

The Foe from the North (Jeremiah 4:5 – 10:25)

Part 2: 07. Jeremiah 7-10



Jeremiah 7:1-4 (see later chapter 26)

The word that came to Jeremiah from YHWH:

Stand in the gate of the YHWH's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of YHWH, all you people of Judah, you that enter these gates to worship YHWH.

Thus says YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, so that I may dwell with you in this place.

Do not trust in these deceptive words: "This is the temple of YHWH, the temple of YHWH, the temple of YHWH."

Jeremiah 7:5-7

If you truly amend your ways and your doings,
if you truly act justly one with another,
if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow,
or shed innocent blood in this place,
and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt,
then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land
that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever.

Jeremiah 7:8-11

Here you are, trusting in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, “We are safe!”—only to go on doing all these abominations?

Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight? (quoted by Jesus: Mark 11:17)

You know, I too am watching, says YHWH.

Jeremiah 7:12-15

Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now, because you have done all these things, says YHWH, and when I spoke to you persistently, you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your ancestors, just what I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, just as I cast out all your kinsfolk, all the offspring of Ephraim.



‘There were in Judah powerful reinforcements for the view that the temple in Jerusalem was the ultimate refuge: the marvellous survival of Jerusalem, and thus of the temple, through the siege of Sennacherib in 701, which Isaiah had foreseen; the steady recitation of Yahweh’s mighty acts by psalmists; and above all, the reform of Josiah, which in response to the words of Deuteronomy centralised the cult in the Jerusalem temple to the exclusion of outlying shrines in the countryside. If the cry “we have been rescued” (v 10) seems fatuous, we must be reminded of the many psalm verses which assure the hearers that Yahweh rescues the righteous out of all their afflictions (Psalm 34:18, 20, and often); if the assumption of ultimate refuge in the temple seems naive, we must be reminded of psalms that assure the hearers that Yahweh hears the cry for help from his temple (Psalm 18:7).

‘But what is this search for security and protection? Jeremiah asks; why centre one’s attention on the holiness of the temple? Only if our lives are lived in radical obedience to the demands of Yahweh’s covenant, the ethical expectations of the Decalogue, will Yahweh continue to sponsor us and protect us.

Jeremiah was of course challenging the religious “establishment” of his time by challenging the assumption that the temple was Yahweh’s ultimate asylum for the people. There is a special difficulty a religious establishment has in understanding itself to stand under the judgment of God, and when that religious establishment is identified with the political power of a state, as Judah’s was, then it is even more difficult to persuade it of its liability to judgment.

‘This was the radical task that Jeremiah undertook, as Jesus would in a later century when he ejected the money changers from the temple court and in so doing used words adapted from Jeremiah’s sermon (**‘Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers’**).

Shiloh had been destroyed: this was not a fact of which people enjoyed being reminded. Jerusalem can be destroyed. And ultimately, Jeremiah was constrained to say, Jerusalem will be destroyed. And then it was destroyed.

It was Jeremiah’s terrible destiny to be vindicated by the destruction of his nation. “The holy stones lie scattered at the head of every street” (Lamentations 4:1); “this was for the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests” (Lamentations 4:13).

Jeremiah 7:16

The prophet Jeremiah's intercession failed, because God commanded it.

As for you,
do not pray for this people,
do not raise a cry or prayer on their behalf,
and do not intercede with me,
for I will not hear you.

Amos 5:23-24

Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

Jeremiah 7:17-20

Do you not see what they are doing in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven (Astarte, consort of Baal); and they pour out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke me to anger. Is it I whom they provoke? says YHWH. Is it not themselves, to their own hurt?

Therefore thus says the Lord YHWH: My anger and my wrath shall be poured out on this place, on human beings and animals, on the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground; it will burn and not be quenched.

Jeremiah 7:21-22

Thus says YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. For in the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Amos 4:4-5

‘Come to Bethel – and transgress;
to Gilgal – and multiply transgression;
bring your sacrifices every morning,
your tithes every three days;
bring a thank-offering of leavened bread,
and proclaim freewill offerings, publish them;
for so you love to do, O people of Israel!
says the Lord YHWH.’

