

08. Jeremiah 11-14



Jeremiah 11:1-5

The word that came to Jeremiah from YHWH: Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. You shall say to them, Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel:

Cursed (see Deuteronomy 27:15-26) is anyone who does not heed the words of this **covenant**, which I commanded your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron-smelter, saying: Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you. So shall you be my people, and I will be your God, that I may perform the oath that I swore to your ancestors, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day.

Then I answered, “So be it, YHWH.”

Jeremiah 11:6-10

YHWH said to me: Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. For I solemnly warned your ancestors when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of an evil will. So I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not.

And YHWH said to me: Conspiracy exists among the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They have turned back to the iniquities of their ancestors of old, who refused to heed my words; they have gone after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken the covenant that I made with their ancestors.

Jeremiah 11:11-13

Therefore, thus says YHWH, assuredly I am going to bring disaster upon them that they cannot escape; though they cry out to me, I will not listen to them.

Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods to whom they make offerings, but they will never save them in the time of their trouble. For your gods have become as many as your towns, O Judah; and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up to shame, altars to make offerings to Baal.

Jeremiah 11:14

As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf (compare 7:16; 14:11-12; 15:1), for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble.

‘The intention of verses 1-14 is to represent that the prophet Jeremiah was actively engaged on behalf of the Deuteronomistic measures of Josiah’s reform and that he subscribed to a theology of prophecy which coincided with the Deuteronomistic one. The problem is then to explain why he was a prophet of doom. The reconciliation is achieved by representing that he was forbidden by Yahweh to intercede.’ (William McKane 2-volume commentary (1986, 1996)).

Jeremiah 11:15-17

What right has **my beloved** in my house, when she has done vile deeds? Can vows and sacrificial flesh avert your doom? Can you then exult?

YHWH once called you, “A green olive tree (see Hosea 14:7), fair with goodly fruit”; but with the roar of a great tempest he will set fire to it, and its branches will be consumed.

YHWH of hosts, who planted you, has pronounced evil against you, because of the evil that the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done, provoking me to anger by making offerings to Baal.

Jeremiah 11:18 – 20:18

In this section of the scroll two themes dominate.

The first is Jeremiah's clear and concise message:

Jerusalem will be destroyed.

The second is Jeremiah's grief and anger that it has fallen to him to announce this painful and unwelcome truth.

Again and again Jeremiah complains to God about his relationship with the people, about his call, about what being a prophet involves, and, perhaps especially, about YHWH's apparent failure to carry out the threats that he got Jeremiah to proclaim. What about the guarantee that YHWH gave Jeremiah that he would protect him (1:8, 17-19)?

Holladay suggests two situations that could well provide the context for a number of these complaints. They help explain why opposing 'prophets' were able to get away with mocking Jeremiah, even, in accordance with Deuteronomy 18:20, to demand his death as a false prophet.

The first occasion was at the end of 601, after the defeat of Babylon by the Egyptians. This defeat was seen as supporting the pro-Egyptian party which Jeremiah had so often denounced, and appeared to undermine Jeremiah's call to submit to Babylon. This is possibly the occasion, too, for King Jehoiakim to mockingly tear up Jeremiah's scroll (see 36:23, according to the date given in the Septuagint).

The second occasion was in 594, when Zedekiah, having survived an assassination attempt, was emboldened to set about forming an anti-Babylonian alliance (see Jeremiah 27 and 29:1-23).

Jeremiah also had to contend with the fact that the exiles in Babylon were unhappy with his declaration that they had to put up with their exile. They wanted it over quickly.

When we examine YHWH's response to Jeremiah's complaints it becomes obvious that they don't satisfy the distraught prophet. Furthermore, on many occasions there is no response: YHWH is silent.

This material is unique among the prophets. It is not difficult to imagine why it was preserved. When Jeremiah was finally vindicated by the capture of Jerusalem in 597, and its destruction in 587, people came to see that he was the true prophet, not his opponents. Jeremiah's protracted experience of suffering and endurance would have become, for those living in exile, a symbol for their own experience, as it would have become for the inhabitants of post-exilic Yehud, who treasured YHWH's promises, but could see no hope of their being fulfilled.

There is some comfort for us, too, who often cannot find meaning in what happens to us and around us. There is no sin in complaining, in joining Jeremiah in expressing to God our pain, our doubts and our fears, so long as we also share with Jeremiah his faith.

The above comments are based on the understanding that the text is offering us insights into experiences of the historical Jeremiah. It is necessary to note that one cannot be completely confident that this is the limit of what is intended by the texts. A parallel may be made with many of the psalms, which are attributed to King David and carry a title which relates the psalm to particular incidents in David's life. The title suggests a context for praying the psalm, but does not guarantee that David is its author. We should say the same about the oracles here that are attributed to Jeremiah.

Aware of this caution, we will follow the editors and reflect on the portrait they are offering of the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 11:18-20

“YHWH, inform me so that I can know.”

It was then that you showed me what they were up to.

But I was like a gentle lamb

led to the slaughter.

And I did not know it was against me

that they devised schemes, saying,

“Let us destroy the tree with its fruit,

let us cut him off from the land of the living,

so that his name will no longer be remembered!”

