actively participate, and the whole community is present. The phrase *qahal gadol* ('large assembly') ironically echoes the covenant assembly language of Deuteronomy — this is a counter-assembly, gathered not for covenant renewal but for defiance of the covenant.
16. The bluntness of this response is striking. The phrase *beshem YHWH* ('in the name of the LORD') shows they fully recognize Jeremiah is claiming divine authority — and they reject it anyway. The verb *shom'im* ('listening, obeying') carries both senses, and their refusal encompasses both: they will neither hear nor obey.
17. The emphatic infinitive absolute *asoh na'aseh* ('we will certainly do') expresses absolute determination — this is a vow they intend to keep. The phrase *melekhet hashamayim* ('Queen of Heaven') likely refers to the goddess Ishtar/Astarte. The Masoretic vocalization *melekhet* could mean 'work of' or 'host of' heaven, but the context of incense and drink offerings clearly points to a goddess cult, and most scholars reposit as *malkat* ('queen'). The people's argument is empirical — when we worshiped her, things went well. Their 'evidence' covers the prosperous periods under Manasseh's long reign (697-642 BCE).
18. The people's argument reaches its theological core: they interpret Josiah's reforms (2 Kings 23) — the destruction of the high places and suppression of foreign cults — as the cause of Judah's subsequent disasters. In their reading of history, Josiah's reform was the catastrophe, not the idolatry it removed. The verb *chasarnu* ('we have lacked') and *tamnu* ('we have been consumed') create a cause-and-effect argument that directly contradicts Jeremiah's prophetic interpretation.
19. The women now speak distinctly, defending their role. The *kavvanim* ('cakes') were ritual cakes shaped or stamped with the image of the goddess — the word appears only in Jeremiah 7:18 and here. The question *hamibbal'adei anashenu* ('without our husbands?') is a legal defense — they argue the worship had male authorization and was therefore a legitimate household and community practice, not unsanctioned female rebellion. The verb *leha'atsivah* is difficult; it may mean 'to portray her' or 'to represent her image' on the cakes.

20. The threefold address ('men, women, all the people') mirrors the threefold audience of verse 15 and ensures no one can claim they were not addressed. Jeremiah's response will directly counter their historical argument.
21. Jeremiah turns their own argument against them. They claimed incense-burning brought prosperity; he insists God remembered every act of it. The verb *zakhar* ('remember') in covenant contexts means not passive recollection but active response — God remembered and acted. The phrase 'rose into his mind' (*ta'aleh al-libbo*) uses the same verb for 'rising' that describes smoke rising — the incense smoke that rose to the Queen of Heaven also rose into God's awareness as provocation.
22. The verb *laset* ('to bear, endure, carry') depicts God's patience as having a limit — he carried the weight of their offenses until he could carry no more. The result — *charvah* ('ruin'), *shammah* ('wasteland'), *qelalah* ('curse'), *me'ein yoshev* ('without inhabitant') — directly refutes the people's claim that the Queen of Heaven cult brought prosperity. The land they remember as prosperous is now uninhabited rubble.
23. Jeremiah delivers the counter-narrative: disaster came not from stopping the Queen of Heaven cult but from practicing it. The fourfold description of what they violated — *qol YHWH* ('voice of the LORD'), *torah* ('instruction'), *chuqqot* ('statutes'), *edot* ('decrees') — is Deuteronomic covenant language covering every dimension of the covenant obligation. The word *chata'tem* ('you sinned') is from the root *ch-t-* meaning 'to miss the mark' — they aimed their worship at the wrong target.
24. Jeremiah now addresses the women specifically alongside the whole people — they spoke as a distinct group in verse 19, and now they receive a distinct divine response. The command *shim'u* ('hear') carries the force of 'listen and obey,' the same verb they refused in verse 16.
25. God's response is devastatingly ironic. The emphatic forms *haqem taqimnah* ('you will certainly fulfill') and *asoh ta'asenah* ('you will certainly carry out') are not permission but bitter sarcasm — since they are determined to keep their idolatrous vows, God releases them to the consequences. The feminine plural verb forms (*taqimnah*, *ta'asenah*) address the women directly. The phrase 'spoken with your mouths and fulfilled with your hands' condemns them for both word and deed — their vows were not idle words but enacted rituals.
26. God swears by his own name — the most solemn possible oath, since there is no higher authority to swear by (cf. Genesis 22:16, Hebrews 6:13). The oath formula *chai Adonai YHWH* ('as the Lord GOD lives') was the standard way Israelites confirmed solemn statements. God is saying that this formula will vanish from Egypt because the Judeans who used it will be dead. The withdrawal of the divine name from their mouths is a reversal of the covenant relationship — the people who bear his name will no longer exist to speak it.
27. The verb *shoqed* ('watching') is a devastating echo of 1:12 where God told the young Jeremiah, 'I am watching over my word to carry it out.' The same divine vigilance that guaranteed the prophetic word now guarantees judgment. The reversal from *tov* ('good') to *ra'ah* ('harm') inverts every covenant blessing. The phrase *ad ketotam* ('until their completion/end') indicates extinction, not merely suffering.
28. The phrase *metei mispar* ('few in number,' literally 'men of counting') indicates such a small group they can be individually counted. God frames the issue as a contest of words — *devar mi yaqum* ('whose word will stand/be established'). The people in verses 17-18 argued from their interpretation of history; God says history itself will settle whose word is true. The verb *qum* ('stand, arise, be established') is covenant language for a promise that holds firm.
29. The *ot* ('sign') functions as a prophetic proof — when the predicted judgment arrives, it will validate Jeremiah's entire prophetic ministry. The emphatic infinitive absolute *qom yaqumu* ('will certainly stand') echoes the verb used in verse 25 about the women's vows (*haqem taqimnah*) — their vows will 'stand' only in the sense that they bring destruction, while God's words will 'stand' as fulfilled prophecy.
30. Pharaoh Hophra (Egyptian: Wahibre; Greek: Apries) reigned 589-570 BCE. He was eventually overthrown by his own general Amasis (Ahmose II) in a military coup, fulfilling this oracle. The parallel with Zedekiah is pointed: the refugees trusted Hophra for protection just as Zedekiah had trusted him for military support against Babylon (cf. 37:5-7). Both trust-in-Egypt policies ended in the same way — the Egyptian protector fell to his enemies. The phrase *mevaqshei nafsho* ('those who seek his life') is a standard expression for mortal enemies.

45

Summary: *Jeremiah 45 is the shortest chapter in the book — five verses containing a personal oracle from God to Baruch son of Neriah, Jeremiah's scribe and companion. The oracle is dated to the fourth year of Jehoiakim (605/604 BCE), the same year Baruch wrote down Jeremiah's prophecies on the first scroll (chapter 36). Baruch has cried out in despair — 'Woe to me!' — overwhelmed by sorrow. God responds with a stark message: He is about to tear down what he has built and uproot what he has planted across the whole earth. In that context, Baruch should not seek great things for himself. But God promises him one thing — his life, given to him 'as plunder' wherever he goes.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This tiny chapter is one of the most intimate moments in prophetic literature. God speaks not to a king, not to a nation, but to a single scribe — a man whose personal anguish matters enough for a divine oracle. The phrase 'I will give you your life as plunder' (*ve-natatti lekha et-nafshekha leshalla*) is extraordinary: in a world about to be torn apart, survival itself is the prize. Baruch will carry his life out of the catastrophe the way a soldier carries loot from a conquered city — it*

is something seized from destruction, not guaranteed. The chapter's placement after the Egypt oracles (chapters 43-44) but with a chronological setting twenty years earlier creates a literary frame: Baruch's personal story is given its own space, separate from the national narrative, honoring the individual amid the collapse of nations.

Translation Friction: *The verb yagata ('you are weary/exhausted') in verse 3 could indicate physical exhaustion from the scribal labor of writing the scroll, or spiritual and emotional exhaustion from the content of what he was writing — prophecies of national destruction. We rendered it in a way that allows both readings. The phrase 'great things' (gedolot) in verse 5 is deliberately vague in the Hebrew — it could mean personal ambition, political advancement, or simply a normal life. We preserved the ambiguity rather than specifying. The dating formula places this oracle in 605 BCE, but its position in the book (after chapter 44) suggests the editor placed it here as a conclusion to the Baruch narrative cycle, not in chronological sequence.*

Connections: *The 'building and tearing down, planting and uprooting' language directly echoes Jeremiah's call narrative (1:10), forming an inclusio between the prophet's commission and this near-final oracle. The scroll-writing event referenced in verse 1 is narrated in detail in chapter 36. Baruch's role as Jeremiah's scribe and companion runs through chapters 32, 36, 43, and 45. The promise of life 'as plunder' uses the same phrase applied to Ebed-Melech in 39:18, linking two faithful individuals who stood with Jeremiah and received personal survival promises. The theme of not seeking 'great things' connects to the broader prophetic critique of human ambition in the face of divine judgment.*

¹The word that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch son of Neriah, when he wrote these words on a scroll from Jeremiah's dictation, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah: ²This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to you, Baruch: ³You said, 'Woe to me! The LORD has added grief to my pain. I am exhausted from my groaning, and I find no rest.' ⁴Say this to him: This is what the LORD says — What I have built, I am tearing down. What I have planted, I am uprooting — and this means the whole earth. ⁵And you — are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek them. For I am bringing disaster upon all flesh, declares the LORD. But I will give you your life as plunder wherever you go.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase mippi yirmeyahu ('from the mouth of Jeremiah') indicates dictation — Baruch wrote what Jeremiah spoke. The sefer ('scroll') is the same scroll described in chapter 36, which King Jehoiakim later cut apart and burned column by column. The fourth year of Jehoiakim (605/604 BCE) was the year of the Battle of Carchemish, when Babylon defeated Egypt and became the dominant world power — a pivotal moment that confirmed Jeremiah's prophecies of judgment from the north.
2. The directness is striking — God names Baruch personally. In the prophetic literature, God typically addresses kings, priests, nations, or cities. To receive a named, personal oracle is rare and marks Baruch as someone God considers significant. The brevity of the introduction — no titles, no genealogy beyond what verse 1 provides — creates intimacy.
3. Baruch's lament has three elements: accumulated sorrow (yagon al makh'ovi, 'grief upon my pain'), physical and emotional collapse (yaga'ti be'anchati, 'I am exhausted in my groaning'), and the absence of relief (menuchah lo matsati, 'I have found no rest'). The verb yasaph ('added') suggests Baruch's suffering is cumulative — each prophetic word he transcribes adds another layer of grief. The word menuchah ('rest') carries echoes of the promised land as Israel's 'rest' (Deuteronomy 12:9) — Baruch cannot find the very thing Israel was promised.
4. The verbs banah/haras ('build/tear down') and nata'/natash ('plant/uproot') are the four verbs of Jeremiah's original commission in 1:10. God is now executing the destructive half of that commission on a cosmic scale. The emphatic pronoun ani ('I myself') appears twice — God himself built, and God himself tears down. The final phrase ve'et-kol-ha'arets hi ('and the whole earth/land — it') is grammatically unusual and emphatic. Whether erets means 'land' (Judah specifically) or 'earth' (the whole world) is debated; the context of universal judgment in Jeremiah's oracles against the nations (chapters 46-51) suggests the broader reading.
5. The phrase gedolot ('great things') is deliberately unspecified — it could mean political ambition, professional recognition, personal comfort, or simply a normal life. God does not mock the desire but contextualizes it: when God is bringing ra'ah ('disaster') on all flesh (kol-basar), personal aspirations must yield. The promise nafshekha leshallal ('your life as plunder') appears also in 21:9, 38:2, and 39:18 — it is given to those who submit to God's judgment rather than resisting it. The word shallal ('plunder, spoil, booty') is military vocabulary — Baruch will escape with his life the way a soldier escapes a battlefield carrying whatever he could grab. The oracle ends with the open phrase 'wherever you go' (al kol-hammeqomot asher telekh-sham), which proved prophetically apt — Baruch went to Egypt with Jeremiah (43:6) and tradition suggests he traveled further.

46

Summary: *Jeremiah 46 opens the 'Oracles against the Nations' section (chapters 46-51), beginning with Egypt. The chapter divides into two oracles: the first (vv. 3-12) is a taunting war song addressed to the Egyptian army at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE, where Nebuchadnezzar crushed Pharaoh Necho's forces along the Euphrates. The second oracle (vv. 13-26) prophesies Nebuchadnezzar's future invasion of Egypt itself. The chapter closes with a promise of restoration for Israel (vv. 27-28) — the only hopeful voice in this war poetry — assuring Jacob that exile is not annihilation.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The military poetry of verses 3-12 is among the most vivid in the Hebrew Bible. The prophet mimics Egyptian battle commands — 'Harness the horses! Mount the steeds! Take your positions!' — then shatters them with the reality of defeat. Egypt is personified as the Nile in flood (vv. 7-8), rising with ambitions to cover the earth, only to be driven back. The nickname for Pharaoh in verse 17 — sha'on he'evir hamo'ed — is a devastating wordplay, rendered as 'Big Noise Who Missed His Moment,' mocking a king who talked loudly but failed to act when it mattered. The historical specificity is rare for prophetic literature: verse 2 names the battle, the opponent, and the date. The closing promise to Jacob (vv. 27-28) reuses language from 30:10-11 almost verbatim, anchoring the oracles against nations within the broader Book of Consolation framework.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase sha'on he'evir hamo'ed (v. 17) is notoriously difficult. Sha'on means 'tumult, loud noise, roar.' He'evir can mean 'he let pass' or 'he caused to pass by.' Mo'ed means 'appointed time, meeting, season.' The result is a mocking epithet: Pharaoh is all noise and missed his chance. We chose 'Big Noise Who Missed His Moment' to capture the contempt while remaining intelligible. The geographic references in verse 9 — Cush, Put, Lud — require identification without disrupting the poetic rhythm. Verse 20 calls Egypt a 'beautiful heifer' (eglah yephephiyah) — a metaphor mixing beauty and sacrifice that resists clean English rendering. The shift from war taunt to salvation oracle in verses 27-28 is abrupt, and some scholars consider these verses a later addition; we translate without prejudice.*

Connections: *The Battle of Carchemish (605 BCE) is one of the most consequential events in ancient Near Eastern history, shifting world power from Egypt to Babylon. Pharaoh Necho is the same ruler who killed Josiah at Megiddo (2 Kings 23:29, 2 Chronicles 35:20-24). The Nile-flood imagery in verses 7-8 echoes Amos 8:8 and 9:5. The sword-as-devourer motif (v. 10) recurs in 2 Samuel 11:25 and Isaiah 1:20. The closing promise (vv. 27-28) parallels 30:10-11 almost word for word. Nebuchadnezzar is again God's instrument — not named as 'My servant' here, but the theology is consistent with 25:9, 27:6, and 43:10. Egypt's judgment connects to Ezekiel 29-32, which devotes four chapters to oracles against Egypt.*

¹The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations. ²Concerning Egypt — concerning the army of Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt, which was at the Euphrates River at Carchemish, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah:

³Prepare the small shield and the large shield,
and advance to battle!

⁴Harness the horses! Mount up, horsemen!
Take your positions in helmets!
Polish the spears! Put on the armor!

⁵Why do I see them terrified, falling back?
Their warriors are crushed,
fleeing headlong without looking back.
Terror on every side! — declares the LORD.

⁶The swift cannot flee,
the warrior cannot escape.
In the north, by the Euphrates River,
they stumble and fall.

⁷Who is this rising like the Nile,
whose waters surge like rivers?

⁸Egypt rises like the Nile,
its waters surging like rivers.
It says, 'I will rise and cover the earth!
I will destroy the city and everyone in it!'

⁹Charge, horses! Drive wildly, chariots!
Let the warriors march out —
Cush and Put, who carry the shield,
and the Ludim, who handle and draw the bow.

¹⁰That day belongs to the Lord GOD of Hosts —
a day of vengeance, to avenge himself on his foes.
The sword will devour and be satisfied,
drunk with their blood.
For the Lord GOD of Hosts holds a sacrifice
in the land of the north, by the Euphrates River.

¹¹Go up to Gilead and get balm,
virgin daughter of Egypt!
In vain you multiply remedies —
there is no healing for you.

¹²The nations have heard of your disgrace;
your cry fills the earth.
Warrior stumbles over warrior —
both have fallen together.

¹³The word that the LORD spoke to Jeremiah the prophet about the coming of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to strike the land of Egypt:

¹⁴Announce in Egypt! Proclaim in Migdol!
Proclaim in Memphis and in Tahpanhes!
Say: Take your stand and prepare yourself,
for the sword devours all around you.

¹⁵Why are your mighty ones swept away?
They do not stand, because the LORD has thrust them down.

¹⁶He multiplies the stumbling; they fall over one another.
They say, 'Get up! Let us return to our own people,
to the land where we were born,
away from the oppressing sword!'

¹⁷They cried out there:
'Pharaoh king of Egypt — Big Noise Who Missed His Moment!'

¹⁸As I live — declares the King,
whose name is the LORD of Hosts —
as surely as Tabor stands among the mountains
and Carmel rises above the sea, so he will come.

¹⁹Pack your bags for exile,
daughter dwelling in Egypt!
For Memphis will become a wasteland,
burned and emptied of inhabitants.

²⁰Egypt is a beautiful heifer,
but a biting fly from the north is coming — it is coming!

²¹Even her hired soldiers in her midst are like fattened calves —
they too have turned and fled together; they did not stand.
For the day of their calamity has come upon them,
the time of their reckoning.

²²Her voice hisses away like a snake,
for they advance with force.
They come against her with axes,
like woodcutters.

²³They will cut down her forest — declares the LORD —
though it is impenetrable,
for they are more numerous than locusts;
they are beyond counting.

²⁴Daughter Egypt is put to shame;
she is handed over to the people of the north.

²⁵The LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: I am about to punish Amon of Thebes, and Pharaoh, and Egypt — her gods,
her kings, Pharaoh, and all who trust in him. ²⁶I will hand them over to those who seek their lives, to Nebuchadnezzar king
of Babylon and his servants. But afterward, Egypt will be inhabited as in former days — declares the LORD.

²⁷But you — do not be afraid, my servant Jacob,
and do not be dismayed, Israel.
For I am about to save you from far away,
your descendants from the land of their captivity.
Jacob will return and be at rest, at ease,
with no one to cause terror.

²⁸Do not be afraid, my servant Jacob — declares the LORD —
for I am with you.
I will make a complete end of all the nations
where I have driven you,
but I will not make a complete end of you.

I will discipline you justly,
but I will certainly not leave you unpunished.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Hebrew *al ha-goyim* ('concerning the nations') is rendered 'concerning the nations' rather than the KJV's 'against the Gentiles.' The term *goyim* in prophetic context refers to the surrounding peoples, not a religious category. This superscription introduces the entire oracles-against-nations collection (chapters 46-51).
2. This is one of the most precisely dated oracles in the prophetic literature. The Battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE was the decisive engagement that ended Egyptian dominance in the Levant. Pharaoh Necho II had killed Josiah at Megiddo in 609 BCE (2 Kings 23:29); now his army is destroyed at the Euphrates. The Hebrew *hikkah* ('struck, defeated') is the standard military term for a decisive defeat. The name Nebuchadnezzar appears in two Hebrew spellings throughout Jeremiah — *Nevukhadre'tsarsar* here, *Nevukhadnetsar* elsewhere.
3. The Hebrew distinguishes between *magen* (the small round shield carried by infantry) and *tsinnah* (the large body-shield). This is a mocking command addressed to the Egyptian forces — the prophet ventriloquizes Egyptian officers issuing orders that will prove futile. The imperative forms create urgency: the battle is about to begin.
4. A rapid-fire series of six imperatives mimicking battle preparation commands. The word *siryatot* ('coats of mail, body armor') is rendered 'armor' rather than the KJV's archaic 'brigandines.' The verb *mirqu* ('polish, burnish, scour') applied to spears conveys making the bronze tips gleam — battle-ready. The staccato rhythm captures the pre-battle urgency of the Hebrew.
5. The scene pivots violently from preparation to rout. The verb *chittim* ('shattered, dismayed') describes psychological collapse. The phrase *magor missaviv* ('terror on every side') is one of Jeremiah's signature expressions (cf. 6:25, 20:3, 20:10, 49:29) — here applied to Egypt's army rather than to Judah. The shift from commanding battle preparation (vv. 3-4) to witnessing total defeat (v. 5) creates devastating irony.
6. The Hebrew *al-yanus* ('let not flee') is rendered as an impossibility — 'cannot flee' — rather than a prohibition, because the context is prophetic declaration of inescapable defeat, not a command. The geographic marker 'in the north, by the Euphrates River' locates the defeat at Carchemish. The verbs *kashelu venafalu* ('they stumble and fall') are prophetic perfects — the defeat is so certain it is described as already completed.
7. The *ye'or* is specifically the Nile (from Egyptian *itrw*, 'river') — not a generic flood. The image of the Nile's annual inundation is Egypt's defining natural phenomenon. The question 'Who is this?' sets up the answer in verse 8: Egypt itself, swelling with imperial ambition like its own river. The verb *yitga'ashu* ('surge, churn, be turbulent') conveys violent, uncontrollable movement.
8. Egypt answers its own question from verse 7. The verb *akasseh* ('I will cover') uses flood imagery — Egypt intends to inundate the world as the Nile inundates its valley. The singular 'city' (*ir*) is likely collective, meaning cities in general rather than one specific city. The hubris of the declaration is deliberate — Egypt speaks as though it were an unstoppable natural force.
9. Egypt's army was multinational — mercenaries from across Africa. Cush refers to the region south of Egypt (modern Sudan/Ethiopia), Put is likely Libya, and the Ludim are debated (possibly Libyans or a people of Anatolia/Lydia). The verb *hithollelu* ('rage, drive madly') applied to chariots creates an image of reckless, frenzied assault. These are ironically presented as commands the prophet issues to Egypt's army — go ahead, bring your full force, it will not matter.
10. The phrase *zebach la-Adonai YHWH tseva'ot* ('a sacrifice to the Lord GOD of Hosts') recasts the battlefield as a sacrificial altar — Egypt's army is the offering. This motif of warfare-as-sacrifice appears also in Isaiah 34:6 and Ezekiel 39:17-20. The sword is personified with three verbs: it 'devours' (*akhelah*), 'is satisfied' (*save'ah*), and 'is drunk' (*ravetah*) — a progression from hunger through satiation to intoxication. The double divine title *Adonai YHWH Tseva'ot* ('Lord GOD of Hosts') signals maximum divine authority.
11. The address 'virgin daughter of Egypt' (*betulat bat-Mitsrayim*) is ironic — Egypt, the great power, is mocked as a wounded girl searching for medicine. Gilead was famous for its healing balm (cf. 8:22, 'Is there no balm in Gilead?'). The word *te'alah* ('healing, recovery') indicates that Egypt's wound is terminal — no amount of medicine will restore her. The irony deepens: Jeremiah earlier asked about Gilead's balm for Judah; now Egypt is the patient who cannot be healed.
12. The word *qelonekh* ('your shame, disgrace, humiliation') is the public exposure of Egypt's defeat — international humiliation. The image of warriors stumbling over each other in retreat (*gibbor begibbor kashalu*) depicts the chaos of a panicked rout where soldiers trample their own comrades. This verse closes the Carchemish oracle with Egypt reduced from Nile-like ambition (v. 8) to a heap of fallen men.
13. This superscription introduces the second oracle (vv. 13-26), which looks beyond Carchemish to a future Babylonian invasion of Egypt itself — historically fulfilled around 568/567 BCE. The verb *lehakkot* ('to strike') is the same root used in verse 2 for the Carchemish defeat (*hikkah*), linking the two oracles: what happened to Egypt's army abroad will happen to Egypt at home.
14. Three Egyptian cities are named: Migdol (a frontier fortress in the northeastern Delta), Noph/Memphis (the ancient capital in Lower Egypt), and Tahpanhes (Daphnae, where Jeremiah's own group fled in chapter 43). The geographic spread — border, capital, Delta garrison — indicates the warning reaches all Egypt. Memphis (Hebrew *Noph*) was the political and religious center; its mention signals that the invasion will reach Egypt's heart.