Hosea 8:13

Though they offer choice sacrifices,
though they eat flesh,
YHWH does not accept them.

Now he will remember their iniquity,
and punish their sins;
they shall return to Egypt.'

Jeremiah 7:23-26

But this command I gave them, “Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you.”

Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but, in the stubbornness of their evil will, they walked in their own counsels, and looked backward rather than forward. From the day that your ancestors came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day; yet they did not listen to me, or pay attention, but they stiffened their necks. They did worse than their ancestors did.

Jeremiah 7:27-28

So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You will call to them, but they will not answer you. You shall say to them: This is the nation that did not obey the voice of YHWH their God, and did not accept discipline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips.

YHWH wants his people to speak and to do the truth

‘They bend their tongues like bows; they have grown strong in the land for falsehood, and not for truth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me’ (Jeremiah 9:3).

Jeremiah 7:29-31

Cut off your hair and throw it away; (Canaanite mourning cult)
raise a lamentation on the bare heights,
for YHWH has rejected and forsaken
the generation that provoked his wrath.

For the people of Judah have done evil in my sight, says YHWH; they have set their abominations in the house that is called by my name, defiling it (2 Kings 21:2-8). And they go on building the high place of Topheth (Fire-pit), which is in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom (Ge-ben-Hinnom, Gehenna), to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6) – which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind.

Jeremiah 7:32-34

Therefore, the days are surely coming, says YHWH, when it will no more be called Topheth (Fire-pit), or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of Slaughter: for they will bury in Topheth until there is no more room.

The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the animals of the earth; and no one will frighten them away.

And I will bring to an end the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of the bride and bridegroom in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for the land shall become a waste.

Jeremiah 8:1-3

At that time, says YHWH, 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 shall be brought out of their tombs; and they shall be spread before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven, which they have loved and served, which they have followed, and which they have inquired of and worshipped; and they shall not be gathered or buried; they shall be like dung on the surface of the ground.

Death shall be preferred to life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family in all the places where I have driven them, says YHWH of hosts.

In his commentary R. P. Carroll writes (page 225):

‘Jeremiah 7:1 – 8:3 combines a number of reflections on cultic matters in Jerusalem and its environs. Starting off with the crowds flocking to the temple in Jerusalem, it finishes with images of the ground covered in corpses and the survivors driven away to alien parts. Silence and desolation cover the temple mount, and the fate of that shrine indicates the incorrectness of the worship offered there.’

Jeremiah 8:4-7

You shall say to them, Thus says YHWH:

When people fall, do they not get up again?

If they go astray, do they not turn back?

Why then has this people turned away in perpetual backsliding?

They have held fast to deceit, they have refused to return. (see 5:1-3)

I have given heed and listened, but they do not speak honestly;

no one repents of wickedness, saying, "What have I done!"

All of them turn to their own course,

like a horse plunging headlong into battle.

Even the stork in the heavens knows its times;

and the turtledove, swallow, and crane

observe the time of their coming;

but my people do not know the ordinance of YHWH.

Jeremiah 8:8-12

How can you say, “We are wise, and the law of YHWH is with us,”
when, in fact, the false pen of the **scribes** has made it into a lie?
The wise shall be put to shame, they shall be dismayed and taken;
since they have rejected the word of YHWH, what wisdom is in them?
Therefore I will give their wives to others and their fields to conquerors,
because from the least to the greatest everyone is greedy for unjust gain;
from **prophet** to **priest** everyone deals falsely.

They have treated the wound of my people carelessly,
saying, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace. (see 6:12-16)
They acted shamefully, they committed abomination;
yet they were not at all ashamed, they did not know how to blush.
Therefore they shall fall among those who fall;
at the time when I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says YHWH.

Jeremiah 8:13-15

When I wanted to gather them, says YHWH, there are no grapes on the vine, no figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them.

Why do we sit still?

Gather together, let us go into the fortified cities and perish there; for YHWH our God has doomed us to perish, and has given us poisoned water to drink, because we have sinned against YHWH.

We look for peace, but find no good,
for a time of healing, but there is terror instead.