But you, YHWH of hosts, who judge righteously,

who try the heart and the mind,

let me see your retribution upon them,

for to you I have committed my cause.

Jeremiah 11:21-23

Therefore thus says YHWH concerning the people of Anathoth (see 1:1), who seek your life, and say, “You will not prophesy in the name of YHWH, or you will die by our hand” —

therefore thus says YHWH of hosts: I am going to punish them; the young men will die by the sword; their sons and their daughters will die by famine; and not even a remnant will be left of them.

For I will bring disaster upon the people of Anathoth, the year of their punishment.

Jeremiah 12:1-2

You will be in the right, YHWH, when I lay charges against you;
but let me put my case to you.

Why does the way of the guilty prosper?

Why do all who are treacherous thrive? (compare Job 21:7)

You plant them, and they take root; (contrast Psalm 1:3)

they grow and bring forth fruit;

you are near in their mouths yet far from their hearts.

Matthew 7:21

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

Jeremiah 12:3-4

But you, YHWH, know me;

You see me and test me – my heart is with you.

Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter,
and set them apart for the day of slaughter.

How long will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither?

For the wickedness of those who live in it
the animals and the birds are swept away,
and because people said, “He is blind to our ways.”

Jeremiah 12:5-6

If you have raced with foot-runners and they have wearied you,

(competing against the false prophets)

how will you compete with horses?

And if in a safe land you fall down,

how will you fare in the thickets of the Jordan?

For even your kinsfolk and your own family, (compare Mark 3:21)

even they have dealt treacherously with you;

they are in full cry after you.

Do not believe them,

though they speak friendly words to you.

Jeremiah 12:7-8

I have forsaken my house,
I have abandoned my heritage;
I have given the beloved of my heart into the hands of her enemies.
My heritage has become to me like a lion in the thicket;
she has lifted up her voice against me – that is why I hate her.

Hosea 9:15

Every evil of theirs began at Gilgal; there I came to hate them.
Because of the wickedness of their deeds
I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more.

Jeremiah 12:9-13

Is the hyena greedy for my **heritage** at my command?

Are the birds of prey all around her?

Go, assemble all the wild animals; bring them to devour her.

Many shepherds (kings) have destroyed **my vineyard**,

they have trampled down my portion,

they have made **my pleasant portion** a desolate wilderness.

They have made it a desolation; desolate, it mourns to me.

The whole land is made desolate, but **no one lays it to heart**.

Upon all the caravan-tracks in the desert spoilers have come;

for the sword of YHWH devours

from one end of the land to the other; no one shall be safe.

They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns,

they have tired themselves out but profit nothing.

They shall be ashamed of their harvests

because of the fierce anger of YHWH.

Jeremiah lived through three massive invasions, each worse than the one before.

1. In 601-600 when the Babylonian king was preoccupied in the east, Chaldaean, Aramaean, Moabite and Ammonite forces ravaged Judah (see 2 Kings 24:2).
2. Then in 598-587 Nebuchadnezzar led the forces that captured Jerusalem.
3. Worst of all was 588-587 when the Babylonian army returned and destroyed the city

Jeremiah 12:14-16

Thus says YHWH concerning all my evil neighbours who touch the heritage that I have given my people Israel to inherit: I am about to uproot them from their land, and I will uproot the house of Judah from among them.

And after I have uprooted them, I will again have compassion on them, and I will bring them back, each to his possession, each to his land.

And then, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, “As YHWH lives,” as they taught my people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up in the midst of my people.

Verse 16 comes as a surprise. YHWH is extending an invitation to the other nations to join the covenant.

Jeremiah 12:17

But if any nation will not listen,
then I will completely uproot it and destroy it, says YHWH.

McKane writes:

‘The neighbours who gloated over Judah’s misfortunes and took advantage of her weakness when she suffered dismemberment and exile (see Obadiah 10ff; Zephaniah 2:8), themselves suffered in turn, as the prophet Jeremiah had predicted. The post-exilic Jerusalem community, effectively separated from the corrupting influences of her neighbours, has nothing to fear, even when these neighbours are restored to their former territories, as scripture predicts. But, according to verses 16-17, their restoration is to be entertained only in so far as they swear allegiance to Yahweh and are integrated into his community.’

Jeremiah 13:1-7 (a vision?)

Thus said YHWH to me, “Go and buy yourself a linen loincloth, and put it on your loins, but do not dip it in water.” So I bought a loincloth according to the word of YHWH, and put it on my loins.

And the word of YHWH came to me a second time, saying, “Take the loincloth that you bought and are wearing, and go now to the Euphrates, and hide it there in a cleft of the rock.” So I went, and hid it by the Euphrates, as YHWH commanded me.

And after many days YHWH said to me, “Go now to the Euphrates, and take from there the loincloth that I commanded you to hide there.” Then I went to the Euphrates, and dug, and I took the loincloth from the place where I had hidden it. But now the loincloth was ruined; it was good for nothing.

Judah rotting in exile

Jeremiah 13:8-11

Then the word of YHWH came to me: Thus says YHWH: Just so I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own will and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing.