15. The word *abbirekha* ('your mighty ones, your bulls') can also be read as a reference to the Apis bull — Egypt's sacred bull deity. If so, the verse simultaneously asks why Egypt's warriors and Egypt's god have been swept away. The verb *nischaf* ('swept away') suggests being washed away by a flood — ironic, since Egypt was the one boasting of rising like the Nile (v. 8). The cause is stated plainly: *YHWH hadafo* ('the LORD has thrust him down').
16. The mercenaries in Egypt's army — Cushites, Libyans, Ludim (see v. 9) — now abandon Egypt and flee to their homelands. The phrase *erets moladtenu* ('the land of our birth') reveals they are foreigners who have no stake in Egypt's survival. The 'oppressing sword' (*cherev hayyonah*) uses *yonah*, which may derive from *yanah* ('oppress') — the sword that victimizes. Egypt hired foreign soldiers, and now they desert.
17. This is one of the most debated phrases in Jeremiah. *Sha'on* ('noise, tumult, roar') mocks Pharaoh's bombast. *He'evir hamo'ed* ('he let the appointed time pass') accuses him of missing his strategic window — possibly a reference to Necho's failure to reinforce his army at Carchemish in time. Some scholars read *hamo'ed* as a pun on a pharaonic name. We rendered it as a nickname — 'Big Noise Who Missed His Moment' — to capture the contemptuous tone of the Hebrew epithet.
18. God swears by his own life — the most solemn oath possible, since nothing higher exists to swear by. The title 'the King' (*ha-Melekh*) contrasts with Pharaoh's impotent kingship in the previous verse: the real King speaks. Tabor and Carmel are chosen for their unmistakable prominence — Tabor rises dramatically from the Jezreel Valley, Carmel juts into the Mediterranean. Nebuchadnezzar's coming will be equally unmistakable and unavoidable.
19. The phrase *kelei golah* ('vessels of exile, baggage for captivity') is a concrete image — pack your belongings for deportation. The same instruction appears in Ezekiel 12:3-4, where the prophet acts it out as a sign. Memphis (Noph) was Egypt's cultural and political capital; its destruction signals total national collapse. The verb *nitstetah* ('burned, set ablaze') adds fire to desolation.
20. Egypt is compared to a sleek, beautiful cow — an image resonant in a culture that venerated the cow-goddess Hathor and the Apis bull. The word *qeret* ('gadfly, biting insect, destruction') is debated — it may mean a stinging horsefly (an insect that torments cattle) or simply 'destruction.' We render 'biting fly' to preserve the cattle metaphor: a gorgeous heifer tormented by a fly from the north (Babylon). The doubled *ba ba* ('is coming, is coming') expresses certainty and imminence.
21. The mercenaries (*sekhireha*) are compared to stall-fed calves (*eglei marbeq*) — pampered, fat, and useless in crisis. The animal imagery continues from verse 20: Egypt is a beautiful cow, her soldiers are fattened calves, and none can withstand the predator from the north. The term *pequddatam* ('their visitation, reckoning, punishment') carries the double sense of divine inspection and divine punishment — God comes to examine and to judge.
22. Egypt's voice — once roaring like the Nile (v. 8) — is now reduced to the hiss of a retreating snake. The image captures Egypt slithering away in humiliation. The Babylonian soldiers are compared to woodcutters (*chotevei etsim*) — they will hack through Egypt's defenses as methodically as lumberjacks fell trees. The shift from Egypt's grandiose self-image to this diminished reality is the rhetorical climax of the oracle.
23. The 'forest' (*ya'rah*) may be literal (the Nile Delta's dense vegetation) or metaphorical (Egypt's dense population and resources). The invaders — compared to locusts (*arbeh*) — overwhelm by sheer numbers. The irony is layered: in the Exodus, God sent locusts against Egypt; now he sends a locust-army of Babylonians. The verb *kartu* ('they cut down') continues the woodcutter metaphor from verse 22.
24. The verb *hovisha* ('she is shamed, disgraced') marks the completion of Egypt's humiliation arc — from rising Nile (v. 7) to beautiful heifer (v. 20) to shamed captive. The phrase *am tsafon* ('people of the north') avoids naming Babylon directly, emphasizing the geographic direction from which all threats come to the Levant and Egypt.
25. Amon of No — Amon (the chief god of the Egyptian pantheon) worshipped at No (Thebes, the great religious capital of Upper Egypt). The LORD targets not just the political ruler but the rival deity: YHWH versus Amon. Pharaoh is named twice, framing the list — the repetition emphasizes that everything between the two mentions of Pharaoh is included in the judgment. The phrase 'all who trust in him' (*ha-botechim bo*) may include Judeans who relied on Egyptian protection.
26. The verse ends with a surprising note of restoration: *acharei-khen tishkon kimei-qedem* ('afterward it will be inhabited as in days of old'). Unlike the oracles against Babylon (chapters 50-51), which prophesy permanent destruction, Egypt's judgment is temporary. This aligns with Ezekiel 29:13-14, which also prophesies Egypt's partial restoration after forty years. The Hebrew *tishkon* ('it will be settled, inhabited') uses the root *sh-k-n*, the same root as *Shekhinah* — Egypt will be 'dwelt in' again, though not by God's presence.
27. This verse parallels 30:10 almost verbatim — the same promise appears in the Book of Consolation and here, framing the oracles against nations as part of Israel's restoration. The verb *moshi'akha* ('I am saving you') is a participle indicating imminent action. The three-word sequence *shaqat vesh'aanan ve'ein macharid* ('quiet and at ease and none terrifying') paints a picture of total shalom — rest, security, and the absence of threat.
28. The distinction between Israel and the nations is sharp: the nations face *kalah* ('complete destruction'), while Israel faces discipline (*yissartikha*, from *yasar*, 'to discipline, correct, instruct'). The phrase *lammishpat* ('with justice, in due measure') qualifies the discipline — it will be proportionate, not annihilating. The final clause *venaqeh lo anaqekka* ('and acquitting, I will not acquit you') is a double-edged promise: Israel will survive, but guilt will not be ignored. This parallels the divine self-description in Exodus 34:7. The verse — and the chapter — ends with the tension unresolved: grace and judgment coexist.

47

Summary: *Jeremiah 47 contains the oracle against the Philistines — a concentrated burst of war poetry in only seven verses. Waters rise from the north to flood the Philistine coast. The cities of Gaza and Ashkelon are devastated. The Philistines are cut off along with their allies from Tyre and Sidon. The oracle closes with a haunting address to the sword of the LORD itself, asking how long it will rage before returning to its sheath — and answering that it cannot rest, because the LORD has given it its orders.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is one of the shortest oracles against a foreign nation in Jeremiah, but its intensity is extraordinary. The flood metaphor (v. 2) casts the Babylonian invasion as a cosmic deluge rising from the north — water imagery that inverts the exodus, where God parted waters to save Israel. Here God sends waters to destroy. The concluding dialogue with the sword (vv. 6-7) is unique in prophetic literature: the prophet addresses God's weapon directly, pleading for it to cease, then acknowledges that the sword acts on divine commission. The Philistines — Israel's ancient enemies from the time of the Judges through David — are now fellow victims of the same Babylonian storm. The superscription ties the oracle to an Egyptian campaign 'before Pharaoh struck Gaza' (v. 1), grounding the cosmic poetry in specific historical events.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription 'before Pharaoh struck Gaza' (v. 1) is historically uncertain — it may refer to Pharaoh Necho's campaign northward in 609 BCE or to an earlier Egyptian action. We translate without resolving the historical question. The phrase she'erit i Kaphtor (v. 4) — 'the remnant of the coastland of Caphtor' — identifies the Philistines' origin as Caphtor (likely Crete or the broader Aegean), which aligns with the 'Sea Peoples' migration known from Egyptian records. The phrase 'how long will you gash yourself?' (v. 5) uses the verb titgodedi, which can mean either mourning gashes (self-laceration in grief) or military gathering — we chose the mourning sense, as the context is lamentation.*

Connections: *The Philistines as 'remnant of Caphtor' connects to Amos 9:7 ('Did I not bring the Philistines from Caphtor?') and Deuteronomy 2:23. The flood-from-the-north motif links to Jeremiah 1:14 ('From the north disaster will break loose') and Isaiah 8:7-8 (Assyria as flood waters). The sword-of-the-LORD motif appears in Deuteronomy 32:41-42, Isaiah 34:5-6, and Ezekiel 21:1-17. Ashkelon and Gaza are named together in judgment oracles in Amos 1:6-8, Zephaniah 2:4-7, and Zechariah 9:5. The mourning imagery connects to the Philistine lament traditions referenced in Isaiah 14:29-31.*

¹The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines, before Pharaoh struck Gaza.

²This is what the LORD says:

Waters are rising from the north —
they will become a raging torrent!
They will flood the land and everything in it,
the city and all who live there.
People will cry out;
every inhabitant of the land will wail.

³At the sound of the pounding hooves of his stallions,
the rattling of his chariots, the rumble of his wheels —
fathers will not turn back for their children,
their hands too limp with terror.

⁴Because of the day that is coming
to devastate all the Philistines,
to cut off from Tyre and Sidon
every surviving ally.
For the LORD is about to devastate the Philistines,

the remnant of the coastland of Caphtor.

⁵Baldness has come upon Gaza;
Ashkelon is silenced — remnant of their valley.
How long will you gash yourself in grief?

⁶O sword of the LORD,
how long before you are still?
Return to your sheath!
Cease — be silent!

⁷How can it be still
when the LORD has given it its orders?
Against Ashkelon and against the seacoast —
there he has appointed it.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription places this oracle before a specific Egyptian military campaign against Gaza. The historical referent is debated — most likely Pharaoh Necho II's march through Philistia en route to Carchemish in 609 BCE. The preposition *el* is rendered 'concerning' rather than the KJV's 'against' for consistency with the project's treatment of prophetic superscriptions. The oracle itself, however, describes a northern invasion (Babylon), not an Egyptian one — the superscription may be editorial, dating the oracle's reception rather than its subject.
2. The flood imagery depicts the Babylonian army as an unstoppable wall of water pouring down from the north. The word *nachal shotef* ('overflowing torrent, raging wadi') describes the flash floods that fill dry riverbeds — sudden, violent, and indiscriminate. The verb *yishtepu* ('they will flood') repeats the root of *shotef*, intensifying the drowning image. This inverts the Egypt oracle, where Egypt boasted of rising like the Nile (46:7-8) — here God himself sends the flood. The dual objects 'the land and everything in it, the city and all who live there' uses merism to indicate total destruction.
3. The verse builds an overwhelming soundscape: *sha'atat parsot abbirav* ('the stamping/pounding of his stallions' hooves'), *ra'ash rikhbo* ('the crashing of his chariot'), *hamon galgillav* ('the roar of his wheels'). The sounds arrive before the army does — the Philistines hear their death approaching. The word *abbirav* ('his mighty ones, his stallions') was used for Egypt's warriors in 46:15; here it refers to war horses. The most devastating image: fathers abandon their children because their hands have gone slack (*riphyon yadayim*, 'limpness of hands') — terror has dissolved the most primal human bond.
4. Tyre and Sidon — Phoenician cities north of Philistia — are mentioned because they were allied with the Philistines against Babylon. The verb *lishddod* ('to devastate, plunder') is repeated (*shoeded*) for emphasis. The identification of the Philistines as *she'erit i Kaphtor* ('remnant of the coastland/island of Caphtor') recalls their origin as part of the Sea Peoples migration from the Aegean world (cf. Amos 9:7, Deuteronomy 2:23). By calling them a 'remnant' (*she'erit*), the text implies they are already diminished — and now even that remnant will be destroyed. *Kaphtor* is generally identified with Crete or the broader Aegean region.
5. *Qorchah* ('baldness') refers to the mourning practice of shaving the head in grief (cf. Isaiah 22:12, Micah 1:16) — Gaza has entered a state of lamentation. The verb *nidmetah* ('she is silenced, destroyed, cut off') applied to Ashkelon carries the dual sense of being silenced and being annihilated — the city's voice is extinguished. The question 'how long will you gash yourself?' (*titgodadi*) refers to the practice of self-laceration in mourning (cf. Deuteronomy 14:1, 1 Kings 18:28). The prophet addresses the surviving Philistines directly, but the question is rhetorical — the mourning will not end because there is no recovery coming.
6. The prophet now addresses the sword itself — a remarkable personification. The exclamation *hoy* ('O, alas') begins what reads as a lament directed at God's own weapon. The three imperatives — *he'asephi* ('gather yourself in, return'), *heragi* ('rest, be still'), and *dommi* ('be silent') — plead with the sword to stop its work. This is the prophet's own voice breaking through the oracle, unable to bear the destruction any longer, even destruction he has announced as God's will. The tension between prophetic commission and human compassion is raw.
7. The prophet answers his own plea: the sword cannot rest because YHWH *tsivvah lah* ('the LORD has commanded it'). The sword is not autonomous — it executes divine orders. The word *ye'adah* ('he has appointed it, assigned it') uses the root *y-'d*, related to *mo'ed* ('appointed time, meeting') — the same root used to mock Pharaoh in 46:17. There, Pharaoh missed his appointed time; here, the LORD's sword keeps its appointment precisely. The oracle ends not with resolution but with the terrible logic of divine judgment: once God commissions destruction, even the prophet's compassion cannot recall the weapon.

48

Summary: *Jeremiah 48 is the longest and most elaborate of the oracles against the nations — a sweeping judgment against Moab, Israel's neighbor east of the Dead Sea. The oracle announces the devastation of Moab's cities, the humiliation of its god Chemosh, and the end of its famed wine production. The central image of the chapter is Moab as undisturbed wine left to settle on its dregs (v. 11), never poured from vessel to vessel — a nation whose complacency has become its defining quality. Despite the totality of the destruction announced, the chapter closes with a startling promise: 'I will restore the fortunes of Moab in the latter days' (v. 47), placing even this condemned nation within the scope of God's ultimate redemptive purpose.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This oracle borrows extensively from Isaiah 15-16, sometimes quoting nearly verbatim, creating one of the most significant cases of prophetic intertextuality in the Hebrew Bible. The wine-on-its-dregs metaphor (v. 11) is unique to Jeremiah and captures Moab's essential problem — not active rebellion against God but undisturbed self-satisfaction. The personification of Moab as a woman mourning on rooftops (v. 38) and the image of the broken vessel (v. 38) echo Jeremiah's own earlier imagery. The repeated lament formula 'How it is broken!' transforms judgment speech into something closer to elegy — the prophet grieves even over nations under condemnation. We preserved the poetic parallelism throughout, particularly in the lament sections, because the Hebrew shifts between prose announcement and poetic mourning in ways that shape the reader's emotional response.*

Translation Friction: *The relationship between this oracle and Isaiah 15-16 required careful handling — where the Hebrew of Jeremiah quotes or adapts Isaiah, we rendered Jeremiah's own text rather than harmonizing with our Isaiah renderings, since the prophets may have deliberately modified their source. The place names in this chapter are numerous and many are uncertain in location; we transliterated them consistently but noted the geographic uncertainty where relevant. The word shaqat ('to be at rest, undisturbed') in verse 11 carries both positive and negative connotations — rest can be blessing or complacency, and context here demands the negative sense. The divine first-person voice shifts to prophetic third-person and back without clear markers, requiring interpretive decisions about speaker identification.*

Connections: *The Isaiah 15-16 parallel is the dominant intertextual connection — Jeremiah inherits, adapts, and expands the earlier Moab oracle. The wine imagery connects to Isaiah's vineyard songs (Isaiah 5, 27) and to Jeremiah's own cup-of-wrath metaphor (25:15-29). The promise of restoration in verse 47 parallels similar restoration promises for Egypt (46:26), Ammon (49:6), and Elam (49:39) — a pattern suggesting that God's judgment of the nations is penultimate, not final. Chemosh, Moab's national deity, is mentioned in the Mesha Stele (c. 840 BCE), the most important extrabiblical witness to Moabite religion and the same god condemned in 1 Kings 11:7 when Solomon built high places for foreign deities. The 'broken vessel' language echoes Jeremiah 19:11 and 22:28.*

¹Concerning Moab — this is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says:

Woe to Nebo, for it is destroyed!

Kiriathaim is put to shame, it is captured.

The fortress is put to shame and shattered.

²Moab's glory is no more.

In Heshbon they have plotted evil against her:

'Come, let us cut her off as a nation!'

You too, Madmen, will be silenced —
the sword will pursue you.

³A cry rings out from Horonaim —
devastation and great destruction!

⁴Moab is shattered!
Her little ones cry out in anguish.

⁵On the ascent of Luhith
weeping rises upon weeping,
and on the descent to Horonaim
cries of anguish over destruction are heard.

⁶Flee! Save your lives!
Be like a juniper bush in the wilderness.

⁷Because you trusted in your achievements and your treasures,
you too will be captured.
Chemosh will go into exile,
his priests and officials together.

⁸The destroyer will come against every city —
no city will escape.
The valley will perish and the plateau will be ruined,
as the LORD has declared.

⁹Give wings to Moab,
for she must fly away!
Her cities will become desolate,
with no one living in them.

¹⁰Cursed is the one who carries out the LORD's work halfheartedly,
and cursed is the one who holds back his sword from blood.

¹¹Moab has been undisturbed since his youth,
settling on his dregs.
He has never been poured from vessel to vessel
or gone into exile.
So his flavor has stayed in him
and his aroma has not changed.

¹²Therefore the days are coming, declares the LORD,
when I will send tilters to him who will tilt him over.
They will empty his vessels
and smash his jars.

¹³Moab will be ashamed of Chemosh,
just as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence.

¹⁴How can you say, 'We are warriors,
men of valor for battle'?

¹⁵Moab is destroyed and her cities overrun.
The best of her young men go down to the slaughter,
declares the King, whose name is the LORD of Hosts.

¹⁶Moab's disaster is near at hand,
and his calamity rushes swiftly.

¹⁷Grieve for him, all who surround him,
all who know his name.
Say: 'How the mighty scepter is broken,
the staff of splendor!'

¹⁸Come down from your glory and sit in parched ground,
you who dwell in Daughter Dibon!
For the destroyer of Moab has come up against you;
he has ruined your fortifications.

¹⁹Stand by the road and watch,
you who dwell in Aroer!
Ask the man fleeing and the woman escaping,
say: 'What has happened?'

²⁰Moab is put to shame, for he is shattered!
Wail and cry out!
Declare it at the Arnon:
Moab is destroyed!

²¹Judgment has come upon the plateau —
upon Holon, upon Jahazah, upon Mephaath,

²²upon Dibon, upon Nebo, upon Beth-diblathaim, ²³upon Kiriathaim, upon Beth-gamul, upon Beth-meon,
²⁴upon Kerioth, upon Bozrah,
and upon all the cities of the land of Moab, far and near.