Jeremiah 8:16-17

The snorting of their horses is heard from Dan;
at the sound of the neighing of their stallions
the whole land quakes.

They come and devour the land and all that fills it,
the city and those who live in it.

See, I am letting snakes loose among you,
adders that cannot be charmed,
and they shall bite you, says YHWH.

Jeremiah 8:18-20

My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick.

(Jeremiah's heart reflecting the Heart of God)

Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land:

“Is YHWH not in Zion? Is her King not in her?”

(“Why have they provoked me to anger with their images,
with their foreign idols?”)

“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.”

(No New Year Celebrations!)

Jeremiah 8:21-22

For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt,
I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me.

Is there no balm (aromatic resin) in Gilead?

Is there no physician there?

Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

God's feelings of regret at having to punish:

Jeremiah 8:21

'For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn,
and dismay has taken hold of me.'

Jeremiah 9:1

'O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a
fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for
the slain of my poor people!'

Jeremiah 31:20

'Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he the child I delight in?
As often as I speak against him, I still remember him.
Therefore I am deeply moved for him;
I will surely have mercy on him.'

Jeremiah 9:1-3 (The Hebrew numbering of verses is different)

O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears,
so that I (Jeremiah) might weep day and night
for the slain of my poor people!

O that I (YHWH) had in the desert a traveler's lodging place,
that I might leave my people and go away from them!

For they are all adulterers, a band of traitors.

They bend their tongues like bows;

they have grown strong in the land for falsehood, and not for truth;
for they proceed from evil to evil,

and **they do not know me**, says YHWH.

(see 2:8; 5:4; 8:7 and 12)

Jeremiah 9:4-6

Beware of your neighbours, and put no trust in any of your kin;
for all your kin are supplanters,
and every neighbour goes around like a slanderer.
They all deceive their neighbours, and no one speaks the truth;
they have taught their tongues to speak lies;
they commit iniquity and are too weary to repent.
Oppression upon oppression, deceit upon deceit!
They refuse to know me, says YHWH.

Jeremiah 9:7-9

Therefore thus says YHWH of hosts:

I will now refine and test them,

for what else can I do with my sinful people?

Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceit through the mouth.

They all speak friendly words to their neighbours,

but inwardly are planning to lay an ambush.

Shall I not punish them for these things? says YHWH;

and shall I not bring retribution on a nation such as this?

The people speak lies, they are dishonest, they slander, their speech is hypocritical. Words are crucial. Cursing a deaf person is as harmful as putting a stumbling-block before someone who is blind (Leviticus 19:14); words tear down a community as thoroughly as does civil war.

Jeremiah 9:10-11

Take up weeping and wailing for the mountains,
and a lamentation for the pastures of the wilderness,
because they are laid waste so that no one passes through,
and the lowing of cattle is not heard;
both the birds of the air and the animals have fled and are gone.
I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a lair of jackals;
and I will make the towns of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant.

Halladay Vol 1, page 305

This passage is unique in setting forth God's impulse to weep over what he has lost. The Old Testament was not afraid to affirm the weeping of God himself. God's pain and disappointment ring throughout the book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 9:12-14

Who is wise enough to understand this? To whom has the mouth of YHWH spoken, so that they may declare it?

Why is the land ruined and laid waste like a wilderness, so that no one passes through?

YHWH says:

Because they have forsaken my law that I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, or walked in accordance with it, but have stubbornly followed their own hearts and have gone after the Baals, as their ancestors taught them.

Jeremiah 9:15-19

Therefore thus says YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel: I am feeding this people with wormwood, and giving them poisonous water to drink. I 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.

Thus says YHWH of hosts:

Consider, and call for the mourning women to come;
send for the skilled women to come;
let them quickly raise a dirge over us,
so that our eyes may run down with tears,
and our eyelids flow with water.

For a sound of wailing is heard from Zion: “How we are ruined!
We are utterly shamed, because we have left the land,
because they have cast down our dwellings.”

Hear, O women, the word of YHWH,

Jeremiah 9:20-22

and let your ears receive the word of his mouth;

teach to your daughters a dirge, and each to her neighbour a lament.

“Death has come up into our windows, it has entered our palaces,

to cut off the children from the streets

and the young men from the squares.”