For as the loincloth clings to one's loins, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, says YHWH, in order that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory. But they would not listen.



Jeremiah 13:12-14

You shall speak to them this word: Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel: Every wine-jar should be filled with wine. And they will say to you, “Do you think we do not know that every wine-jar should be filled with wine?” Then you shall say to them: Thus says YHWH: 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. And I will dash them one against another, parents and children together, says YHWH. I will not pity or spare or have compassion when I destroy them.

Jeremiah 13:15-17

Hear and give ear; do not be haughty, for YHWH has spoken.
Give glory to YHWH your God before he brings darkness,
and before your feet stumble on the mountains at twilight.
While you look for light, he turns it into gloom
and makes it deep darkness.

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

Jeremiah 13:18-19

(Nehushta, 2 Kings 24:8)

Say to the king (Jehoiachin) and the queen mother; “Take a lowly seat, for your beautiful crown has come down from your head.”
The towns of the Negeb are shut up with no one to open them;
all Judah is taken into exile, wholly taken into exile.

Jeremiah 13:20-21 (the text is unclear)

Lift up your eyes and see those who come from the north.

Where is the flock that was given you, your beautiful flock?

What will you say when your sheep are taken from you?

Will not pangs take hold of you, like those of a woman in labour?

Jeremiah 13:22-27

If you say in your heart, “Why have these things come upon me?”

it is for the greatness of your iniquity

that your skirts are lifted up, and you are violated.

Can Ethiopians change their skin or leopards their spots?

Can you do good who are accustomed to do evil?

I will scatter you like chaff driven by the wind from the desert.

This is your lot, the portion I have measured out to you, says YHWH,

because you have forgotten me and trusted in lies.

I myself will lift up your skirts over your face,

and your shame will be seen.

I have seen your abominations,

your adulteries and neighings, your shameless prostitutions

on the hills of the countryside.

Woe to you, O Jerusalem!

How long will it be before you are made clean?

Jerusalem 14:1-6

The word of YHWH that came to Jeremiah concerning the **drought**:

Judah mourns and her gates languish. (no market)

They lie in gloom on the ground, and the cry of Jerusalem goes up.

Her nobles send their servants for water;

they come to the cisterns, they find no water,

they return with their vessels empty.

They are ashamed and dismayed and cover their heads,

because the ground is cracked.

Because there has been no rain on the land

the farmers are dismayed; they cover their heads.

Even the doe in the field forsakes her newborn fawn

because there is no grass.

The wild asses stand on the bare heights, they pant for air like jackals;

their eyes fail because there is no herbage.

Jeremiah 14:7-9

Although our iniquities testify against us,
act, YHWH, for your name's sake.

Our apostasies indeed are many, and we have sinned against you.

O hope of Israel, its saviour in time of trouble,
why should you be like a stranger in the land,

like a traveler turning aside for the night? (Luke 2:7)

Why should you be like someone confused,
like a mighty warrior who cannot give help?

Yet you, YHWH, are in the midst of us,

and we are called by your name; do not forsake us!

Jeremiah 14:10-11

Thus says YHWH concerning this people:
Truly they have loved to wander,
they have not restrained their feet;
therefore YHWH does not accept them,
now he will remember their iniquity
and punish their sins.

YHWH said to me:

Do not pray for the welfare of this people. (7:16; 11:14)

Although they fast, I do not hear their cry, and
although they offer burnt offering and grain offering,
I do not accept them; but by the sword, by famine,
and by pestilence I consume them.

Jeremiah 14:13-14

Then I said: “Ah, Lord YHWH! Here are the prophets saying to them, ‘You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you true peace in this place.’”

YHWH said to me: The prophets are prophesying lies in my name; I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds.

Jeremiah 14:15-16

Therefore thus says YHWH concerning the prophets who prophesy in my name though I did not send them, and who say, “Sword and famine shall not come on this land”: By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed. And the people to whom they prophesy shall be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem, victims of famine and sword. There shall be no one to bury them – themselves, their wives, their sons, and their daughters. For I will pour out their wickedness upon them.

Jeremiah 14:17-19

You shall say to them this word:

Let my eyes run down with tears night and day,

and let them not cease,

for the virgin daughter – my people – is struck down

with a crushing blow, with a very grievous wound.

If I go out into the field, look – those killed by the sword!

And if I enter the city, look – those sick with famine!

For both prophet and priest ply their trade throughout the land,

and have no knowledge.

Have you completely rejected Judah? Does your heart loathe Zion?

Why have you struck us down so that there is no healing for us?

We look for peace, but find no good;

for a time of healing, but there is terror instead.

Jeremiah 14:20-22

We acknowledge our wickedness, YHWH,
the iniquity of our ancestors,
for we have sinned against you.

Do not spurn us, for your name's sake;
do not dishonour your glorious throne;
remember and do not break your covenant with us.

(Jeremiah 33:21; Psalm 89:30-34)

Can any idols of the nations bring rain?

Or can the heavens give showers?

Is it not you, YHWH our God?

We set our hope on you,
for it is you who do all this.