²⁵Moab's horn is cut off
and his arm is broken,
declares the LORD.

²⁶Make him drunk, for he exalted himself against the LORD!
Moab will wallow in his own vomit
and become an object of ridicule himself.

²⁷Was not Israel a laughingstock to you?
Was he caught among thieves,
that whenever you spoke of him
you shook your head in scorn?

²⁸Abandon the cities and settle among the rocks,
you inhabitants of Moab!
Be like a dove that nests
on the sides of a gorge's mouth.

²⁹We have heard of Moab's pride — exceedingly proud! —
his loftiness, his arrogance,

his conceit, and the haughtiness of his heart.

³⁰I know his bluster, declares the LORD —
it amounts to nothing.
His boasts accomplish nothing.

³¹Therefore I will wail over Moab;
for all of Moab I will cry out.
For the men of Kir-heres he will moan.

³²More than the weeping for Jazer
I weep for you, O vine of Sibmah!
Your branches stretched across the sea,
reaching as far as the sea of Jazer.
The destroyer has fallen
upon your summer fruit and your grape harvest.

³³Joy and gladness are taken away
from the orchards and from the land of Moab.
I have stopped the wine from the vats.
No one treads the grapes with shouts —
the shouts are not shouts of joy.

³⁴From the outcry of Heshbon to Elealeh,
to Jahaz they raise their voice —
from Zoar to Horonaim, to Eglath-shelishiyah —
for even the waters of Nimrim have become desolate.

³⁵I will put an end in Moab, declares the LORD,
to anyone who offers sacrifice at the high places
and burns incense to his gods.

³⁶Therefore my heart moans for Moab like a flute,
and my heart moans for the men of Kir-heres like a flute —
for the wealth they gained has perished.

³⁷For every head is shaved bald
and every beard is cut short.
On every hand are gashes,
and on every waist, sackcloth.

³⁸On every rooftop in Moab
and in her public squares — everywhere, mourning!
For I have shattered Moab like a jar
that no one wants, declares the LORD.

³⁹How shattered he is! Wail!
How Moab has turned his back in shame!
Moab has become an object of ridicule
and a horror to all his neighbors.

40For this is what the LORD says:
Look — like an eagle he swoops down
and spreads his wings over Moab.

41The cities are captured
and the strongholds are seized.
On that day the heart of Moab's warriors
will be like the heart of a woman in labor.

42Moab will be destroyed as a people,
because he exalted himself against the LORD.

43Terror, pit, and trap
await you, inhabitant of Moab,
declares the LORD.

44The one fleeing from terror
will fall into the pit,
and the one climbing out of the pit
will be caught in the trap.
For I will bring upon Moab
the year of their punishment,
declares the LORD.

45In the shadow of Heshbon the fugitives stand exhausted,
but fire has gone out from Heshbon,
a flame from the house of Sihon.
It has consumed the forehead of Moab,
the skull of the sons of tumult.

46Woe to you, Moab!
The people of Chemosh are lost,
for your sons are taken captive
and your daughters into exile.

47Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab
in the latter days, declares the LORD.
Thus far is the judgment of Moab.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The oracle opens with the standard prophetic messenger formula redirected toward a foreign nation. Nebo here is a Moabite city (not the mountain of Moses's death, though they share the name). Kiriathaim is a Moabite town mentioned in the Mesha Stele. Misgab may be a proper name or the common noun meaning 'fortress, stronghold' — we rendered it as 'the fortress' following the Hebrew sense, noting the ambiguity.
1. The verbs *hubishah* ('put to shame') and *chattah* ('shattered, dismayed') describe not merely military defeat but the collapse of national confidence.
2. There is a wordplay in the Hebrew that cannot be reproduced in English: Heshbon () and *chashvu* ('they plotted,' from the root *ch-sh-b*) share consonants, creating a pun — 'In Plot-town they have plotted.' Similarly, *Madmen* and *tiddommi* ('you will be silenced,' from the root *d-m-m*) form another wordplay. These puns suggest the city names themselves prophesy their fate. The shift from third-person description to second-person address ('you too') is characteristic of prophetic rhetoric.

3. Horonaim is a Moabite city also mentioned in the Mesha Stele and in Isaiah 15:5. The paired nouns *shod vashever* ('devastation and destruction') form a hendiadys emphasizing total ruin. The brevity of the Hebrew line — only five words — creates a staccato urgency.
4. The word *tse'oreha* is debated — it may mean 'her little ones' (children) or may be a reference to the town Zoar (*tso'ar*), mentioned in Isaiah 15:5. We followed the reading 'her little ones' because the image of children crying intensifies the pathos of the oracle. The LXX reads 'Zoar,' and some modern translations follow that reading.
5. This verse closely parallels Isaiah 15:5. The geographic imagery is vivid — Luhith is uphill and Horonaim downhill, so the weeping ascends and the cries descend, filling the entire landscape with lamentation. The phrase *bikhi ya'aleh bekhi* ('weeping rises upon weeping') uses repetition to convey relentless, compounding grief.
6. The word *aro'er* is difficult — it may refer to a bare, scrubby plant (juniper or tamarisk), to the city Aroer, or may be related to the root meaning 'stripped bare.' The comparison to a desert shrub suggests desolate survival — alive but barely, stripped of everything, clinging to existence in barren land. The LXX reads 'wild donkey,' but the MT plant imagery fits the desolation context better.
7. Chemosh (Kemosh) was the national deity of Moab, well attested in the Mesha Stele (c. 840 BCE) where King Mesha credits Chemosh with military victories — the mirror image of how Israel credits the LORD. The verb *yatsa* ('go out') combined with *golah* ('exile') describes the deportation of the god's idol along with his personnel — a devastating theological statement: Moab's god cannot protect even himself. The word *ma'asayikh* ('your achievements/works') may also refer to idol-making, creating a double meaning.
8. The Hebrew makes a geographic sweep: the *emeq* ('valley,' the Jordan rift) and the *mishor* ('plateau,' the Moabite tableland east of the Dead Sea). Together they encompass all of Moab's territory — lowland and highland alike fall. The word *shoded* ('destroyer') is a participle suggesting an ongoing agent of destruction, not a single event.
9. The word *tsits* may mean 'wings' or 'blossom/flower,' and some scholars read this as 'give Moab a gravestone' (from *tsiyyun*, 'marker'). The image of giving wings to Moab so she can fly away is bitterly ironic — escape would require flight, but there is no escape. The desolation formula 'without any to dwell therein' (*me'ein yoshev bahen*) is a standard Jeremianic judgment formula recurring throughout chapters 46-51.
10. This verse is startling — it pronounces a curse on anyone who executes God's judgment against Moab with insufficient zeal. The word *remiyah* means 'slackness, negligence, deceitfulness' — we rendered it 'halfheartedly' to capture the sense of inadequate commitment to the task. The theological implication is severe: the destroyer of Moab is doing 'the LORD's work' (*melekhet YHWH*), and failure to complete it fully is itself a cursable offense. This verse has been used in later tradition to discuss the ethics of divinely commanded violence.
11. This is the theological center of the oracle. The word *sha'an'an* ('undisturbed, at ease, complacent') carries negative connotations in prophetic literature — cf. Amos 6:1, 'Woe to those who are at ease in Zion.' The winemaking metaphor is technically precise: *shemarim* are the sediment or lees that settle at the bottom of a wine jar, and the verb *huraq* ('emptied, poured out') describes the decanting process. Moab has never experienced national catastrophe — unlike Israel and Judah who were repeatedly invaded and exiled — and this undisturbed existence has produced not maturity but stagnation. The word *ta'am* ('taste, flavor') and *reach* ('aroma, scent') sustain the wine metaphor through to the end of the verse.
12. The wine metaphor continues: God will send *tso'im* ('tilters, those who tip over') — workers who pour the wine from one vessel to another. The wordplay between *tso'im* and *tse'uhu* ('they will tilt him') reinforces the image. The verb *yariqu* ('they will empty') and the smashing of *nivlehem* ('their jars/wineskins') complete the metaphor: Moab's long-undisturbed complacency will be violently ended. The metaphor of decanting becomes the metaphor of destruction.
13. The comparison is devastating: Moab's trust in Chemosh will fail just as Israel's trust in the golden calf at Bethel failed. Bethel ('house of God') was the site of Jeroboam's calf shrine (1 Kings 12:28-29), and Israel's confidence in that cult did not prevent the Assyrian destruction of 722 BCE. The parallel implies that false religious confidence — whether Moabite or Israelite — leads to the same outcome.
14. The rhetorical question exposes the emptiness of Moab's military boasting. The words *gibborim* ('warriors, mighty men') and *anshei-chayil* ('men of valor') are the highest terms for military prowess in Hebrew — Moab claims elite warrior status, but the claim is about to be shown hollow.
15. The divine title here is striking: *hammelek YHWH tseva'ot shemo* ('the King, whose name is the LORD of Hosts'). God is identified not merely as prophet's patron but as the sovereign King who outranks all earthly rulers and all national deities. The word *meitav* ('the best, choicest') describes the cream of Moab's youth — the finest soldiers are the ones who fall. The verb *yardu* ('they go down') to slaughter suggests descent, both literal (into a valley of battle) and figurative (into death).
16. The verse is concise and urgent — only eight Hebrew words. The noun *eid* ('disaster, calamity') and *ra'ato* ('his misfortune, his evil') form a pair emphasizing the totality of what approaches. The verb *miharah* ('hastens, rushes') with the intensifier *me'od* ('very, exceedingly') conveys unstoppable momentum.
17. The summons to mourn shifts the tone from judgment announcement to lament. The images *matteh-oz* ('staff of strength, mighty scepter') and *maqel tif'arah* ('staff of splendor, beautiful rod') are symbols of royal authority and national pride. Their breaking represents the end of Moab's sovereignty. The lament formula *ekhah* ('How!') echoes the opening word of the book of Lamentations and is the characteristic cry of funeral lamentation in Hebrew.
18. Dibon was the capital of Moab, where the Mesha Stele was discovered in 1868. The personification *bat-Dibon* ('Daughter Dibon') treats the city as a woman — a common prophetic convention. The command to descend from glory (*kavod*) to sit in thirst reverses the city's status: from enthroned honor to ground-level desperation. The word *tsama* ('thirst, parched ground') may refer to literal thirst or to sitting in dry, desolate ground.

19. Aroer sits on the Arnon gorge at the northern border of Moab — a natural observation point for refugees streaming south. The inhabitants of this border city will see the flood of escapees and learn of the catastrophe from their terrified reports. The pair *nas venimlatah* ('the fleeing one and the escaping one') uses masculine and feminine forms, indicating that both men and women are in flight.
20. The Arnon River formed Moab's traditional northern boundary. The command to declare the news at the Arnon means announcing the catastrophe at the nation's border — the destruction is to be published at the very boundary of the land. The verb *heililu* ('wail') is the characteristic sound of mourning, an onomatopoeic word imitating the wailing cry.
21. This begins a catalogue of doomed Moabite cities (vv. 21-25). The *mishor* ('plateau, tableland') is the elevated plain east of the Dead Sea that was Moab's agricultural heartland. *Holon*, *Jahazah*, and *Mephaath* were Levitical cities assigned to Reuben (Joshua 21:36-37) but later absorbed into Moab — their mention here recalls the contested territorial history between Israel and Moab.
22. The city catalogue continues. *Dibon* was the capital (see v. 18). *Nebo* here is the city, not the mountain. *Beth-diblathaim* ('house of fig cakes') is mentioned in the Mesha Stele as a Moabite town. The rapid listing without connecting verbs creates a drumbeat effect — city after city falling under judgment.
23. *Kiriathaim* was already mentioned in verse 1 as captured. *Beth-gamul* and *Beth-meon* are Moabite towns; *Beth-meon* is likely the same as *Baal-meon* mentioned in the Mesha Stele. The prefix 'Beth' means 'house' — these are named as households or settlements, emphasizing the domestic scale of the devastation.
24. *Kerioth* may be the same as *Ar*, the ancient capital of Moab. *Bozrah* here is a Moabite city, not the Edomite *Bozrah* of 49:13. The summary phrase 'far and near' closes the city catalogue with a comprehensive sweep — no Moabite settlement, however remote, is exempt from judgment.
25. Two body-part metaphors for national power: *qeren* ('horn') represents strength and aggressive power (as a bull's horn), while *zero'a* ('arm') represents military might and active force. Both are destroyed. The combination 'horn cut off, arm broken' is comprehensive — Moab has lost both offensive capability (horn) and the capacity to act (arm).
26. The metaphor shifts from wine as complacency (v. 11) to wine as humiliation — forced drunkenness that leads to public degradation. The verb *higdil* ('made himself great, exalted himself') names Moab's fundamental sin: arrogance against the LORD. The image of wallowing in vomit (*safaq beqi'o*) is deliberately revolting — national pride collapses into physical grotesqueness. The word *sechok* ('laughter, ridicule, derision') indicates that Moab will become what he once was to others: a joke.
27. God turns the tables: Moab mocked Israel's suffering (the fall of Samaria in 722 BCE and Judah's later troubles), but now Moab will receive the same treatment. The verb *titnoded* ('you shook yourself, wagged your head') describes the physical gesture of contemptuous derision — shaking the head at someone's misfortune. The rhetorical question 'Was he caught among thieves?' implies that Israel's punishment was not for crime but was nevertheless mocked by Moab as if it were.
28. The dove nesting at the edge of a chasm is an image of desperate, precarious refuge — the only shelter left is the wild cliff face. The word *pachat* ('pit, gorge, chasm') suggests a dangerous precipice rather than a safe cave. The inhabitants who once lived in proud cities must become like birds clinging to rock walls. The dove (*yonah*) is elsewhere a symbol of vulnerability and mourning (cf. Isaiah 38:14, 59:11).
29. This verse piles up five synonyms for pride: *ge'on* ('pride, majesty'), *govho* ('his loftiness'), *ge'ono* ('his arrogance'), *ga'avato* ('his conceit'), and *rum libbo* ('the height of his heart'). The accumulation is deliberate — Moab's pride is so excessive that one word cannot contain it. This verse closely parallels Isaiah 16:6, confirming Jeremiah's dependence on the earlier oracle. The 'we have heard' (*shama'nu*) is plural, suggesting a collective prophetic tradition witnessing Moab's notorious pride.
30. God's response to the five-fold pride of v. 29 is dismissive. The word *evrato* can mean 'his wrath, his fury, his bluster' — the sense here is that Moab's angry posturing is empty. The phrase *lo-khen baddav* ('his lies/boasts are not so, not right') indicates that Moab's self-assessment is fundamentally false. The contrast between Moab's elaborate pride (five terms in v. 29) and God's terse dismissal (a single short verse) is rhetorically devastating.
31. A remarkable shift: the speaker (whether God or the prophet — the text is ambiguous) breaks into lament for Moab rather than continuing the judgment speech. The verb *ayalil* ('I will wail') is the same mourning cry commanded in v. 20. *Kir-heres* (also called *Kir-hareseth*, modern *Kerak* in Jordan) was a major Moabite fortress city. The shift from first person ('I will wail') to third person ('he will moan') in the Hebrew is abrupt — this may reflect alternating voices between prophet and God, or a textual difficulty.
32. This verse closely parallels Isaiah 16:8-9. *Sibmah* was famous for its vineyards, and the vine of *Sibmah* symbolizes Moab's agricultural prosperity. The 'branches stretching across the sea' is hyperbolic — Moab's vine tendrils (*netishoteha*) reached so far they seemed to cross the Dead Sea. The pairing of *qayits* ('summer fruit') and *batsir* ('grape harvest') represents the full agricultural cycle now interrupted by the destroyer. The vine imagery connects to the wine-on-dregs metaphor of verse 11.
33. The word *heidad* appears three times in rapid succession — it normally means the joyful shout of grape-treaders stomping the harvest, but the final occurrence negates it: *heidad heidad lo heidad* ('shouting, shouting — not shouting!'). The joyful harvest cry has become a cry of something else — perhaps war, perhaps grief. The wordplay captures the inversion of celebration into catastrophe. The *karmel* ('orchard, fruitful field') may be a common noun or refer to a specific place; we rendered it as the common noun.
34. This verse parallels Isaiah 15:4-6. The geographic sweep traces the sound of lamentation across the entire Moabite landscape from north (*Heshbon*) to south (*Zoar*). *Eglath-shelishiyah* is debated — it may be a place name ('Eglath of the third') or a description ('a three-year-old heifer'), an epithet for *Horonaim* or *Zoar*. We treated it as a place name following the LXX tradition. The waters of *Nimrim* (a wadi south of the Dead Sea) going dry

represents the destruction of Moab's water sources — ecological devastation accompanying military destruction.

35. The destruction extends to Moab's religious system. The bamah ('high place') was the standard worship site throughout the ancient Near East — an elevated platform or hilltop shrine. The verb maqtir ('one who burns incense, one who makes offerings smoke') describes the characteristic ritual act at these shrines. God eliminates not just Moab's political and economic life but its entire religious apparatus.
36. The comparison of the heart's mourning to a chalilim ('flutes, pipes') evokes the sound of funeral music — the hollow, mournful tone of reed pipes played at funerals and laments. The verb yehemeh ('moans, murmurs, growls') is onomatopoeic. The phrase yitrat asah ('the surplus/wealth he made') refers to accumulated prosperity now lost. The speaker's personal grief for Moab — 'my heart moans' — is remarkable in a judgment oracle and parallels Isaiah 15:5, 16:9, 11.
37. Four mourning customs are catalogued: shaving the head (qorchah), cutting the beard, slashing the hands (gedudot, 'gashes, cuts'), and wearing sackcloth. These rituals were practiced throughout the ancient Near East as expressions of grief. Some of these practices were prohibited for Israelites in Leviticus 19:28 and Deuteronomy 14:1, but Moabites are not under that prohibition — the prophet describes their mourning customs without comment. The universality ('every head, every beard, all hands') emphasizes the totality of grief.
38. The rooftop (gag) was the place of public mourning in ancient culture — flat roofs served as open-air platforms visible to the whole community. The simile of the broken vessel (keli ein-chefets bo, 'a vessel in which there is no delight') echoes Jeremiah 22:28 where the same phrase is used of King Jehoiachin. A pot that no one wants is discarded — Moab has lost all value in God's assessment. The divine first-person 'I have shattered' makes clear that this is not random catastrophe but deliberate divine action.
39. The lament formula eikh ('How!') returns from v. 17. The phrase hifnah oref ('turned the back') is an idiom for fleeing in defeat — the opposite of the warrior facing his enemy. Moab becomes both sechok ('ridicule, laughingstock') and mechittah ('horror, terror, dismay') — simultaneously laughable and terrifying, the contradictory reactions that total destruction provokes in observers.
40. The eagle (neshet, which may also refer to a vulture — both large raptors) is a recurring image for invading armies in prophetic literature (cf. Deuteronomy 28:49, Habakkuk 1:8, Ezekiel 17:3). The verb yid'eh ('he swoops, he flies') and the spreading of wings (paras kenafav) describe both the speed of the attack and the totality of coverage — the eagle's wings overshadow the entire land. The identity of the eagle is unstated but contextually refers to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.
41. The simile of warriors reduced to the helplessness of a woman in labor (ishah metserah) appears also in 49:22 and 50:43. It describes not cowardice but overwhelming, involuntary pain and loss of control — the mightiest soldiers will be seized by terror as uncontrollable as labor contractions. The word qeriyot may be the city Kerioth (as in v. 24) or the common noun 'cities' — we rendered it as the common noun here since the plural form with the article suggests a generic reference.
42. This verse states the verdict in its starkest form: Moab ceases to exist as a people (me'am). The cause is repeated from v. 26: higidil ('he made himself great, he exalted himself') against the LORD. Moab's sin is not idolatry per se (though that is implied) but the fundamental posture of self-exaltation — placing himself above the God of Israel. The verb nishmat ('will be destroyed, annihilated') from the root sh-m-d is the strongest term for national destruction in Hebrew.
43. Three words with alliterative force in Hebrew: pachad, pachat, pach — 'terror, pit, trap.' The near-identical sounds create a sense of inescapable danger closing in from every direction. This triad is borrowed from Isaiah 24:17, where it describes universal judgment. The sound-play cannot be fully reproduced in English, though 'terror, pit, and trap' partially preserves the percussive consonants.
44. The three-fold trap from v. 43 is now deployed in sequence: fleeing from one danger leads directly into the next. This image of inescapable judgment also appears in Amos 5:19 (the man who flees a lion and meets a bear). The phrase shenat pequddatam ('the year of their punishment/visitation') uses pequddah, which can mean 'visitation' (positive or negative) — here clearly negative, the appointed time when God calls Moab to account. This verse closely follows Isaiah 24:18.
45. This verse quotes Numbers 21:28-29, the ancient Song of Heshbon celebrating Sihon the Amorite's original conquest of Moab. Jeremiah reaches back to Israel's oldest poetry to describe Moab's present destruction — history repeats itself. Heshbon, once Sihon's capital, becomes both refuge and source of destruction. The phrase pe'at Mo'av ('the forehead/side of Moab') and qodqod ('skull, crown of the head') personify the nation as a human body being consumed by fire. The benei sha'on ('sons of tumult') characterizes the Moabites as a people of uproar and commotion.
46. This verse also echoes Numbers 21:29 — the ancient taunt against Chemosh's inability to protect his people. The phrase am-Kemosh ('people of Chemosh') identifies Moab by its national deity, as Israel is called 'people of the LORD.' The parallel between Chemosh's failure and the LORD's faithfulness is implicit but devastating. Sons and daughters in captivity represent the total demographic destruction of the nation.
47. The closing verse reverses the entire oracle. After 46 verses of relentless destruction, God promises to restore Moab's fortunes 'in the latter days.' This restoration formula (shavti shevut) appears also for Egypt (46:26), Ammon (49:6), and Elam (49:39) — a pattern suggesting that judgment of the nations is penultimate, not final. The editorial note 'Thus far is the judgment of Moab' (ad hennah mishpat Mo'av) is a redactional marker closing the oracle unit. The phrase be'acharit hayyamim is eschatological, pointing beyond historical restoration to an ultimate future act of God.