Speak! Thus says YHWH:

“Human corpses will fall like dung upon the open field,

like sheaves behind the reaper, and no one shall gather them.”

‘Jeremiah sees the universe again in the state in which it had been before Yahweh began his work; here the old pagan god Mōt, the god of death, is at work once more, destroying the people. And more than the people of the covenant: it is the corpses of “humanity” that shall fall. The drumbeat of these laments has the power even today to awe the hearer; the words must have chilled the blood of Jeremiah’s hearers’ (Holladay vol 1, 316).

Jeremiah 9:23-24

Thus says YHWH: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; but let those who boast boast in this, that they have the sense to know me, that I am YHWH;

I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says YHWH

YHWH wants his people to 'know' him; that is to say, to live in communion with him, and enjoy the intimacy of love with which he, 'the fountain of living water' (17:13), longs to bless them.

Jeremiah 9:25-26

The days are surely coming, says YHWH, when I will attend to all those who are physically circumcised: Egypt, Judah, Edom, the Ammonites, Moab, and all those with shaven temples who live in the desert. (an anti-Babylonian coalition?)

For all these nations are uncircumcised,

and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart.

Jeremiah 10:1-5

Hear the word that YHWH speaks to you, O house of Israel.

Thus says YHWH: Do not learn the way of the nations,

or be dismayed at the signs of the heavens;

for the nations are dismayed at them.

For the customs of the peoples are false:

a tree from the forest is cut down,

and worked with an adze by the hands of an artisan;

people deck it with silver and gold;

they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move.

Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field,

and they cannot speak;

they have to be carried, for they cannot walk.

Do not be afraid of them,

for they cannot do evil, nor is it in them to do good.

Jeremiah 10:6-10

There is none like you, O YHWH;

you are great, and your name is great in might.

Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For that is your due.'

Among all the wise ones of the nations

and in all their kingdoms there is no one like you.

They are both stupid and foolish;

the instruction given by idols is no better than wood!

Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Ophir.

They are the work of the artisan and of the hands of the goldsmith;

their clothing is blue and purple;

they are all the product of skilled workers.

YHWH is the **true God**; he is the **living God** and the **everlasting King**.

At his wrath the earth quakes,

and the nations cannot endure his indignation.

Jeremiah 10:11-13

Thus shall you say to them: The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth will perish from the earth and from under the heavens.

It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.

When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth. He makes lightnings for the rain, and he brings out the wind from his storehouses.

Jeremiah 10:14-16

Everyone is stupid and without knowledge; goldsmiths are all put to shame by their idols; for their images are false, and there is no breath in them. They are worthless, a work of delusion; at the time of their punishment they shall perish.

Not like these is YHWH, the portion of Jacob,
for he is the one who formed all things,
and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance;
YHWH of hosts is his name.

Holladay, vol 1, 337

The idols are mocked in a kind of doggerel poetry, laughed to scorn; Yahweh is addressed and hymned in the solemn language of liturgy.

Jeremiah 10:17-21 Getting ready for Exile

Gather up your bundle from the ground, O you who live under siege!

For thus says YHWH:

I am going to sling out the inhabitants of the land at this time,
and I will bring distress on them, so that they shall feel it.

Woe is me (the people) because of my hurt! My wound is severe.

But I said, “Truly this is my punishment, and I must bear it.”

My tent is destroyed, and all my cords are broken;

my children have gone from me, and they are no more;

there is no one to spread my tent again, and to set up my curtains.

The shepherds are stupid, and do not consult YHWH;

therefore they have not prospered, and all their flock is scattered.

Jeremiah 10:22-25

Hear, a noise! Listen, it is coming –
a great commotion from the land of the north
to make the cities of Judah a desolation, a lair of jackals.

I know, O YHWH, that the way of human beings is not in their control,
that mortals as they walk cannot direct their steps.

Correct me, O YHWH, but in just measure; (see Psalm 6:1)
not in your anger, or you will bring me to nothing.

Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not know you, (Psalm 79:6-7)
and on the peoples that do not call on your name;
for they have devoured Jacob;
they have devoured him and consumed him,
and have laid waste his habitation.