49

Summary: *Jeremiah 49 collects five short oracles against nations surrounding Israel: Ammon (vv. 1-6), Edom (vv. 7-22), Damascus (vv. 23-27), Kedar and Hazor (vv. 28-33), and Elam (vv. 34-39). Each oracle announces divine judgment for a specific reason — Ammon for land theft, Edom for proud self-reliance, Damascus for panic in the face of bad news, the Arabian tribes for false security, and Elam for military aggression. Three of the five oracles (Ammon, Edom, Elam) close with promises of future restoration, extending the pattern established in chapter 48's Moab oracle.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The Edom oracle (vv. 7-22) is the most theologically dense section, borrowing extensively from Obadiah — the only case in the Hebrew Bible where two prophetic books share this much material, raising complex questions about literary priority and prophetic tradition. The question 'Is there no longer wisdom in Teman?' (v. 7) challenges Edom's famed intellectual tradition (Teman being associated with wisdom, as in Job's friend Eliphaz the Temanite). The Kedar-Hazor oracle is notable for its target — nomadic Arabian tribes rather than settled kingdoms — and contains some of the most vivid desert warfare imagery in prophetic literature. The Elam oracle is geographically surprising, reaching far to the east (modern southwestern Iran), suggesting that God's sovereignty extends well beyond Israel's immediate neighbors. We preserved the distinct rhetorical character of each sub-oracle rather than harmonizing them into a uniform style.*

Translation Friction: *The Edom oracle's relationship to Obadiah required careful handling — where the Hebrew of Jeremiah 49 parallels Obadiah, we rendered Jeremiah's own text rather than importing our Obadiah renderings, since the textual traditions may have diverged deliberately. The phrase malkom in verse 1 is ambiguous: it could mean 'their king' (malkam) or 'Milcom' (the Ammonite deity), and context supports both readings — we rendered 'Milcom' with a note on the ambiguity. Several place names in the oracle against Kedar and Hazor are uncertain, and the Hazor here is not the Canaanite city of Joshua 11 but an otherwise unknown Arabian settlement. The shift between divine first-person and prophetic third-person speech is particularly abrupt in this chapter, sometimes changing mid-verse.*

Connections: *The Edom oracle connects to Obadiah 1-9 (shared material), Genesis 25 and 36 (Esau/Edom traditions), and the broader prophetic tradition of Edom as Israel's perpetual antagonist (Isaiah 34, 63:1-6, Ezekiel 25:12-14, 35:1-15, Malachi 1:2-5). The Ammon oracle connects to Judges 11 (Jephthah's dispute over Ammonite land claims) and Amos 1:13-15. The Damascus oracle parallels Amos 1:3-5 and Isaiah 17. The promise of restoration for Ammon (v. 6) and Elam (v. 39) parallels the Moab restoration promise (48:47), forming a theological pattern: God's judgment of the nations is real but not final. Bozrah in the Edom oracle (v. 13) should not be confused with the Moabite Bozrah of 48:24 — this is the Edomite capital, modern Buseirah in southern Jordan.*

‡Concerning the Ammonites — this is what the LORD says:

Does Israel have no sons?

Has he no heir?

Then why has Milcom dispossessed Gad,
and why do his people settle in its cities?

‡Therefore the days are coming, declares the LORD,
when I will sound the battle alarm against Rabbah of the Ammonites.
She will become a desolate mound,
and her surrounding towns will be burned with fire.
Then Israel will dispossess those who dispossessed him,
says the LORD.

³Wail, Heshbon, for Ai is destroyed!
 Cry out, daughters of Rabbah!
 Put on sackcloth, lament,
 and run back and forth among the walls,
 for Milcom will go into exile,
 his priests and officials together.

⁴Why do you boast of your valleys —
 your valley is flowing away, faithless daughter!
 You who trust in your treasures, saying,
 'Who would come against me?'

⁵I am bringing terror upon you,
 declares the Lord GOD of Hosts,
 from every side.
 Each of you will be driven out headlong,
 and no one will gather the fugitives.

⁶But afterward I will restore the fortunes of the Ammonites,
 declares the LORD.

⁷Concerning Edom — this is what the LORD of Hosts says:
 Is there no longer wisdom in Teman?
 Has counsel vanished from the discerning?
 Has their wisdom rotted away?

⁸Flee! Turn back! Go deep into hiding,
 you inhabitants of Dedan!
 For I will bring Esau's disaster upon him —
 the time when I punish him.

⁹If grape-pickers came to you,
 would they not leave some gleanings?
 If thieves came in the night,
 would they not steal only what they needed?

¹⁰But I — I have stripped Esau bare,
 I have uncovered his hiding places,
 and he cannot conceal himself.
 His offspring are destroyed, his brothers and his neighbors,
 and he is no more.

¹¹Leave your orphans — I will keep them alive.
 Let your widows trust in me.

¹²For this is what the LORD says: If those who did not deserve to drink the cup must drink it, will you really go unpunished?
 You will not go unpunished — you will certainly drink it.

¹³For I have sworn by myself, declares the LORD,
 that Bozrah will become a desolation,

a reproach, a ruin, and a curse.
All her cities will be ruins forever.

¹⁴I have heard a report from the LORD,
and a messenger has been sent among the nations:
'Assemble and march against her!
Rise up for battle!'

¹⁵For I will make you small among the nations,
despised among humanity.

¹⁶The dread you inspire has deceived you,
the arrogance of your heart —
you who dwell in the clefts of the rock,
who cling to the height of the hill.
Even if you build your nest as high as the eagle,
from there I will bring you down,
declares the LORD.

¹⁷Edom will become a desolation.
Everyone passing by will be appalled
and will hiss at all her wounds.

¹⁸Like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah
and their neighboring cities, says the LORD,
no one will live there,
no human being will settle in her.

¹⁹Look — like a lion coming up
from the thickets of the Jordan
to rich pastureland,
I will suddenly chase him away from it.
And who is the chosen one I will appoint over it?
For who is like me?
Who can summon me to court?
And what shepherd can stand against me?

²⁰Therefore hear the plan of the LORD
that he has devised against Edom,
and his purposes that he has formed
against the inhabitants of Teman:
Surely the youngest of the flock will drag them away;
surely their pasture will be made desolate because of them.

²¹At the sound of their fall the earth trembles;
their outcry is heard at the Sea of Reeds.

²²Look — like an eagle he rises and swoops,
spreading his wings over Bozrah.

On that day the heart of Edom's warriors
will be like the heart of a woman in labor.

²³Concerning Damascus —
Hamath and Arpad are put to shame,
for they have heard bad news.
They melt in anxiety;
there is agitation on the sea that cannot be calmed.

²⁴Damascus has lost her strength.
She has turned to flee,
and panic has gripped her.
Distress and pain have seized her
like a woman giving birth.

²⁵How is the renowned city not abandoned,
the town of my delight!

²⁶Therefore her young men will fall in her public squares,
and all her soldiers will be silenced on that day,
declares the LORD of Hosts.

²⁷I will set fire to the walls of Damascus,
and it will consume the fortresses of Ben-hadad.

²⁸Concerning Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor,
which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon defeated —
this is what the LORD says:
Rise up, advance against Kedar,
and plunder the people of the east!

²⁹Their tents and their flocks will be seized,
their tent curtains and all their goods and their camels
carried off.
Men will shout at them:
'Terror on every side!'

³⁰Flee! Wander far away! Go deep into hiding,
you inhabitants of Hazor, declares the LORD!
For Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon
has devised a plan against you
and formed a strategy against you.

³¹Rise up, advance against a nation at ease,
living in security, declares the LORD —
a nation with no gates and no bars,
dwelling in isolation.

³²Their camels will become plunder
and their vast herds, spoil.
I will scatter to every wind
those who clip the corners of their hair,
and from every direction I will bring their disaster,
declares the LORD.

³³Hazor will become a haunt of jackals,
a desolation forever.
No one will live there;
no human being will settle in her.

³⁴The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning Elam, at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah:

³⁵This is what the LORD of Hosts says:
I am about to break the bow of Elam,
the chief weapon of their strength.

³⁶I will bring against Elam the four winds
from the four corners of the heavens.
I will scatter them to all these winds,
and there will be no nation
where Elam's exiles will not reach.

³⁷I will shatter Elam before their enemies,
before those who seek their lives.
I will bring disaster upon them —
the burning heat of my anger,
declares the LORD.
I will send the sword after them
until I have consumed them.

³⁸I will set my throne in Elam
and destroy her king and officials from there,
declares the LORD.

³⁹But in the latter days
I will restore the fortunes of Elam,
declares the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word *malkam* is deliberately ambiguous — it can be vocalized as 'their king' (*malkam*) or as 'Milcom' (the national deity of Ammon, also known as Molech). We rendered it as 'Milcom' because the parallel with Chemosh in 48:7 (Moab's god going into exile) suggests a deity rather than a human king. The tribe of Gad occupied Transjordanian territory that Ammon claimed; after Gad's deportation by Assyria (c. 733 BCE), Ammon expanded into the vacated land. God's rhetorical questions imply that Israel's exile was not an invitation for Ammon to annex the territory — Israel still has heirs.
2. Rabbah (modern Amman, Jordan) was the Ammonite capital. The term *teru'at milchamah* ('alarm of war, war cry') refers to the blast of the shofar or the shout of attacking troops. The word *tel* ('mound, ruin heap') is a technical term for the artificial hill created when a city is destroyed and rebuilt repeatedly — Rabbah will become an archaeological ruin. The phrase *yarash yisra'el et yorshav* ('Israel will dispossess his dispossessors') uses the same verb from v. 1 (*yarash*, 'to inherit, to dispossess') — the tables are turned, and Israel reclaims what was taken.

3. Heshbon here is in Ammonite territory (distinct from the Moabite context of chapter 48). The Ai mentioned here is not the Ai of Joshua 7-8 near Bethel but an otherwise unknown Ammonite town. The phrase *malkam bagolah yelekh* ('Milcom/their king will go into exile') exactly parallels 48:7 where Chemosh goes into exile — the pattern demonstrates that foreign gods are powerless against the LORD. The women running 'among the walls/hedges' (*bagederot*) suggests frantic, directionless movement within confined spaces.
4. The phrase *zav imqekh* ('your valley flows') is a wordplay — the *amaqim* ('valleys') that Ammon boasts about are 'flowing away,' possibly referring to the blood flowing in the valleys or the fertility of the land draining away. The title *bat hashovovevah* ('faithless/backsliding daughter') applies the same term used for Israel (3:14, 22) to Ammon — even foreign nations are held accountable for faithlessness. The arrogant question 'Who would come against me?' echoes Edom's boast in Obadiah 3 and is a characteristic prophetic marker of prideful self-delusion.
5. The full divine title *Adonai YHWH Tseva'ot* ('the Lord GOD of Hosts') is used here — the most expansive form of the divine name, combining the title of sovereignty (*Adonai*), the covenant name (YHWH), and the military title (*Tseva'ot*). The phrase *ish lefanav* ('each man straight ahead') describes panicked, directionless flight — each person running wherever he faces, with no coordination or leadership. The final clause 'no one will gather the fugitives' (*ein meqabbets lanoded*) means there will be no rallying point, no regrouping — the dispersal is permanent.
6. As with Moab (48:47) and later Elam (49:39), the judgment oracle closes with a promise of restoration. The phrase *ashiv et shevut* ('I will restore the fortunes/captivity') uses the root *shuv* ('return'), Jeremiah's central verb for both judgment and restoration. The word 'afterward' (*acharei-khen*) is less specific than the 'latter days' of 48:47 — it promises restoration without placing it in eschatological time.
7. Teman, an Edomite clan and region, was renowned in the ancient world for wisdom — Eliphaz the Temanite is the most prominent of Job's friends (Job 2:11). The three rhetorical questions are devastating: Edom's famed intellectual tradition has failed completely. The verb *nisrechah* ('has rotted, has become foul, has decayed') is unusually strong — wisdom has not merely departed but decomposed. The word *banim* ('sons, children') here means 'the discerning ones' or 'the intelligent' — a usage of *ben* as a member of a class rather than a literal offspring.
8. Dedan was an Arabian trading settlement at the southern edge of Edom's territory. The inhabitants are warned to flee because Edom's catastrophe will spill over into neighboring regions. The name 'Esau' is used instead of 'Edom' — a reminder that Edom is Jacob/Israel's twin brother (Genesis 25:25-26, 36:1), making this a judgment within the family. The verb *he'miqu* ('go deep') suggests hiding in deep caves or remote wadis — the terrain of Edom (Petra region) is famous for its deep, narrow gorges and hidden caves.
9. This verse closely parallels Obadiah 5. The rhetorical logic is a *fortiori*: even grape-harvesters leave some fruit behind, and even thieves take only enough — but the judgment coming on Edom will be far more thorough than either. The implied conclusion (stated explicitly in v. 10) is that Edom will be stripped completely bare. The word *ollelot* (' gleanings') refers to the small clusters left on the vine after harvest — gleanings laws in Israel required leaving these for the poor (Leviticus 19:10).
10. The emphatic pronoun *ani* ('I myself') stresses divine agency — this is not a natural disaster but God's deliberate act. The verb *chasafti* ('I have stripped bare, I have exposed') is the opposite of Edom's attempt to hide in deep places (v. 8). God strips away every layer of protection. The phrase *ve'einenu* ('and he is not, and he is no more') is stark and final — Edom ceases to exist. Historically, the Edomites were gradually absorbed by the Nabataeans and later the Idumeans of the Hellenistic period, effectively disappearing as a distinct people.
11. This verse is startling in context — after announcing total destruction, God offers to protect Edom's most vulnerable: the orphans (*yetomim*) and widows (*almanot*). The verse may be ironic (Edom's orphans will need divine protection because there will be no men left) or genuinely compassionate (even in judgment, God cares for the helpless). The tension between these readings is deliberate and should not be resolved. The imperative 'leave' (*azvah*) addresses Edom directly — entrust your most vulnerable to the God who is destroying you.
12. The cup metaphor connects to Jeremiah's cup-of-wrath vision in 25:15-29, where all nations must drink from the cup of divine judgment. The argument is a *fortiori*: if even those whose 'judgment' (*mishpat*) did not require drinking the cup must nevertheless drink, how much more must Edom drink? The emphatic infinitive absolute construction *shato tishteh* ('you will certainly drink') leaves no room for escape. The identity of those who 'did not deserve to drink' is debated — it likely refers to Judah, who suffered despite being God's covenant people.
13. God swears by himself because there is no greater authority to swear by (cf. Genesis 22:16, Hebrews 6:13). Bozrah (modern Buseirah in southern Jordan) was the capital of Edom — not to be confused with the Moabite Bozrah of 48:24. The four-fold sentence — *shamah* ('desolation'), *cherpah* ('reproach'), *chorbah* ('ruin'), *qelalah* ('curse') — is a comprehensive judgment formula. The phrase *chorvot olam* ('ruins forever') uses *olam* in its sense of indefinite, stretching-beyond-sight duration.
14. This verse closely parallels Obadiah 1. The prophet receives a *shemu'ah* ('report, rumor, message') directly from the LORD, then sees a *tsir* ('envoy, messenger') dispatched among the nations to muster an army against Edom. The scene reveals the heavenly council directing international affairs — the nations think they are acting independently, but God has summoned them. The imperatives *hitqabetsu* ('gather yourselves'), *bo'u* ('come'), and *qumu* ('rise up') create urgency.
15. Parallels Obadiah 2. The verbs describe both diminishment (*qaton*, 'small, insignificant') and social contempt (*bazui*, 'despised'). Edom, which considered itself great and secure, will be reduced to insignificance. The word *ba'adam* ('among humanity, among people') broadens the scope beyond the nations to a universal contempt.
16. Parallels Obadiah 3-4. The word *tiflatstetkha* is rare — it may mean 'the terror/dread you inspire in others' or 'your horrible nature.' Edom's fearsome reputation has become a source of self-deception: because others fear them, they believe they are invulnerable. The geographic references to 'clefts of the rock' (*chagvei hassela*) precisely describe the terrain around Petra (whose name means 'rock' in Greek) and the Edomite highlands — narrow canyon passages and cliff dwellings that seemed impregnable. The eagle-nest image combines height with the illusion of inaccessibility, but

God's reach exceeds even the eagle's altitude.

17. The reaction of passersby combines yishom ('will be appalled, horrified, stunned') with yishroq ('will hiss, whistle') — the hissing is a gesture of shock and contempt, the sharp intake of breath at something terrible. The word makkoteha ('her wounds, her plagues, her blows') describes Edom's devastation as physical injuries inflicted on a body.
18. The comparison to Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19) invokes the paradigmatic divine destruction — total, irreversible, and exemplary. The phrase mahpekhat Sedom ('the overthrow of Sodom') uses a specific noun for catastrophic overturning, not merely 'destruction.' The double negation — 'no one will live there, no human being will settle' — uses two different words for humanity (ish, 'a man,' and ben-adam, 'a son of man/human being') to emphasize the completeness of depopulation.
19. This extended simile compares God to a lion emerging from the dense vegetation along the Jordan River to attack prey in open pasture. The ge'on haYarden ('pride/thickets of the Jordan') refers to the lush, jungle-like growth along the river banks where lions once lived. The three rhetorical questions assert God's absolute sovereignty: no one equals him (mi khamoni), no one can call him to account (mi yo'ideni), and no leader (ro'eh, 'shepherd,' a common metaphor for kings) can resist him. This passage is reused almost verbatim in 50:44 against Babylon.
20. The 'plan' (atsat) and 'purposes' (machshevotav) of the LORD are presented as accomplished facts — what God has planned is as good as done. The image of tse'irei hatso'n ('the youngest/smallest of the flock') dragging away the mighty Edomites is deliberately humiliating — even the weakest will overcome them. The word neveh ('pasture, dwelling') continues the pastoral metaphor: Edom's home territory will be made desolate. This verse reappears nearly identically in 50:45 against Babylon.
21. The fall of Edom is so catastrophic that the earth itself shakes (ra'ashah ha'arets) and the sound carries to the yam-suf ('Sea of Reeds,' traditionally 'Red Sea') — an enormous distance, emphasizing the magnitude of the event. The mention of the Sea of Reeds also evokes the Exodus, linking Edom's fall to the paradigmatic act of divine judgment and deliverance.
22. This verse closely parallels 48:40-41 (the eagle over Moab), using nearly identical language for Edom. The reuse suggests that the same divine agent of destruction (the eagle, representing Nebuchadnezzar) will strike both nations. The simile of warriors reduced to the helplessness of a woman in labor (ishah metserah) describes involuntary, overwhelming physical distress — the mightiest soldiers seized by terror as uncontrollable as contractions.
23. The Damascus oracle begins abruptly without a messenger formula. Hamath and Arpad were Syrian cities north of Damascus that fell to Assyria before Damascus itself (cf. Isaiah 10:9, 36:19). The verb namogu ('they melt, they dissolve') describes the loss of all solidity and resolve. The phrase bayyam de'agah ('anxiety/worry on the sea') is difficult — it may mean the anxious sea as a metaphor for turmoil, or 'anxiety like the sea' (comparing their inner turmoil to the restless ocean). The verb hashqet ('to be quiet, to be still') with lo yukal ('is not able') describes uncontrollable agitation.
24. The verb rafetah ('has become weak, has gone limp') describes the loss of physical strength — Damascus's legendary military power collapses. The personification as a woman in labor (kayyoleodah) echoes 48:41 and 49:22 — the same image applied to Moab, Edom, and now Damascus, suggesting that divine judgment produces the same helpless agony regardless of the nation. The word retet ('trembling, panic') is rare in the Hebrew Bible, intensifying the unusualness of Damascus's experience.
25. The speaker of this lament is debated — it may be the prophet, a citizen of Damascus, or God himself expressing loss. The phrase ir tehillah ('city of praise/renown') and qiryat mesosi ('city of my joy/delight') indicate that Damascus was celebrated for its beauty and vitality. The exclamation eikh ('How!') again echoes the lament formula. The verse's meaning is also debated: 'How is it that the city has not yet been abandoned' (wondering why people stay in a doomed place) or 'How has the city of renown been abandoned' (mourning its fall).
26. The verb yiddammu ('will be silenced, will perish') from the root d-m-m ('to be silent, to cease') suggests death as silencing — the noisy, vibrant city falls into the silence of death. The rechof ('public square, broad place') was the center of civic life in an ancient city — for young men to fall there means the heart of the city is a killing ground. The phrase bayyom hahu ('on that day') is eschatological language marking a decisive divine intervention.
27. Ben-hadad ('son of Hadad') was a dynastic name used by several Aramean kings of Damascus (1 Kings 15:18, 20:1, 2 Kings 13:3). The name invokes the storm god Hadad, the chief deity of the Arameans — calling the fortresses by this name suggests that Damascus's royal power, rooted in its national deity, will be consumed. This verse closely parallels Amos 1:4. The verb hitsatti ('I will kindle, I will set fire') makes God the direct agent of destruction.
28. Kedar was a confederation of Arabian tribes descended from Ishmael (Genesis 25:13), inhabiting the Syrian-Arabian desert east of Israel. Hazor here is not the Canaanite city of Joshua 11:1 but refers to unwallied Arabian settlements (from chatser, 'enclosure, settlement') — semi-permanent encampments in the desert. The phrase benei-qedem ('people of the east, easterners') is a general term for Arabian and Transjordanian peoples. Nebuchadnezzar is named directly as the historical agent of this judgment — a rare explicit identification in the oracles against nations.
29. The catalogue of plunder — tents, flocks, curtains, goods, camels — is the complete inventory of nomadic wealth. These are not city-dwellers with walls and storehouses but pastoralists whose entire livelihood is portable and vulnerable. The cry magor missaviv ('terror on every side') is a characteristic Jeremiah phrase (6:25, 20:3, 20:10, 46:5) — it becomes the war cry shouted at the fleeing nomads, turning Jeremiah's own experience of terror into a weapon against others.
30. The triple imperative — nusu ('flee'), nudu ('wander'), he'miqu ('go deep') — creates escalating urgency. The same command to 'go deep' (he'miqu lashavet) appeared in v. 8 addressed to Dedan near Edom — the same survival strategy for different nations. The word etsah ('counsel, plan') and

machashavah ('thought, strategy') describe Nebuchadnezzar's deliberate military planning, but the broader context makes clear that the Babylonian king's plans are themselves instruments of God's judgment.

31. The description of the target — shelev ('at ease, tranquil'), yoshev lavetach ('living in security'), without doors or bars, dwelling alone — describes the nomadic lifestyle as both its blessing and its vulnerability. These desert-dwelling tribes have no fortifications because they have no fixed cities. Their isolation (badad yishkonu, 'they dwell alone') is geographic and cultural — they live apart from the settled world. What was freedom becomes fatal exposure when an army comes.
32. The phrase qetsutssei fe'ah ('those who clip the corners [of their hair]') describes an Arabian grooming custom — trimming the hair at the temples. This same phrase appears in 9:25 and 25:23, identifying specific Arabian peoples by their distinctive hairstyle. The scattering 'to every wind' (lekhlo-ruach) means dispersal in all four directions — total diaspora. The phrase mikkol-avarav ('from all his sides/directions') means disaster converges from every quarter, leaving no direction of escape.
33. The word tannim ('jackals') represents the wild animals that reclaim abandoned human settlements — a standard image of desolation in prophetic literature (cf. Isaiah 13:22, 34:13). The double negation with ish and ben-adam (paralleling v. 18 and 48:9) is the comprehensive depopulation formula. The phrase shemamah ad-olam ('desolation forever/to the distant horizon of time') uses olam in its sense of indefinite, stretching-beyond-sight duration — the desolation has no visible end.
34. The Elam oracle is unique among the oracles against nations for having a precise date — the beginning of Zedekiah's reign (c. 597 BCE). Elam was located in what is now southwestern Iran (capital: Susa), far to the east of Israel's usual sphere of concern. Its inclusion extends the scope of God's sovereignty far beyond the Levant. The dating formula connects this oracle to the turbulent period immediately after Nebuchadnezzar's first deportation of Judah.
35. Elam was renowned in the ancient world for its archers — the bow (qeshet) was their signature military weapon. Breaking the bow means destroying their primary military capability. The phrase reshit gevuratam ('the beginning/chief of their strength') identifies archery as the foundation of Elamite power. The destruction begins with the weapon system that defines them — without the bow, Elam is defenseless.
36. The 'four winds from the four corners of the heavens' (arba ruchot me'arba qetsot hashamayim) represents cosmic-scale judgment — destruction comes from every cardinal direction simultaneously. The scattering of Elam's people to every nation is the most extreme dispersal formula in Jeremiah's oracles against nations. The word nidchei ('exiles, outcasts, driven-out ones') from the root n-d-ch describes forced, involuntary displacement to the farthest reaches of the known world.
37. The phrase charon appi ('the burning of my anger, my fierce wrath') is one of the strongest anger expressions in Hebrew — charon means 'burning heat' and af ('nose, anger') refers to the flaring nostrils of fury. The verb hichatti ('I will shatter, I will terrify') from the root ch-t-t describes the complete breakdown of morale. The sword 'sent after them' (shilachti achareihem et-hacherev) personifies the weapon as a pursuing agent — the sword chases Elam's scattered survivors until consumption (kaloti, 'until I have finished/consumed') is complete.
38. The image of God setting his throne (kis'i) in Elam is extraordinary — it declares that God will personally exercise sovereignty in this distant land, displacing its human rulers. The destruction of 'king and officials' (melekh vesarim) eliminates the entire governing structure. This verse makes explicit what the other oracles against nations imply: God is not merely punishing foreign lands but establishing his own kingship over them. The placement of God's throne in Elam anticipates the universal sovereignty theme of later apocalyptic literature.
39. The restoration formula echoes 48:47 (Moab) and 49:6 (Ammon), completing a three-fold pattern: judgment is followed by eschatological hope. The phrase be'acharit hayyamim ('in the latter days') uses the same eschatological time-marker as 48:47. Notably, Edom and Damascus receive no such restoration promise — their oracles end with unrelieved judgment. The theological significance is debated: does this pattern suggest degrees of divine mercy, or is it a redactional difference reflecting the history of the text's composition? Acts 2:9 mentions Elamites among those present at Pentecost, which some interpreters read as fulfillment of this promise.

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Summary: Jeremiah 50 opens the massive two-chapter oracle against Babylon (chapters 50-51), the longest sustained prophetic judgment in the book. The chapter announces Babylon's fall, the shattering of her gods Bel and Marduk, and the arrival of 'a nation from the north' — the same directional formula previously used for Babylon's own attack on Jerusalem, now turned back on her. Interwoven with Babylon's doom is Israel's restoration: the scattered people of both Israel and Judah will seek the LORD together, weeping as they return to Zion and binding themselves in an everlasting covenant. The chapter's theological center is verse 34, where God is named Israel's Go'el — the kinsman-redeemer who is bound by obligation to plead their cause against the empire that devoured them.

What Makes This Remarkable: *The literary architecture of this chapter is a study in reversal. Every judgment formula that Jeremiah used against Jerusalem in earlier chapters reappears here aimed at Babylon: the foe from the north (v. 3, cf. 1:14, 4:6, 6:1, 6:22), the call to flee (v. 8, cf. 4:6), the land becoming a desolation (v. 13, cf. 4:27, 6:8), the sword against inhabitants (v. 35-38, cf. 14:12). Babylon was God's instrument; now the instrument itself faces the forge. The go'el declaration in verse 34 is theologically explosive — God does not rescue Israel as a distant sovereign but as closest kin, using the same legal category as Ruth's Boaz. The everlasting covenant of verse 5 (berit olam) reaches beyond Sinai, anticipating the new covenant of chapter 31. The fourfold 'sword' refrain in verses 35-38 is poetry of devastating precision, systematically dismantling every pillar of Babylonian society.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase hinneh (rendered 'look' or integrated naturally) appears multiple times and required contextual judgment each time. The verb paqad ('to visit, attend to, punish') in verses 18, 27, and 31 shifts between punitive and restorative uses — we rendered each according to context and documented the decisions. The word naqam ('vengeance') in verses 15 and 28 required careful handling: this is not petty revenge but covenantal vindication, and we rendered it as 'vengeance' with notes on the covenantal dimension. The metaphor of Israel as 'scattered sheep' (v. 17) connects to earlier shepherd-failure oracles (23:1-4) and we preserved the pastoral language. The rare word zed/zadon ('arrogance, presumption') in verses 31-32 is a key characterization of Babylon's sin — pride elevated to cosmic defiance.*

Connections: *The 'foe from the north' formula reverses the invasion oracle of 6:22-24 almost word for word. The go'el imagery connects to Isaiah 41:14, 43:14, 44:6, 44:24, 47:4, 48:17, 49:7, 49:26, 54:5, 54:8, and to Ruth 3-4 where the legal institution is narrated. The everlasting covenant (berit olam, v. 5) links to 31:31-34 (new covenant), 32:40 (everlasting covenant), and Genesis 17:7. The shepherd-and-flock metaphor connects to 23:1-4 (faithless shepherds), Ezekiel 34, and Psalm 23. The 'vengeance of his temple' (v. 28) links to the temple destruction narrated in chapter 52 and 2 Kings 25. Babylon's fall here is echoed in Isaiah 13-14, 21:1-10, and ultimately in Revelation 17-18.*

¹The word that the LORD spoke against Babylon, against the land of the Chaldeans, through Jeremiah the prophet. ²Announce it among the nations, proclaim it, raise a signal; proclaim it and do not conceal it. Say: Babylon is captured! Bel is put to shame, Marduk is shattered. Her images are put to shame, her idols are broken to pieces. ³For a nation advances against her from the north — it will turn her land into a wasteland, and no one will live in it. Both human and animal will flee; they will be gone. ⁴In those days and at that time, declares the LORD, the people of Israel will come — they and the people of Judah together. They will walk along weeping, and they will seek the LORD their God. ⁵They will ask the way to Zion, their faces turned toward it: 'Come, let us bind ourselves to the LORD in an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten.' ⁶My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds led them astray, turning them loose on the mountains. They wandered from mountain to hill and forgot their resting place. ⁷All who found them devoured them, and their oppressors said, 'We bear no guilt, because they sinned against the LORD — the pasture of righteousness, the hope of their ancestors, the LORD.' ⁸Flee from the midst of Babylon, go out from the land of the Chaldeans, and be like the lead goats at the head of the flock. ⁹For I am about to stir up and bring against Babylon an assembly of great nations from the land of the north. They will array themselves against her; from there she will be captured. Their arrows will be like those of a skilled warrior — none returns empty-handed. ¹⁰Chaldea will become plunder; all who plunder her will have their fill, declares the LORD. ¹¹Because you rejoiced, because you exulted, you who plundered my inheritance — because you frolicked like a heifer treading grain and neighed like stallions — ¹²Your mother will be utterly put to shame; she who bore you will be disgraced. Look — the last of the nations! A desert, a dry land, a wasteland. ¹³Because of the wrath of the LORD she will not be inhabited; she will become an utter desolation. Everyone who passes by Babylon will be horrified and will hiss at all her wounds. ¹⁴Take up your positions around Babylon, all you who draw the bow. Shoot at her! Do not spare any arrows, for she has sinned against the LORD. ¹⁵Raise the war cry against her on every side! She has surrendered; her pillars have fallen, her walls are torn down. For this is the vengeance of the LORD — take vengeance on her! As she has done, do to her. ¹⁶Cut off the sower from Babylon, and the one who wields the sickle at harvest time. Before the oppressing sword, each one will turn to his own people and each will flee to his own land. ¹⁷Israel is a scattered sheep that lions have driven away. The first to devour him

was the king of Assyria, and this last one, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, has gnawed his bones. ¹⁸Therefore this is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: I am about to punish the king of Babylon and his land, just as I punished the king of Assyria. ¹⁹And I will bring Israel back to his pasture, and he will graze on Carmel and Bashan, and on the hills of Ephraim and Gilead his appetite will be satisfied. ²⁰In those days and at that time, declares the LORD, the iniquity of Israel will be searched for — and there will be none. The sins of Judah — and they will not be found. For I will pardon the remnant I preserve. ²¹Go up against the land of Merathaim — attack it — and against the inhabitants of Pekod. Put them to the sword and devote them to destruction, declares the LORD. Do everything I have commanded you. ²²The sound of war in the land — and great shattering! ²³How the hammer of the whole earth has been cut down and shattered! How Babylon has become a horror among the nations! ²⁴I set a trap for you, and you were caught, Babylon — and you did not even know it. You were found and seized, because you provoked the LORD. ²⁵The LORD has opened his armory and brought out the weapons of his wrath, for the Lord GOD of Hosts has work to do in the land of the Chaldeans. ²⁶Come against her from every direction. Open her granaries, pile her up like heaps of grain, and devote her to utter destruction. Let nothing of her remain. ²⁷Put all her young bulls to the sword; let them go down to slaughter. Woe to them, for their day has come — the time of their reckoning. ²⁸The sound of fugitives and survivors from the land of Babylon, coming to declare in Zion the vengeance of the LORD our God — the vengeance for his temple. ²⁹Summon the archers against Babylon, all who draw the bow. Encamp against her on every side; let no one escape. Repay her according to her deeds — as she has done, do to her — for she has acted arrogantly against the LORD, against the Holy One of Israel. ³⁰Therefore her young men will fall in her public squares, and all her warriors will be silenced on that day, declares the LORD. ³¹I am against you, Arrogance — declares the Lord GOD of Hosts — for your day has come, the time when I will call you to account. ³²Arrogance will stumble and fall with no one to lift him up. I will set fire to his cities, and it will consume everything around him. ³³This is what the LORD of Hosts says: The people of Israel and the people of Judah are oppressed together. All who took them captive hold them fast and refuse to let them go. ³⁴Their Redeemer is strong — the LORD of Hosts is his name. He will surely champion their cause, so that he may give rest to the land but turmoil to the inhabitants of Babylon. ³⁵A sword against the Chaldeans, declares the LORD, against the inhabitants of Babylon, against her officials, and against her wise men! ³⁶A sword against her diviners — they will become fools! A sword against her warriors — they will be shattered! ³⁷A sword against his horses and chariots, and against all the mixed peoples in her midst — they will become weak! A sword against her treasuries — they will be plundered! ³⁸A drought on her waters — they will dry up! For she is a land of carved images, and they go mad over terrifying idols. ³⁹Therefore desert creatures will dwell there with jackals, and ostriches will inhabit it. It will never again be settled; no one will live in it from generation to generation. ⁴⁰As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring towns, declares the LORD, no one will live there; no human being will settle in it. ⁴¹Look — a people is coming from the north! A great nation and many kings are stirring from the ends of the earth. ⁴²They grasp bow and javelin. They are cruel and show no mercy. Their roar is like the sea. They ride on horses, drawn up for battle like one man — against you, daughter of Babylon! ⁴³The king of Babylon has heard the report of them, and his hands have gone limp. Anguish has seized him, pain like a woman in labor. ⁴⁴Look — like a lion coming up from the thickets of the Jordan to a secure pasture, I will suddenly drive them from it. And who is the chosen one I will appoint over it? For who is like me? Who will summon me to court? And what shepherd can stand before me? ⁴⁵Therefore hear the plan of the LORD that he has formed against Babylon, and the purposes he has devised against the land of the Chaldeans: Even the smallest of the flock will drag them off. Their own pasture will be devastated because of them. ⁴⁶At the sound of Babylon's capture, the earth trembles; a cry is heard among the nations.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription marks this as the beginning of a new oracle collection. The preposition *be-yad* ('by the hand of') is rendered 'through' to capture the instrumental sense — Jeremiah is the conduit, not the author, of the divine word. The dual target ('Babylon... land of the Chaldeans') is emphatic: both the city and the entire territory are addressed.
2. The rapid-fire imperatives (*haggidu*, *hashmi'u*, *se'u-nes*, *hashmi'u*) create urgency — this news must be broadcast everywhere at once. *Bel* is the title of Marduk, Babylon's chief deity, from the Akkadian *belu* ('lord'). The verb *hovish* ('put to shame') does not mean merely embarrassed but publicly exposed as powerless. The word *gilluleiha* ('her idols') is deliberately derogatory — from a root meaning 'dung-pellets,' it is the prophets'

contemptuous term for pagan images.

3. The phrase *goy mitstsafon* ('a nation from the north') is the same formula used for Babylon's own attack on Judah (1:14-15, 4:6, 6:1, 6:22). The reversal is deliberate and devastating — the destroyer from the north now faces a destroyer from the north. Historically this refers to the Medes and Persians. The totality of desolation ('from human to animal') echoes the un-creation language Jeremiah used for Judah in 4:25.
4. The phrase *halokh uvakho yelekhu* ('walking and weeping they will go') uses the infinitive absolute construction to depict continuous weeping during the journey home. The reunion of Israel (the former northern kingdom, exiled since 722 BCE) and Judah (exiled in 586 BCE) is a restoration beyond political possibility — only divine intervention reunites the two separated peoples. The verb *biqesh* ('seek') implies deliberate, urgent searching, not casual inquiry.
5. The verb *nilvu* ('let us join, bind ourselves') is from the root l-v-h, the same root from which the name 'Levi' may derive — it means to attach oneself, to cling to. The covenant the returning exiles seek is not the old Sinai covenant they broke but a *berit olam* — an everlasting covenant that anticipates the *berit chadashah* of 31:31-34. The phrase *lo tishshakheach* ('will not be forgotten') contrasts with the old covenant that was forgotten through disobedience.
6. The shepherd metaphor indicts Judah's leaders (kings, priests, prophets) for the people's exile — the flock did not wander on its own; the shepherds drove them off course. The verb *shovevu* ('turned them aside, led them astray') is from *shuv* in a causative sense — the same root that means 'return/repent' here means 'lead astray,' another of Jeremiah's characteristic wordplays with *shuv*. The 'resting place' (*rivtsam*) is both literal pasture and metaphor for the covenant relationship — the place of security they abandoned.
7. The enemies' self-justification ('we bear no guilt') exposes a theological irony: Babylon claims immunity because Israel sinned against the LORD. But exploiting God's discipline of his people does not exempt the exploiter — this is precisely the logic that condemns Babylon throughout this chapter. The phrase *neveh-tsedeq* ('pasture of righteousness') continues the shepherd-flock imagery: God is the righteous pasture the sheep left. The word *miqveh* ('hope, gathering place') also carries the sense of a reservoir — God as the source to which all hope flows.
8. The imperative *nodu* ('flee, wander away') is addressed to the Judean exiles — they must leave before judgment falls. The comparison to *attudim* ('he-goats, lead goats') means the returning exiles should lead the way boldly, like the dominant male goats that walk at the front of the flock. This is not a call to timid departure but to confident exodus.
9. The phrase *qehal goyim gedolim* ('assembly of great nations') mirrors the coalition language used for Babylon's own allies. The archer simile specifies *maskhil* ('skilled, effective') — not merely a strong warrior but one who knows where to aim. The phrase *lo yashuv reqam* ('will not return empty') means every arrow finds its mark — total military efficiency.
10. The verb *yisba'u* ('will be satisfied, sated') implies abundance — the plunderers will gorge themselves on Babylon's wealth. The same verb is used for feasting to fullness. The concluding *ne'um YHWH* ('declares the LORD') stamps divine authority on the prediction.
11. God addresses Babylon directly. The word *nachalati* ('my inheritance') is significant: Israel is not merely a nation Babylon conquered but God's own *nachalah* — his personal inheritance, his treasured portion. The heifer and stallion imagery is deliberately crude: Babylon's celebration over destroying God's people was animalistic exuberance. The verb *tafushu* ('you grew fat, frolicked') and *titshahalu* ('you neighed') reduce the empire to barnyard behavior.
12. 'Your mother' is Babylon herself, the mother-city of the Chaldean empire. The progression from 'last of the nations' to 'desert... dry land... wasteland' is a three-stage descent from political humiliation to physical desolation. The word *acharit* ('end, last, hindmost') reverses Babylon's self-understanding as the first of the nations.
13. The verb *yishom* ('will be horrified, appalled') and *yishroq* ('will hiss, whistle') describe the reaction of passersby to ruins — the hissing is not contempt but the sharp intake of breath at shocking devastation. The same double reaction appears in 19:8 directed at Jerusalem, reinforcing the symmetry between Judah's and Babylon's fates.
14. The military command language shifts to direct address of the attacking armies. The verb *yedu* ('shoot') is an imperative plural. The phrase *al-tachmelu el-chets* ('do not spare arrows') means hold nothing back — total assault. The justification *ki laYHWH chat'ah* ('for she has sinned against the LORD') applies to Babylon the same standard she cited against Israel in verse 7.
15. The phrase *natnah yadah* ('she has given her hand') means surrender — the gesture of submission. The word *niqmat YHWH* ('vengeance of the LORD') is not petty retaliation but covenantal justice: God enforces the same measure-for-measure principle (*ka'asher astah asu lah*, 'as she has done, do to her') that Babylon herself used against others. The *lex talionis* applied to empires.
16. The destruction of agriculture (sower and harvester) means the end of Babylon as a functioning civilization. The phrase *cherev hayyonah* ('the oppressing sword') uses *yonah* in an unusual sense — not 'dove' but from the root y-n-h meaning 'to oppress, to wrong.' The flight of foreign workers and conscripts back to their homelands describes the disintegration of Babylon's multinational empire.
17. The singular *seh* ('sheep,' not 'flock') emphasizes Israel's vulnerability — one lone animal against predators. The two lions represent Assyria (which destroyed the northern kingdom in 722 BCE) and Babylon (which destroyed the southern kingdom in 586 BCE). The verb *itsmoh* ('gnawed his bones, crushed his bones') is more violent than mere 'breaking' — it describes a predator stripping a carcass to the skeleton. The chronological framing (*harishon... hazeh ha'acharon*, 'the first... this last one') structures Israel's entire exile history as a sequence of predation.

- 18.** The verb *paqad* ('to visit, attend to, punish') here carries its punitive sense — God 'visits' Babylon with judgment. The parallel structure ('as I punished the king of Assyria') reminds the reader that Assyria, once invincible, was destroyed in 612 BCE — Babylon will follow the same path. The full divine title *YHWH tseva'ot Elohei Yisrael* ('the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel') emphasizes God's sovereignty over all armies and his particular bond with Israel.
- 19.** The restoration continues the shepherd imagery — God returns the scattered sheep to its *naveh* ('pasture, dwelling'). The four regions named (Carmel, Bashan, Ephraim, Gilead) represent the full territorial extent of the united kingdom, including areas lost to Assyria — this is a promise of total restoration, not partial return. The verb *tisba* ('will be satisfied') echoes verse 10's *visba'u*, creating a contrast: Babylon's plunderers will be sated with loot, but Israel will be sated with good pasture.
- 20.** The forensic imagery is striking: iniquity and sin will be searched for like evidence in a legal investigation — and the search will come up empty. This is not because Israel never sinned but because God will have pardoned (*eslach*, from *s-l-ch*, the verb used exclusively for divine forgiveness in the Hebrew Bible) the surviving remnant. The parallel between 'iniquity of Israel' and 'sins of Judah' uses the two standard terms for wrongdoing: *avon* (iniquity, guilt, twisted action) and *chatto't* (sins, missing the mark). Both kingdoms' guilt is erased.
- 21.** *Merathaim* ('double rebellion') is a wordplay on southern Babylonia's marshland region (*mat marrati*). *Pekod* ('punishment, visitation') is both a real Aramean tribe east of the Tigris and a wordplay on *paqad* ('to punish'). Jeremiah loads the oracle with double meanings — the place names themselves pronounce judgment. The verb *hacharem* ('devote to destruction') is the *herem* — total destruction as an act of consecration to God, the most severe form of warfare in the Hebrew Bible.
- 22.** The brevity of this verse is itself expressive — two short phrases that crack like a whip. The word *shever* ('shattering, breaking, destruction') is one of Jeremiah's most frequent terms, used for both physical and social collapse. Its placement at the end of this staccato couplet gives it percussive force.
- 23.** The title *pattish kol-ha'arets* ('hammer of the whole earth') is a striking epithet for Babylon — the empire that smashed every nation. The verb *ngida* ('has been cut down') applies the language of felling a tree to the hammer, mixing metaphors deliberately: the weapon that shattered others is itself shattered. The exclamatory *eikh* ('how!') introduces the *qinah* (lament) form, ironically mourning the fall of the destroyer.
- 24.** God himself is the trapper — *yaqoshti* ('I set a snare') uses the language of bird-catching. Babylon, the great predator, is reduced to prey. The phrase *ve'at lo yada'at* ('and you did not know') is devastating: the world's most sophisticated intelligence apparatus was oblivious to the trap. The verb *hitgarit* ('you provoked, contended against') from *g-r-h* means to stir up strife against — Babylon did not merely ignore God but actively antagonized him.
- 25.** The word *otsaro* ('his storehouse, treasury, armory') pictures God as having a divine arsenal from which he draws instruments of judgment. The phrase *kelei za'mo* ('weapons of his indignation') personalizes the invading armies as God's own weaponry. The phrase *melakhah hi* ('it is work, a task') is almost bureaucratic — God's destruction of Babylon is framed as a job to complete, not an outburst of rage.
- 26.** The word *ma'abuseiha* ('her granaries, her storage bins') is from the root meaning 'to feed, fatten' — the invaders are to crack open the stores that fattened Babylon. The simile *kemo aremim* ('like heaps') compares the piled rubble to threshed grain heaps. The verb *hacharimuhah* ('devote her to destruction') is the *herem* again — total, consecrated destruction.
- 27.** The 'young bulls' (*pareiha*) is both literal (livestock destruction) and metaphorical (Babylon's warriors as fattened cattle). The phrase *et pequddatam* ('the time of their visitation/reckoning') uses *paqad* in its punitive sense — God's appointed day of accounting. The word *yomam* ('their day') echoes the 'Day of the LORD' concept from the prophetic tradition.
- 28.** The fugitives are Judean exiles escaping Babylon's fall. They carry news to Zion of *niqmat hekhalo* ('vengeance for his temple') — God has avenged the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BCE. The word *heikhal* ('temple, palace') specifically refers to the inner sanctuary, the most sacred space. The destruction of God's dwelling place demands God's retribution against the destroyer.
- 29.** The principle of measure-for-measure justice (*ke-fo'olah*, 'according to her deeds') is repeated from verse 15. The verb *zadah* ('acted arrogantly, presumed') is from the root *z-d-h* denoting willful, presumptuous defiance — not mere pride but cosmic insolence. The title *Qedosh Yisrael* ('the Holy One of Israel') is primarily Isaianic (used over 25 times in Isaiah) but appears here to stress that Babylon's offense is against God's holiness itself — his utter distinctness and authority.
- 30.** The verb *yiddammu* ('will be silenced, cut off') is from *d-m-m* ('to be silent, cease') — the warriors will not merely die but be silenced, their voices and military commands extinguished. The 'public squares' (*rechovoteiha*) were the centers of civic life; their young men will litter the very places where Babylon's culture thrived.
- 31.** God addresses Babylon by the name *zadon* ('Arrogance, Presumption') — the city is personified as its defining sin. This is not a description but a title: Babylon is Arrogance itself. The divine self-introduction formula *hineni elekha* ('I am against you') is the most threatening sentence in prophetic literature — when God declares himself against an entity, its doom is sealed. The phrase *et peqadtikha* ('the time I visit you') uses *paqad* in its punitive sense.
- 32.** The personification continues: *zadon* ('Arrogance') stumbles like a man and falls with no one to help. The verb *kashol* ('stumble') implies an unexpected fall — Babylon will not see it coming. The fire motif (*hitsatti esh*, 'I will kindle fire') is God's signature instrument of total judgment, used for Sodom (Genesis 19:24), and promised against Jerusalem itself (21:14). Now it turns on the instrument of Jerusalem's punishment.

33. The language deliberately echoes the Exodus: 'refuse to let them go' (me'anu shallecham) mirrors Pharaoh's refusal to release Israel (Exodus 4:23, 7:14, 8:28, 9:2, 10:4). Babylon is the new Egypt, and the coming liberation will be a new exodus. The verb hecheziku ('held fast, gripped') intensifies the captivity — this is not passive detention but an iron grip.
34. The emphatic infinitive absolute riv yariv ('he will surely plead, champion') intensifies the legal metaphor — God enters the courtroom as Israel's kinsman-advocate and will not rest until the case is won. The contrast between hirgia ('give rest') for the land and hirgiz ('give turmoil') for Babylon uses two verbs from similar roots to create a wordplay: rest for one, restlessness for the other. This verse is the theological center of the chapter.
35. The fourfold 'sword' oracle begins here and runs through verse 38 — four targets systematically dismantled. The first target couples the general population ('inhabitants') with the ruling elite ('officials' and 'wise men'). Babylon's renowned wisdom tradition (magi, astrologers, diviners) is specifically targeted — the very intellectual culture that made Babylon famous will be destroyed.
36. The baddim ('diviners, empty talkers, boasters') are Babylon's professional soothsayers. The verb no'alu ('they will become foolish, be shown to be fools') strips them of their claimed wisdom. The parallel structure (cherev el X... cherev el X) creates a drumbeat of destruction. The verb chattu ('they will be shattered, dismayed') indicates psychological collapse — the warriors will break internally before the sword even reaches them.
37. The 'mixed peoples' (ha'erev) are the foreign mercenaries and multinational population of the Babylonian empire. The phrase vehayu lenashim ('they will become like women') is rendered 'they will become weak' because the Hebrew idiom equates femininity with military helplessness — a culturally bound metaphor that we translate by its intended meaning (loss of fighting capacity) rather than its literal image, to avoid implying that women are inherently weak. The fourth sword target is Babylon's wealth — her treasuries (otsroteiha) will be looted.
38. The wordplay shifts from cherev ('sword') to chorev ('drought') — a single consonant change turns military destruction into ecological catastrophe. Babylon's power depended on the Euphrates and its canal system; drought means death. The word emim ('terrors, terrifying things') for idols may allude to the Mesopotamian lamassu and shedu — the terrifying winged figures that guarded Babylonian temples and palaces. The verb yitholalu ('they go mad, rave') describes the frenzy of idol worship.
39. The tsiyyim ('desert creatures') and iyyim ('jackals' or 'howling creatures') are wild animals that reclaim abandoned human settlements — their presence signals that civilization has completely retreated. The benot ya'anah ('ostriches' or 'daughters of the desert cry') are birds associated with desolate ruins. The phrase ad-dor vador ('from generation to generation') extends the desolation into perpetuity. This language closely parallels Isaiah 13:20-22, the Isaianic oracle against Babylon.
40. The Sodom comparison is the ultimate judgment formula — Babylon's destruction will be as total and permanent as the archetypal act of divine annihilation. The phrase mahpekhat Elohim ('God's overthrow') uses the specific vocabulary of Genesis 19. The distinction between yeshev ('dwell permanently') and yagur ('sojourn temporarily') emphasizes that Babylon will have neither permanent residents nor temporary visitors — complete emptiness.
41. This verse nearly replicates 6:22, where the same formula described the Babylonian invasion of Judah. There the 'foe from the north' was Babylon; here the 'foe from the north' targets Babylon — the most devastating literary reversal in the book. The addition of 'many kings' (melakhim rabbim) expands beyond chapter 6's original, indicating a coalition (the Medo-Persian alliance). The verb ye'oru ('are stirring, being roused') implies divine initiative behind the coalition's formation.
42. This verse closely parallels 6:23, which described the Babylonian army approaching Jerusalem. The phrase bat-Babel ('daughter of Babylon') personifies the city as a vulnerable woman facing a merciless army — the same terror Jerusalem felt now falls on Babylon. The phrase arukh ke'ish lammilchamah ('arrayed like one man for battle') conveys disciplined military unity. The sea-roar simile (qolam kayyam yehemeh) captures the terrifying sound of a massive army in motion.
43. This verse parallels 6:24, where it was Judah who heard the report and went limp — now the king of Babylon experiences the identical terror. The phrase rafu yadav ('his hands went limp') is an idiom for total paralysis in the face of overwhelming threat. The labor-pain simile (chil kayyoleadah) is not merely about pain but about helplessness — the king cannot stop what is coming any more than a woman can halt labor. The reversal from chapter 6 is complete.
44. This passage recycles 49:19-21 (the oracle against Edom), applying the same lion imagery to Babylon. The ge'on haYarden ('pride/thickets of the Jordan') refers to the dense vegetation along the Jordan River where lions once lived. God is the lion who drives the flock (Babylon) from its pasture. The rhetorical questions ('who is like me?') assert absolute divine sovereignty — no human authority can challenge, summon, or withstand God. The verb yo'ideni ('will appoint me a time, summon me') is legal language — no one can subpoena God.
45. The phrase tse'irei hatson ('the smallest of the flock') is deeply ironic — even the weakest, most insignificant members of the attacking force will be able to drag away Babylon's defenders. The word naveh ('pasture, habitation') continues the shepherd-flock metaphor that runs through the entire chapter. God's 'plan' (atsat YHWH) is a deliberate, considered strategy, not an impulsive reaction — the verb ya'ats implies counsel, planning, purposeful design.
46. The final verse is a cosmic conclusion — Babylon's fall shakes the entire earth. The verb nir'ashah ('trembles, quakes') describes seismic impact, and the ze'aqah ('cry, outcry') that reaches the nations is both Babylon's death-scream and the shockwave felt by every nation that depended on or feared her. The chapter ends not with resolution but with reverberating impact — the full consequences unfold in chapter 51.

51

Summary: *Jeremiah 51 continues the oracle against Babylon begun in chapter 50, forming the longest chapter in the book. The chapter moves through waves of imagery: Babylon as God's 'war-hammer' now broken, the cup of God's wrath poured out on the nations now turned back on Babylon, the heavens and earth singing over Babylon's fall, and the cosmic scope of the LORD's sovereignty over all creation. The chapter climaxes with a dramatic sign-act: the prophet instructs Seraiah son of Neriah to carry a scroll bearing all these oracles to Babylon, read them aloud, tie a stone to the scroll, and hurl it into the Euphrates with the words 'So shall Babylon sink, never to rise again.' The final line — 'Thus far are the words of Jeremiah' — marks the formal end of the prophetic collection before the historical appendix of chapter 52.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Three images dominate this chapter. First, Babylon as God's mappets ('war-hammer' or 'shatterer,' v. 20) — a nation used as a divine instrument of judgment now itself shattered by the same God who wielded it. Second, the cup of wrath — Babylon made the nations drink, and now the LORD forces the cup back on her (v. 7). Third, the scroll-sinking sign-act (vv. 59-64) is one of the most vivid prophetic actions in the Hebrew Bible, a physical enactment of the oracle's message: as the stone drags the scroll to the riverbed, so Babylon will be dragged down irreversibly. The instruction to Seraiah is significant because he is the brother of Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe — both sons of Neriah serve as the prophet's literary agents. The closing colophon 'Thus far are the words of Jeremiah' (v. 64b) is a scribal note that marks the boundary between Jeremiah's prophetic corpus and the historical appendix of chapter 52.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew mappets (v. 20) is variously translated as 'battle-axe,' 'war-club,' or 'hammer' — we chose 'war-hammer' because the root n-p-ts means 'to shatter,' and the instrument is defined by its effect. The verb shiqqu (v. 39) in 'when they are heated I will set their feast' is difficult; some read it as intoxication, others as a burning heat — we followed the intoxication reading since the cup-of-wrath metaphor governs the context. The phrase lev qamai (v. 1), traditionally read as an atbash cipher for kasdim ('Chaldeans'), poses a translation question — we rendered the surface meaning with a note on the cipher. The relationship between this chapter's poetry and the prose sign-act narrative (vv. 59-64) required attention to tonal shift.*

Connections: *The cup-of-wrath motif connects to Jeremiah 25:15-29, where Jeremiah is first commanded to make the nations drink. The war-hammer imagery echoes Jeremiah 50:23 ('How the hammer of the whole earth is cut down and broken!'). The sign-act of sinking the scroll parallels other Jeremiah sign-acts: the linen belt (ch. 13), the potter's vessel (ch. 19), the yoke (ch. 27-28). Seraiah son of Neriah connects to Baruch son of Neriah (ch. 36, 45). The closing formula connects forward to chapter 52's historical appendix, which draws from 2 Kings 24-25. The cosmic hymn sections (vv. 15-19) are nearly identical to Jeremiah 10:12-16, forming an inclusio within the book.*

¹This is what the LORD says: I am stirring up against Babylon and against those who dwell in Leb-qamai a destroying wind.
²I will send winnowers to Babylon, and they will winnow her and empty her land, for they will come against her from every side on the day of disaster. ³Let no archer string his bow, let no one stand tall in his armor. Do not spare her young men — devote her entire army to destruction. ⁴The slain will fall in the land of the Chaldeans, the pierced through in her streets. ⁵For Israel and Judah have not been widowed by their God, by the LORD of Hosts — though their land was filled with guilt before the Holy One of Israel. ⁶Flee from the midst of Babylon! Each of you, save your own life! Do not be destroyed for her iniquity, for this is the time of the LORD's vengeance — he is repaying her what she deserves. ⁷Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD's hand, making the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine — that is why the nations have gone mad. ⁸Suddenly Babylon has fallen and is shattered! Wail over her! Bring balm for her wound — perhaps she can be healed. ⁹We tried to heal Babylon, but she could not be healed. Leave her, and let each of us go to his own land, for her judgment reaches to the heavens and rises to the clouds. ¹⁰The LORD has brought forth our vindication! Come, let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God. ¹¹Sharpen the arrows! Fill the quivers! The LORD has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, for his purpose against Babylon is to destroy her — for this is the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance for his temple. ¹²Raise the signal against the walls of Babylon! Strengthen the guard, post the watchmen, prepare the ambushes — for the LORD has

both planned and carried out what he spoke against the inhabitants of Babylon. ¹³You who dwell by many waters, rich in treasures — your end has come, the measure of your profit-taking is cut off. ¹⁴The LORD of Hosts has sworn by himself: I will surely fill you with attackers like a swarm of locusts, and they will raise a war cry against you. ¹⁵He made the earth by his power, established the world by his wisdom, and stretched out the heavens by his understanding. ¹⁶When he thunders, there is a roar of waters in the heavens. He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth, creates lightning for the rain, and brings wind out from his storehouses. ¹⁷Every person is too stupid to understand; every metalworker is put to shame by his idol, for his cast image is a lie and there is no breath in them. ¹⁸They are worthless, a work of mockery. In the time of their reckoning, they will perish. ¹⁹The portion of Jacob is not like these, for the one who formed all things is he, and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance — the LORD of Hosts is his name. ²⁰You are my war-hammer, my weapon of battle. With you I shattered nations, with you I destroyed kingdoms. ²¹With you I shattered horse and rider; with you I shattered chariot and driver. ²²With you I shattered man and woman; with you I shattered old and young. ²³With you I shattered shepherd and flock; with you I shattered farmer and team of oxen; with you I shattered governors and officials. ²⁴I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea for all the evil they did in Zion before your eyes, declares the LORD. ²⁵I am against you, destroying mountain, declares the LORD — you who destroy the whole earth. I will stretch out my hand against you and roll you down from the crags and make you a scorched mountain. ²⁶No one will take from you a stone for a cornerstone or a stone for foundations, for you will be an everlasting ruin, declares the LORD. ²⁷Raise a signal in the land! Blow the ram's horn among the nations! Consecrate nations against her, summon against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz. Appoint a commander against her; bring up horses like bristling locusts. ²⁸Consecrate nations against her — the kings of the Medes, all their governors, all their officials, and every land under their rule. ²⁹The earth trembles and writhes, for the purposes of the LORD against Babylon stand firm — to make the land of Babylon a desolation with no one living in it. ³⁰The warriors of Babylon have stopped fighting; they sit in their fortresses. Their strength has dried up; they have become like women. Her dwellings are set on fire; her gate-bars are broken. ³¹Runner meets runner, messenger meets messenger, to report to the king of Babylon that his city is captured from end to end, ³²the river crossings are seized, the marshes are burned with fire, and the soldiers are in a panic. ³³For this is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Daughter Babylon is like a threshing floor at the time it is trampled — just a little longer, and the time of harvest will come for her. ³⁴Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has devoured us, he has crushed us, he has set us down like an empty vessel. He has swallowed us like a sea-serpent, filled his belly with our delicacies, and vomited us out. ³⁵The violence done to me and my flesh — let it fall on Babylon, says the inhabitant of Zion. My blood — let it fall on the inhabitants of Chaldea, says Jerusalem. ³⁶Therefore this is what the LORD says: I am taking up your case and exacting your vengeance. I will dry up her sea and make her springs run dry. ³⁷Babylon will become a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals, an object of horror and hissing, with no one living in it. ³⁸Together they roar like young lions; they growl like lion cubs. ³⁹When they are heated, I will prepare their feast and make them drunk so that they revel — then they will sleep an everlasting sleep and never wake, declares the LORD. ⁴⁰I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter, like rams together with he-goats. ⁴¹How Sheshach is captured — the praise of all the earth seized! How Babylon has become an object of horror among the nations! ⁴²The sea has risen over Babylon; she is covered by the roar of its waves. ⁴³Her cities have become a desolation, a dry and barren land, a land where no one dwells and no human being passes through. ⁴⁴I will punish Bel in Babylon and force out of his mouth what he has swallowed. The nations will no longer stream to him — even the wall of Babylon has fallen. ⁴⁵Come out from her, my people! Each of you, save your own life from the fierce anger of the LORD! ⁴⁶Do not lose heart or be afraid when rumors are heard in the land — one year a rumor comes, and the next year another rumor, with violence in the land and ruler against ruler. ⁴⁷Therefore the days are coming when I will punish the idols of Babylon. Her whole land will be put to shame, and all her slain will fall in her midst. ⁴⁸Then the heavens and the earth and everything in them will shout for joy over Babylon, for the destroyers will come against her from the north, declares the LORD. ⁴⁹Just as Babylon caused the slain of Israel to fall, so at Babylon the slain of all the earth have fallen. ⁵⁰You who have escaped the sword — go! Do not stand still! Remember the LORD from far away, and let Jerusalem rise in your hearts. ⁵¹We are ashamed, for we have heard insults; disgrace has covered our faces because foreigners have entered the holy places of the house of the LORD. ⁵²Therefore the days are coming, declares the LORD,

when I will punish her idols, and throughout her entire land the wounded will groan. ⁵³Even if Babylon were to ascend to the heavens, even if she were to fortify her lofty stronghold, destroyers will come against her from me, declares the LORD. ⁵⁴A sound of outcry from Babylon — great shattering from the land of the Chaldeans! ⁵⁵For the LORD is destroying Babylon and silencing her great voice. Their waves roar like mighty waters; the thunder of their voice is unleashed. ⁵⁶For a destroyer has come against her — against Babylon. Her warriors are captured; their bows are shattered, for the LORD is a God of recompense; he will surely repay in full. ⁵⁷I will make her officials and sages drunk, her governors, commanders, and warriors, and they will sleep an everlasting sleep and never wake, declares the King — the LORD of Hosts is his name. ⁵⁸This is what the LORD of Hosts says: The broad walls of Babylon will be completely torn down, and her high gates will be set on fire. The peoples labor for nothing, and the nations exhaust themselves for what the flames consume. ⁵⁹The instruction that Jeremiah the prophet gave to Seraiah son of Neriah, son of Mahseiah, when Seraiah went with Zedekiah king of Judah to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign. Seraiah was the quartermaster. ⁶⁰Jeremiah wrote on a single scroll all the disaster that would come upon Babylon — all these words that are written against Babylon. ⁶¹Jeremiah said to Seraiah, "When you arrive in Babylon, make sure you read aloud all these words. ⁶²Then say: LORD, you yourself have spoken against this place, declaring that it will be cut off so that no one will dwell in it — neither human nor animal — for it will be an everlasting desolation. ⁶³When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates.

⁶⁴Then say: So shall Babylon sink, never to rise again, because of the disaster I am bringing upon her. And they will collapse in exhaustion."

Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase *lev qamai* ('the heart of those who rise against me') is widely recognized as an *atbash* cipher — a Hebrew code where letters are substituted in reverse alphabetical order — for *kasdim* ('Chaldeans'). The same technique appears in 25:26 where *sheshakh* encodes *bavel* ('Babylon'). We retain the surface meaning in the rendering with this note. The verb *me'ir* ('stirring up') indicates that God initiates this destruction actively, not merely permits it.
2. The verb *zarah* ('to winnow') pictures grain thrown into the wind so the chaff blows away — applied to Babylon, it means the nation will be scattered and sifted until nothing of value remains. The wordplay between *bavel* and *zarim/zeruha* (Babylon and the winnowers) reinforces the irony: Babylon the great will be blown away like chaff.
3. The verse is directed at Babylon's defenders, telling them resistance is futile. The verb *hacharim* ('devote to destruction') is the language of *cherem* — total consecration to God through annihilation. This same vocabulary was used for Israel's conquest of Canaan, now turned against Babylon. The irony is devastating: the instrument of God's judgment is now itself under the ban.
4. The parallelism between *chahal* ('slain') and *meduqarim* ('pierced through') intensifies the carnage. The phrase 'in her streets' echoes the language used earlier for Jerusalem's own destruction (Lamentations 2:21), creating a grim reciprocity — what Babylon did to Zion's streets now happens in Babylon's own.
5. The verb *alman* ('widowed') is striking — it casts the covenant relationship as a marriage, with exile as the apparent death of the spouse. But God declares the marriage is not over; Israel is not a widow. The word *asham* ('guilt') here denotes both the offense and the liability it creates. The title 'the Holy One of Israel' (*qedosh yisra'el*) is more characteristic of Isaiah but appears here to emphasize God's covenantal distinctness.
6. The command to flee Babylon is addressed to the Judean exiles living there — they must separate themselves before judgment falls. The verb *damam* in the *nifal* ('be silenced, be destroyed') carries the sense of being wiped out. The noun *gemul* ('recompense, what is deserved') implies strict proportional justice — Babylon will receive exactly what she gave.
7. The image of Babylon as a golden cup in God's hand is theologically explosive: Babylon's imperial conquest was God's instrument of judgment, but now the cup turns. The verb *mesakkeret* ('making drunk') connects to the cup-of-wrath motif in Jeremiah 25:15-29. The verb *yitholelu* ('go mad, rave') depicts the political chaos that follows Babylon's influence — the nations stagger like drunks.
8. The verb *nishbarah* ('is shattered') uses the same root as the shattering Babylon inflicted on others. The word *tsori* ('balm, resin') recalls Jeremiah 8:22 — 'Is there no balm in Gilead?' — creating a bitter echo. There was no healing for Judah's wound, and now there is none for Babylon's. The 'perhaps' (*ulai*) is ironic: the speaker knows there is no remedy.
9. The speakers here are likely the foreign nations who served Babylon — they tried to sustain the empire, but it is beyond saving. The phrase 'reaches to the heavens' echoes the Tower of Babel narrative (Genesis 11:4), where Babylon's builders said 'let us build a tower that reaches to the heavens.' Now it is Babylon's judgment, not her tower, that reaches heaven.

10. The word *tsidqoteinu* ('our righteousness/vindication') here carries the sense of legal vindication — God has demonstrated that Israel's cause was just by judging their oppressor. The shift from Babylon's judgment to Zion's declaration creates a liturgical moment: the exiles envision returning to tell the story.
11. The Medes are named as God's instrument, historically accurate since the Medo-Persian alliance under Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 BCE. The phrase *niqmat hekhalo* ('vengeance for his temple') refers to the destruction of Solomon's temple in 586 BCE — God will avenge the desecration of his own dwelling place. The word *mezimmah* ('plan, purpose, device') emphasizes that Babylon's fall is not random but divinely orchestrated.
12. The military commands pile up in rapid succession — five imperatives in a single verse. The final clause affirms the prophetic-fulfillment principle: God both devises (*zamam*) and executes (*asah*) his word. The distinction between planning and doing emphasizes that prophetic speech is not wishful thinking but a declaration of what God has already determined.
13. Babylon was literally built on waterways — the Euphrates ran through the city, and an elaborate canal system sustained its agriculture and commerce. The phrase 'many waters' is both geographical and symbolic, evoking the cosmic waters of chaos that Babylon claimed to control. The word *bitsa* ('profit, unjust gain, plunder') denotes wealth gained through exploitation. The noun *ammah* ('cubit, measure') here functions as the limit God sets: Babylon's greed has been measured and found finished.
14. God swearing 'by himself' (*benafsho*, literally 'by his own life/soul') is the most solemn oath possible — there is no higher authority to swear by. The comparison to *yeleq* ('locusts') evokes the plague imagery of Joel and Exodus — an overwhelming, consuming force. The *hedad* ('war cry, shout') is the triumphal shout of harvesters or warriors, ironically applied here to Babylon's destruction.
15. This verse begins a hymnic section (vv. 15-19) that is nearly identical to Jeremiah 10:12-16, creating an *inclusio* within the book. Placed here in the Babylon oracle, it serves a polemical function: the God who judges Babylon is not a local deity but the creator of all things. The three parallel clauses ascribe three attributes to creation: power (*koach*), wisdom (*chokhmah*), and understanding (*tevunah*).
16. The phrase *leqol titto* ('at the sound of his giving') is rendered 'when he thunders' because the context describes God's voice as the thunderstorm. The 'storehouses' (*otsrot*) of wind is a cosmological image — God keeps the winds stored until he releases them, asserting sovereign control over weather, which Babylonian religion attributed to Marduk.
17. The verb *niv'ar* ('made brutish, rendered stupid') is a harsh assessment — idol-makers are not merely mistaken but rendered sub-rational by their craft. The phrase *lo ruach bam* ('no breath/spirit in them') is the definitive judgment on idols: they lack the animating breath (*ruach*) that God breathes into living things (Genesis 2:7). This directly contrasts with the living God described in vv. 15-16.
18. The word *hevel* ('vapor, breath, worthlessness') — the same word that dominates Ecclesiastes — dismisses idols as insubstantial. The phrase *ma'aseh ta'tu'im* ('work of mockery/delusion') suggests the idols are both deceptive and ridiculous. The 'time of reckoning' (*et pequddatam*) is the moment God calls all things to account.
19. This verse concludes the hymnic section by contrasting the living God with dead idols. The 'portion of Jacob' (*cheleq ya'aqov*) means that Israel's God is not an idol but the maker of everything. The word *shevet* ('tribe, staff, scepter') here designates Israel as God's particular possession among the nations. This verse is nearly identical to 10:16.
20. The noun *mappets* appears only here in the Hebrew Bible — it is coined for this context, derived from the verb *nippets* ('to shatter, smash to pieces'). We render it 'war-hammer' rather than 'battle-axe' (KJV) because the root describes blunt-force shattering, not cutting. The past tense 'shattered' and 'destroyed' (perfective verbs) is deliberate — God speaks of Babylon's role as already completed. What follows in vv. 21-23 is a litany of what God smashed with this hammer, building to the revelation that the hammer itself is now broken.
21. The repetitive 'with you I shattered' (*venippatsti bekha*) creates a litany that extends through verse 23. Each line names a category of human power — military, political, social — all crushed by God's war-hammer. The rhythm is deliberately incantatory, building to a devastating crescendo.
22. The litany moves from military targets (v. 21) to civilian ones — men, women, elderly, youth. The totality of destruction is the point: no category of person was exempt from the devastation God inflicted through Babylon. The merism 'old and young' encompasses the entire population.
23. The litany concludes by spanning all social roles — pastoral (shepherd), agricultural (farmer), and political (governors, officials). The words *pachot* ('governors') and *seганим* ('officials') are loan words from Akkadian, appropriate for an oracle about Babylon. The effect of the seven-fold repetition of 'with you I shattered' is cumulative: Babylon was the instrument of total devastation — and now that instrument is finished.
24. The verb *shillamti* ('I will repay, recompense') carries the sense of completing a payment — God will settle the account in full. The phrase *le'eiikhem* ('before your eyes') means the exiles will witness the reversal — the same people who watched Zion's destruction will see Babylon's.
25. Babylon was built on a flat plain, so 'mountain' (*har*) here is metaphorical — Babylon is a mountain of destructive power, towering over the nations. The image of being rolled down from the crags and becoming a 'scorched mountain' (*har serefah*) evokes volcanic destruction: the once-mighty peak reduced to burned-out rock from which no building stone can ever be quarried (v. 26). The verb *gilgalti* ('I will roll you') is vivid and physical — God pushes Babylon off the heights like a boulder.
26. The image is of total demolition — not even the rubble will be reusable. A city whose stones cannot serve as foundation material is a city permanently erased from civilization. The phrase *shimmemot olam* ('everlasting desolation') uses *olam* to indicate duration beyond the horizon of perception — Babylon will not recover within any foreseeable future.

27. The three kingdoms — Ararat (Urartu, in modern eastern Turkey/Armenia), Minni (the Manneans, south of Lake Urmia), and Ashkenaz (the Scythians) — are all peoples who came under Median control and participated in the assault on Babylon. The verb *qaddesh* ('consecrate, set apart') for military campaign uses holy-war language — the attack on Babylon is a sacred mission. The word *tipsar* ('commander, marshal') is an Akkadian loan word. The simile 'like bristling locusts' (*keyelek samar*) describes cavalry horses with their manes standing on end.
28. The Medes are again identified as the human agents of divine judgment. The repetition of 'consecrate' (*qaddesh*) reinforces the holy-war framework: this is not mere geopolitics but sacred action. The phrase 'every land under their rule' (*kol erets memshaltó*) indicates a coalition of vassal states under Median hegemony.
29. The verbs *ra'ash* ('tremble') and *chul* ('writhe, convulse') describe the earth itself reacting to God's judgment as if in labor pains. The phrase *me'ein yoshev* ('without an inhabitant') is the ultimate judgment formula in Jeremiah, recurring throughout the book (2:15, 4:7, 9:10, 33:10, 34:22, 44:22, 46:19) — a land without people is a land under the full weight of covenant curse.
30. The verb *nasheta* ('has dried up') pictures strength evaporating like water — the mighty warriors are drained of all power. The simile 'become like women' (*hayu lenashim*) reflects ancient Near Eastern war rhetoric where defeated warriors are compared to women as an expression of total military collapse. The breaking of bars (*berichim*) signifies the breaching of the city's defenses — Babylon's famous gates are forced open.
31. The breathless sequence of runners and messengers conveys the speed and panic of the city's fall. The phrase *miqqatseh* ('from the end') means the invaders have entered from the outskirts and are advancing inward — the king learns his city is falling section by section. According to Herodotus (1.191) and the Nabonidus Chronicle, the Persians entered Babylon by diverting the Euphrates and walking under the walls along the dried riverbed.
32. The *ma'barot* ('crossings, fords') are the strategic river passages through Babylon — whoever controls the Euphrates crossings controls the city. The *agammin* ('marshes, reed pools') surrounding Babylon are set ablaze, eliminating both cover and escape routes. The verb *nivhalu* ('are terrified, panic') describes the complete psychological collapse of the defending forces.
33. The threshing floor image (*goren*) layers two agricultural metaphors: the floor is trampled and prepared now, and soon the harvest (*qatsir*) — the full destruction — will arrive. The phrase 'Daughter Babylon' (*bat bavel*) personifies the city as a woman, consistent with ancient Near Eastern convention. The word *hidrikhah* ('treading, trampling') describes the oxen treading grain on the threshing floor, an image of being crushed underfoot.
34. Jerusalem speaks in the first person plural, voicing the experience of exile. The verb *bela'anu* ('swallowed us') compares Nebuchadnezzar to a *tannin* ('sea-serpent, dragon, great sea creature') — the primordial chaos monster of ancient Near Eastern mythology. The progression is vivid: devoured, crushed, emptied, swallowed, filled, expelled. The verb *hedichanu* ('cast us out, rinsed us away') carries the sense of being flushed out — Jerusalem was consumed and then discarded.
35. Zion and Jerusalem speak as plaintiff and witness, demanding that the violence (*chamas*) and bloodshed (*dam*) they suffered be returned upon Babylon. The word *she'eri* ('my flesh, my body') makes the suffering physical and personal — not abstract political loss but bodily violation. This is a legal cry for justice, not mere vengeance.
36. God responds to Zion's legal cry (v. 35) by taking up her case (*riv*) — the language is forensic, depicting God as both advocate and judge. The drying up of Babylon's 'sea' (*yam*) and 'springs' (*maqor*) refers to the elaborate water systems that sustained the city. Without the Euphrates and its canal network, Babylon cannot survive. Historically, Cyrus diverted the Euphrates to enter the city.
37. The word *gallim* ('heaps, stone piles') reduces Babylon from the world's greatest city to rubble. The *tannim* here is 'jackals' (not the *tannin* 'sea-serpent' of v. 34 — different Hebrew words). The phrase *shammah ushreqah* ('horror and hissing') describes the reaction of passersby — they gasp in shock and hiss in contempt at the ruins.
38. The Babylonians are compared to lions in their ferocity — *kefirim* ('young lions') and *gorei arayot* ('lion cubs') are still dangerous but not fully mature, suggesting Babylon's power is past its prime. The verbs *yish'agu* ('they roar') and *na'aru* ('they growl') create an animal soundscape of predatory aggression.
39. The word *bechumam* ('in their heat, when they are inflamed') may refer to intoxication at a feast or to the heat of battle fever. We follow the feast interpretation since the next clause describes drinking. The phrase *shenat olam* ('everlasting sleep') is a euphemism for death — the drunken revelry becomes a permanent stupor. Historically, ancient sources report that Babylon fell during a feast (Daniel 5; Herodotus 1.191; Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 7.5.15).
40. The sacrificial imagery is deliberate — *karim* ('lambs'), *elim* ('rams'), and *attudim* ('he-goats') are all sacrificial animals. Babylon's destruction is portrayed as a sacrifice to God, reversing the language of worship: the empire that destroyed God's temple now becomes an offering on God's altar.
41. *Sheshakh* is the atbash cipher for *Bavel* ('Babylon') — the same code used in 25:26. The letters b-b-l become sh-sh-k when each letter is replaced by its reverse-alphabet counterpart. The phrase *tehillat kol ha'arets* ('the praise of all the earth') is used ironically — the city that was admired by every nation has become shameful. The exclamatory *eikh* ('How!') is the same word that opens Lamentations, creating a deliberate echo between Jerusalem's fall and Babylon's.
42. The 'sea' (*yam*) here is metaphorical — the invading armies are compared to a flood of chaotic waters overwhelming the city. This inverts Babylon's own self-image: in Babylonian mythology, Marduk conquered the chaos-sea Tiamat. Now the chaos-waters conquer Babylon. The verb *nikhsatah* ('she is covered, overwhelmed') pictures total submersion.

43. Three terms pile up for the wasteland: shamah ('desolation'), tsiyyah ('dry land'), and aravah ('steppe, wilderness'). The phrase ben adam ('son of man, human being') is used in its generic sense — not a single human will traverse this land. The total absence of human life reverses the divine blessing of filling and subduing the earth (Genesis 1:28).
44. Bel (from the Akkadian belu, 'lord') is the title of Marduk, Babylon's chief deity. The image of forcing out what Bel has swallowed refers to the captive peoples and temple treasures that Babylon consumed — God will make Marduk disgorge his plunder. The verb yinharu ('stream, flow') describes the tributary nations who once flowed toward Babylon like rivers toward the sea — that tide has reversed. The fall of Babylon's wall (chomat bavel) signals the end of what was considered the greatest fortification in the ancient world.
45. The command ammi ('my people') is addressed to the Judean exiles in Babylon — they must physically separate from the doomed city. The phrase charon af YHWH ('fierce anger of the LORD') is literally 'the burning of the LORD's nostrils,' a physiological metaphor for wrath. This call to 'come out' anticipates Isaiah 48:20 and Revelation 18:4.
46. The word shemu'ah ('rumor, report, news') repeats three times, capturing the anxiety of exile life — each year brings a new alarming report. The phrase moshel al moshel ('ruler against ruler') describes the power struggles within the Babylonian empire during its final years. The exiles must not mistake these upheavals for the end — the final judgment will come in God's time.
47. The verb paqad ('punish, attend to, visit') is used for divine reckoning against Babylon's idols (pesilei bavel). The word pesil ('carved image, idol') targets the physical representations of Babylonian religion. When God punishes the idols, the entire theological claim of Babylon — that its gods sustain the empire — is exposed as false.
48. The cosmic response — heavens, earth, and everything in them singing — elevates Babylon's fall to a creation-wide event. The irony is sharp: 'from the north' (mitsafon) echoes Jeremiah's early oracles where judgment came on Judah 'from the north' (1:13-15, 4:6, 6:1). Now the northern threat turns against Babylon itself.
49. The parallelism creates strict reciprocity: Babylon caused Israel's dead to fall, and now Babylon's own dead fall — along with the dead of every nation she consumed. The gam...gam ('also...also') construction emphasizes exact proportionality in divine justice.
50. This verse is addressed to the Judean exiles who will survive Babylon's fall. The command 'do not stand still' (al ta'amodu) urges immediate departure — do not linger in the collapsing empire. The phrase 'let Jerusalem rise in your hearts' (virushalaim ta'aleh al levavkhem) is deeply poignant: the exiles must carry Jerusalem within them as they journey home. The verb 'rise' (ta'aleh) is the same root as 'go up' (alah), the technical term for pilgrimage to Jerusalem.
51. The exiles speak, confessing their shame at the desecration of the temple. The word miqdeshei ('holy places, sanctuaries') of the LORD's house refers to the inner sacred spaces that only authorized priests could enter — foreigners in the holy of holies is the ultimate violation. The emotion is both national humiliation and religious horror.
52. God responds to the exiles' shame (v. 51) with a promise of action against Babylon's idols. The verb ye'enoq ('groan, moan') is onomatopoeic — the sound of the word mimics the groan of the dying. This auditory detail makes the judgment visceral: Babylon will be filled with the sound of suffering.
53. The language echoes the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:4) — even if Babylon builds to heaven itself, God will bring her down. The verb tevatser ('fortify, make inaccessible') suggests a fortress so high it seems unreachable. But no height is beyond God's reach. The phrase me'itti ('from me') emphasizes that the destroyers come as God's agents — this is not random conquest but divine commission.
54. The noun shever ('shattering, breaking, destruction') is the same root as the verb used for shattering throughout the war-hammer litany (vv. 20-23). The shatterer is now shattered — the wordplay completes the reversal. The verse is pure sound: ze'aqah ('outcry') and shever gadol ('great shattering') create an auditory image of collapse.
55. The 'great voice' (qol gadol) that God silences is Babylon's imperial proclamation — the voice of command that ruled the nations. The 'waves' (gallim) continue the sea metaphor from v. 42 — the invading forces are an unstoppable flood. The word she'on ('thunder, roar, tumult') describes the overwhelming noise of the assault, drowning out Babylon's silenced voice.
56. The title el gemulot ('God of recompense/repayment') appears only here in the Hebrew Bible — it defines God's character in terms of exact justice. The emphatic infinitive absolute shallem yeshallem ('he will surely, fully repay') guarantees that the debt will be collected in its entirety. The broken bows (qashshot) symbolize the end of Babylon's military capability.
57. The divine title 'the King' (ha-melekh) is placed in direct contrast with Babylon's human rulers — God outranks every official, sage, governor, and warrior just listed. The five categories of leadership (officials, sages, governors, commanders, warriors) represent the full apparatus of imperial power, all rendered unconscious by divine judgment. The phrase 'everlasting sleep' (shenat olam) repeats from v. 39, reinforcing the finality of death.
58. Babylon's walls were legendary — Herodotus reports them as 56 miles long, 80 feet thick, and 320 feet high (likely exaggerated, but reflecting their fame). The verb 'ar'er tit'ar'ar is an emphatic infinitive absolute meaning 'will surely, completely be torn down.' The closing proverb about laboring for nothing and for fire echoes Habakkuk 2:13 almost verbatim — the nations build empires that God reduces to ash.
59. This verse begins the sign-act narrative that closes the Babylon oracle (vv. 59-64). Seraiah son of Neriah is the brother of Baruch son of Neriah, Jeremiah's scribe (32:12) — both brothers serve the prophet. The title sar menuchah is debated: KJV renders it 'quiet prince,' but it more likely means 'quartermaster' or 'officer of rest stops' — the official responsible for the delegation's lodging during the journey to Babylon. Zedekiah's trip to Babylon in his fourth year (594/593 BCE) was likely to demonstrate continued loyalty after unrest in the region.

60. The word *sefer* ('scroll, book, document') refers to a parchment or papyrus scroll. The phrase *sefer echad* ('a single scroll') emphasizes that all the Babylon oracles (chapters 50-51) were gathered into one document for this specific mission. This is a rare glimpse into the physical production of prophetic literature — the oracle is not just spoken but written, transported, and performed.
61. The verb *qara* ('read, call out, proclaim') means to read aloud, not silently. *Seraiah* is to publicly proclaim the oracle against Babylon while standing in Babylon — an extraordinarily dangerous act of prophetic theater. The verb *ra'ita* ('and you shall see') may mean 'survey' or 'observe' — *Seraiah* should witness Babylon's grandeur and then read God's sentence against it.
62. *Seraiah* is to address God directly while standing in the heart of Babylon — a prayer that God fulfill his own word. The merism 'from human to animal' (*me'adam ve'ad behemah*) indicates the reversal of creation itself in that place: where God made both humanity and animals to inhabit the earth, Babylon will have neither. The phrase *shimmemot olam* ('everlasting desolation') repeats from v. 26, forming a frame around the oracle.
63. The sign-act reaches its climax: the written word of God is physically enacted. The stone (even) ensures the scroll sinks — it will not float or be recovered. The Euphrates (*Perat*) was Babylon's lifeline, the river that ran through the city center. Throwing the oracle into the Euphrates is throwing God's judgment into the heart of Babylon. The act is both symbolic and irrevocable — once sunk, the scroll cannot be retrieved, and neither can the judgment be reversed.
64. The verb *tishqa* ('sink, submerge') is the interpretive key to the entire sign-act: as the stone-weighted scroll sinks to the riverbed, so Babylon will sink beneath the weight of divine judgment. The phrase *velo taqum* ('and will not rise') makes the sinking permanent — there is no resurfacing. The colophon 'Thus far are the words of Jeremiah' (*ad hennah divrei yirmeyahu*) is a scribal notation marking the end of the prophetic collection. Everything that follows in chapter 52 is historical appendix, drawn from the same tradition as 2 Kings 24-25. This colophon is one of the clearest editorial markers in the prophetic books, indicating that the book of Jeremiah was compiled and edited by hands other than the prophet's — likely *Baruch* or a later scribal circle.

52

Summary: *Jeremiah 52 is the historical appendix to the book, closely paralleling 2 Kings 24:18-25:30. It narrates the final events of Judah's kingdom: Zedekiah's rebellion, the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, the city's breach, Zedekiah's capture and blinding, the destruction of the temple and city walls, the deportation of the population, and the appointment of officials over the remnant. The chapter includes a unique three-part deportation census (vv. 28-30) not found in 2 Kings, providing specific numbers for three separate deportations. The book closes with the release of King Jehoiachin from Babylonian prison by Evil-Merodach (Amel-Marduk) — a quiet note of hope at the end of catastrophe.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter functions as the historical verification of everything Jeremiah prophesied. The prophet warned of siege, destruction, exile, and the fall of the Davidic monarchy — chapter 52 shows it all fulfilled. The deportation numbers in verses 28-30 (3,023 + 832 + 745 = 4,600 total) are significantly lower than the round numbers in 2 Kings 24:14-16 (10,000 + 8,000), likely because Jeremiah's count records only adult males while Kings includes families, or because they count different deportation events. The discrepancy is historically significant and we note it without resolving it. The final scene — Jehoiachin eating at the king's table in Babylon — echoes the covenant meals of the patriarchs and provides the book's only forward-looking moment: the Davidic line survives. We preserve the matter-of-fact prose register of this chapter, which reads like royal annals rather than prophetic poetry.*

Translation Friction: *The parallel with 2 Kings 25 required constant cross-referencing to identify where Jeremiah 52 diverges — the deportation numbers (vv. 28-30) are the most significant unique material. The dating formulas use both regnal years and calendar months, requiring careful rendering. The word *pinnah* ('corner') in verse 23 is traditionally rendered 'on a side' but may indicate a specific architectural feature of the temple pillars. The name *Evil-Merodach* (v. 31) is the Hebrew rendering of the Babylonian name *Amel-Marduk* ('man of Marduk') — we retain the biblical form with a note on the original. Throughout the chapter, the prose is deliberately spare and archival, and we resisted the temptation to add rhetorical color that the Hebrew does not contain.*

Connections: *This chapter parallels 2 Kings 24:18-25:30 almost word for word, with key differences. It also reprises Jeremiah's own prophecies: the siege fulfills 21:3-10 and 34:1-5; the burning of the temple fulfills 7:14; Zedekiah's capture fulfills 32:3-5 and 34:3; the exile fulfills 25:11. Jehoiachin's release connects to 22:24-30 (the signet-ring oracle) and forward to Zerubbabel, Jehoiachin's grandson, who leads the return (Haggai 2:23, where God reverses the signet-ring image). The deportation numbers provide data found nowhere else in the*

Hebrew Bible.

¹Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. ²He did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as Jehoiakim had done. ³For because of the anger of the LORD, things reached the point in Jerusalem and Judah that he cast them out from his presence. And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. ⁴In the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came with his entire army against Jerusalem. They encamped against it and built siege works all around it. ⁵The city remained under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. ⁶In the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, the famine in the city was so severe that there was no bread for the people of the land. ⁷Then the city wall was breached. All the soldiers fled, leaving the city at night by way of the gate between the two walls near the king's garden, even though the Chaldeans surrounded the city. They made their way toward the Arabah. ⁸The Chaldean army pursued the king and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. His entire army scattered away from him. ⁹They captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he passed sentence on him. ¹⁰The king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. He also slaughtered all the officials of Judah at Riblah. ¹¹Then he blinded Zedekiah, bound him in bronze shackles, and the king of Babylon brought him to Babylon and put him in the house of custody until the day of his death. ¹²In the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month — the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon — Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, who served the king of Babylon, entered Jerusalem. ¹³He burned the house of the LORD, the king's palace, and every house in Jerusalem — every large building he burned with fire. ¹⁴The entire Chaldean army that was with the captain of the guard tore down all the walls of Jerusalem on every side. ¹⁵Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard deported some of the poorest people, the rest of the population remaining in the city, the deserters who had gone over to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the craftsmen. ¹⁶But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left some of the poorest people of the land as vine-workers and field-laborers. ¹⁷The Chaldeans broke apart the bronze pillars of the house of the LORD, the stands, and the bronze sea that was in the house of the LORD, and carried all their bronze to Babylon. ¹⁸They also took the pots, the shovels, the wick-trimmers, the basins, the ladles, and all the bronze implements used in the service. ¹⁹The captain of the guard also took the thresholds, the fire pans, the basins, the pots, the lampstands, the ladles, and the drink-offering bowls — whatever was gold, as gold, and whatever was silver, as silver. ²⁰The two pillars, the one sea, and the twelve bronze bulls that were beneath it, which King Solomon had made for the house of the LORD — the bronze of all these items was beyond weighing. ²¹As for the pillars, the height of one pillar was eighteen cubits, its circumference twelve cubits, its thickness four fingers — it was hollow. ²²A bronze capital was on top of it, and the height of one capital was five cubits, with latticework and pomegranates all around the capital — all of bronze. The second pillar was the same, with pomegranates. ²³There were ninety-six pomegranates facing outward; in all, there were one hundred pomegranates on the latticework all around. ²⁴The captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the threshold. ²⁵From the city he took a court official who had been commander over the soldiers, seven men from the king's inner circle who were found in the city, the secretary of the army commander who mustered the people of the land, and sixty men of the people of the land who were found inside the city. ²⁶Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. ²⁷The king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah went into exile from its own soil. ²⁸This is the number of people Nebuchadnezzar deported: in the seventh year, 3,023 Judeans; ²⁹in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, 832 people from Jerusalem; ³⁰in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard deported 745 Judeans. The total number of people deported was 4,600. ³¹In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth day of the month, Evil-Merodach king of Babylon, in the year he became king, lifted the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah and released him from prison. ³²He spoke kindly to him and set his throne above the thrones of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. ³³He changed out of his prison garments and ate regularly at the king's table for the rest of his life. ³⁴His allowance was a regular allowance given to him by the king of Babylon, a daily portion, until the day of his death — all the days of his life.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. This is the standard regnal formula used for Judean kings. Hamutal was also the mother of Jehoahaz (2 Kings 23:31), making Zedekiah and Jehoahaz full brothers. The 'Jeremiah of Libnah' here is not the prophet — it is a common name. Libnah was a Judean city in the Shephelah near Lachish.
2. The evaluation formula 'he did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD' (vayyaas hara be'einei YHWH) is the standard negative verdict used for Judean and Israelite kings throughout Kings and Chronicles. Comparing Zedekiah to Jehoiaquim rather than to his father Josiah makes the judgment sharper — he followed the worst recent model rather than the best.
3. The phrase *hishlikho otam me'al panav* ('he cast them out from his presence') is the theological thesis of the entire chapter: exile is expulsion from God's presence. The verb *hishlikh* ('cast, hurl') is violent — not a gentle dismissal but a forcible ejection. Zedekiah's rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar was the proximate political cause of the siege, but the text frames it as occurring within God's anger — the political act is embedded in a theological framework.
4. The date — the tenth of Tevet, 588 BCE — became a permanent Jewish fast day (Zechariah 8:19) commemorating the beginning of the siege. The word *dayeq* ('siege works, siege wall') refers to the earthen ramps and wooden fortifications used to encircle and starve a besieged city. The precision of the dating reflects annalistic record-keeping — the scribes knew the exact day the siege began.
5. The siege lasted approximately eighteen months — from January 588 to July 586 BCE. The brevity of this verse belies the catastrophic suffering: famine, disease, and social collapse are documented in Lamentations 2:11-12, 4:4-10 and Ezekiel 4:9-17. The terse style is characteristic of annalistic prose.
6. The ninth of Tammuz (July 586 BCE) is the date of the famine's extremity — later tradition associates this with the seventeenth of Tammuz, another fast day. The phrase *am ha'arets* ('people of the land') here refers to the common population of Jerusalem, the civilian non-elite who suffered most from the siege. The verb *chazaq* ('was strong, severe') describes the famine as an overwhelming force.
7. The verb *tivvaqa* ('was breached, broken through') is the technical military term for a wall being pierced by siege operations. The gate 'between the two walls' (*bein hachmotayim*) was in the southeastern corner of the city, near the Kidron Valley — it offered a narrow escape route toward the Jordan Rift Valley. The Arabah is the Jordan Valley depression extending south to the Dead Sea. The nighttime escape reveals the desperation of the defenders.
8. The plains of Jericho (*arvot yericho*) are about fifteen miles east of Jerusalem — Zedekiah did not get far. The verb *nafotsu* ('scattered') uses the same root as *mappets* ('war-hammer') in 51:20 — a bitter irony: the nation that shattered others is itself shattered. The king is abandoned by his own army, left alone to face capture.
9. Riblah was Nebuchadnezzar's military headquarters in central Syria (modern Lebanon/Syria border region), strategically located on the Orontes River. The phrase *vayedabber itto mishpatim* ('he spoke judgments with him') means Nebuchadnezzar held a formal judicial proceeding — this was not summary execution but a vassal trial for treaty violation. Zedekiah had sworn loyalty by oath (2 Chronicles 36:13, Ezekiel 17:13-19), and his rebellion was legally prosecutable under ancient Near Eastern treaty law.
10. The verb *shachat* ('slaughtered') is the same verb used for sacrificial slaughter — the execution of Zedekiah's sons is described with deliberate brutality. The phrase *le'ainav* ('before his eyes') emphasizes that this was designed as psychological torture — the last sight Zedekiah would ever see (v. 11). Killing the royal sons eliminated potential future claimants to the throne — a standard practice in ancient Near Eastern political punishment.
11. The verb *ivver* ('blinded') describes the physical mutilation of gouging out the eyes — a punishment attested in Assyrian and Babylonian records for rebellious vassals. The detail fulfills both Jeremiah's prophecy that Zedekiah would 'see the king of Babylon's eyes' (32:4, 34:3) and Ezekiel's seemingly contradictory prophecy that Zedekiah would go to Babylon but not 'see' it (Ezekiel 12:13). The bronze shackles (*nechushtayim*) may echo Samson's fate (Judges 16:21), another blinded prisoner. The 'house of custody' (*beit ha-pequddot*) is a Babylonian prison.
12. The date is the tenth of Av (August 586 BCE). Second Kings 25:8 gives the seventh of Av — the discrepancy of three days is unexplained and likely reflects different records or different stages of the destruction. The ninth of Av (*Tisha B'Av*) became the traditional fast day, splitting the difference. Nebuzaradan's title *rav tabbachim* (literally 'chief of the butchers/slaughterers') was the standard title for the commander of the royal bodyguard — an Akkadian administrative title, not a description of his actions, though the literal meaning is grimly appropriate.
13. The house of the LORD (*beit YHWH*) is Solomon's temple, which had stood for approximately 370 years. The systematic nature of the burning — temple, palace, private houses, and all major structures — indicates deliberate demolition, not collateral damage. The phrase *kol beit hagadol* ('every large building') may mean 'every house of a great person' (i.e., the aristocratic houses) or 'every great house' in terms of size. This verse fulfills Jeremiah 7:14 — 'I will do to this house what I did to Shiloh.'
14. The verb *natsetsu* ('tore down, demolished') indicates systematic dismantling, not mere breaching. City walls were symbols of identity and security — their destruction left Jerusalem defenseless and politically nullified. Archaeological evidence confirms massive destruction layers in Jerusalem dating to this period.
15. The deportees fall into categories: the poor (*dallot ha'am*), the remaining residents, the defectors (*nofelim*, literally 'those who fell' to the Babylonian side), and the craftsmen (*amon*, 'artisans, skilled workers'). Babylon's deportation policy targeted skilled laborers and potential leaders while leaving subsistence farmers to work the land (v. 16). The word *nofelim* for defectors is loaded — those who 'fell to' Babylon during the siege may have followed Jeremiah's counsel (21:9, 38:2).

16. The words *koremim* ('vine-workers') and *yogevim* ('field-laborers, plowmen') indicate that the Babylonians maintained agricultural production in Judah — the land was not abandoned but worked by a remnant of impoverished farmers. This economic calculation — deport the skilled, keep the unskilled to work the soil — was standard Babylonian imperial policy.
17. The bronze pillars (Jachin and Boaz, cf. 1 Kings 7:15-22), the movable stands (*mekhonot*, cf. 1 Kings 7:27-37), and the bronze sea (*yam hanechoset*, cf. 1 Kings 7:23-26) were the major bronze furnishings of Solomon's temple. The verb *shibberu* ('they broke apart') indicates they were too large to transport whole — the Babylonians dismantled them for the metal. The temple was not merely burned but systematically stripped of its valuable metals.
18. The inventory of temple vessels catalogues the items used in daily sacrificial service: *sirot* ('pots' for boiling offerings), *ya'im* ('shovels' for ash removal), *mezammerot* ('wick-trimmers' for the lampstand), *mizraqot* ('basins' for catching and throwing sacrificial blood), and *kappot* ('ladles' or 'pans' for incense). The detailed listing emphasizes the completeness of the plunder — every implement of worship was confiscated.
19. The phrase *asher zahav zahav va'asher kesef kasef* ('what was gold as gold, what was silver as silver') indicates that the metals were catalogued and collected by type — the Babylonians were meticulous in their plunder. The *sippim* may be 'thresholds' or 'bowls' (the Hebrew is ambiguous). The *menaqiyot* ('drink-offering bowls') were used for libation offerings.
20. The twelve bronze bulls (*baqar*, literally 'oxen, cattle') supported the bronze sea on their backs (1 Kings 7:25). The phrase *lo hayah mishqal* ('there was no weight,' i.e., 'beyond weighing') indicates the quantity of bronze was so vast it could not be practically measured. According to 1 Kings 7:47, Solomon's bronze work was 'exceedingly great' in quantity. The mention of Solomon by name connects the destruction to its builder, completing the arc from construction to demolition.
21. The dimensions are given precisely: eighteen cubits high (approximately 27 feet / 8.2 meters), twelve cubits in circumference (approximately 18 feet / 5.5 meters), and four fingers thick (approximately 3 inches / 7.6 cm). The note that the pillar was hollow (*navuv*) indicates it was cast as a cylinder, not solid — a significant feat of bronze-casting technology. These measurements describe the pillars Jachin and Boaz (1 Kings 7:15-22).
22. The *koteret* ('capital') was the decorative crown atop each pillar, five cubits high (approximately 7.5 feet / 2.3 meters). The *sevakhah* ('latticework, network') and *rimmonim* ('pomegranates') were ornamental features — pomegranates symbolized fertility and abundance in ancient Israelite art. The description matches 1 Kings 7:17-20 with minor variations.
23. The number discrepancy — ninety-six visible ('facing outward,' *ruchah*, literally 'toward the wind/air') versus one hundred total — means four pomegranates were concealed at the attachment points of the latticework. This architectural detail is unique to Jeremiah 52; it does not appear in the Kings parallel. The precision of the count (even noting hidden pomegranates) reflects the archival nature of this record.
24. This Seraiah the chief priest is not the same Seraiah as in 51:59. The three ranks of priestly leadership are named: the chief priest (*kohen ha-rosh*), the second priest (*kohen ha-mishneh*), and the threshold keepers (*shomrei ha-saf*). These were the senior religious officials of the temple. Their arrest and execution (v. 27) eliminated the priestly leadership of Judah.
25. The *saris* ('court official,' sometimes 'eunuch') was a military overseer. The 'seven men who saw the king's face' (*shiv'ah anashim mero'ei fenei ha-melekh*) were members of the royal privy council — only the most trusted advisors had direct access to the king. The number is seven in Jeremiah versus five in 2 Kings 25:19 — another discrepancy between the parallel accounts. The sixty men from the general population may have been civic leaders or elders.
26. The prisoners are transported from Jerusalem to Riblah in Syria — a journey of approximately 200 miles — to face Nebuchadnezzar's judgment in person. The deliberate transport to the king's headquarters rather than summary execution in Jerusalem indicates these were political prisoners whose fate Nebuchadnezzar determined personally.
27. The final clause — *vayyigel yehudah me'al admato* ('Judah went into exile from its own soil') — is the theological summary of the entire catastrophe. The word *adamah* ('soil, ground') connects to *adam* ('human being') and to the Edenic creation narrative — exile from the land is a second expulsion from the garden. The covenant promised land; exile is the covenant's ultimate curse (Deuteronomy 28:63-64).
28. This deportation census (vv. 28-30) is unique to Jeremiah 52 — it does not appear in 2 Kings 25 and is one of the most important historical records in the chapter. The 'seventh year' of Nebuchadnezzar (598/597 BCE) corresponds to the first deportation, when Jehoiachin surrendered. The number 3,023 is far lower than the 10,000 given in 2 Kings 24:14 — the discrepancy likely reflects different counting methods: Jeremiah may count only adult males, or only those from Jerusalem, while Kings includes families and surrounding territory.
29. The 'eighteenth year' (587/586 BCE) corresponds to the siege and fall of Jerusalem. The word *nefesh* ('soul, person, life') is used as the counting unit — literally '832 souls.' This number seems remarkably low for the main deportation following the city's destruction, reinforcing the probability that these counts represent only a specific category (perhaps adult male citizens of Jerusalem proper, not the broader population of Judah).
30. The third deportation in Nebuchadnezzar's twenty-third year (582/581 BCE) is otherwise unknown from biblical sources — it may relate to the aftermath of Gedaliah's assassination (Jeremiah 41) and the resulting disorder. The grand total of 4,600 (3,023 + 832 + 745) is strikingly modest compared to the tens of thousands mentioned in Kings. If these numbers are accurate and represent adult males, the total exiled community including women, children, and dependents may have been 15,000-20,000. These figures are among the most debated numbers in biblical historiography.

- 31.** Evil-Merodach (Hebrew form of the Babylonian name Amel-Marduk, meaning 'man of Marduk') succeeded Nebuchadnezzar in 562 BCE. The phrase *nasa rosh* ('lifted the head') is an idiom meaning 'showed favor to' or 'pardoned' — it carries the sense of raising someone from a lowered, defeated posture. Jehoiachin had been imprisoned for thirty-seven years since his surrender in 597 BCE. Babylonian administrative tablets (the 'Jehoiachin rations tablets') confirm that Jehoiachin was housed and fed in Babylon, corroborating this account.
- 32.** The phrase *dibber itto tovot* ('spoke good things to him') indicates a formal change of status, not merely polite conversation. Setting Jehoiachin's throne above the other captive kings means he was given precedence — the Davidic king, though a prisoner, held the highest rank among Babylon's royal captives. The 'other kings' were rulers of various conquered nations also held in Babylon.
- 33.** The changing of garments (*shinnah et bigdei kil'o*) symbolizes a change of status — from prisoner to honored guest. The phrase *akhal lechem lefanav tamid* ('ate bread before him continually') means Jehoiachin dined at the king's own table — a mark of the highest favor, echoing Mephibosheth eating at David's table (2 Samuel 9:7). This image of a Davidic king eating at a foreign king's table is the book's final word: not triumph, but survival. The Davidic line endures.
- 34.** The final verse of Jeremiah ends not with a bang but with quiet sustenance: a daily food ration (*aruchat tamid*, 'continual allowance') given day by day (*devar yom beyomo*, 'the matter of a day in its day'). The repetition of 'all the days of his life' (*kol yemei chayyav*) from verse 33 emphasizes permanence — this provision never stopped. The book that began with the call of a prophet and moved through national catastrophe ends with a meal. The Davidic king lives; the line is not extinguished. From Jehoiachin's line will come Zerubbabel, who leads the return from exile (1 Chronicles 3:17-19, Ezra 3:2). This quiet ending is the book's final theological statement: judgment is real, but God's covenant with David's house endures beyond the ruins.