

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

King Josiah killed 609

Carchemish 605 Babylonian army defeats Assyrian and Egyptian armies

Part I: 06. Jeremiah 4:5 – 6:30



## Jeremiah 4:5-8

Declare in Judah, and proclaim in Jerusalem, and say:

Blow the trumpet through the land; shout aloud and say,

“Gather together, and let us go into the fortified cities!”

Raise a standard toward Zion, flee for safety, do not delay,

for I am bringing evil from the north (1:14-15),

and a great destruction.

A lion has gone up from its thicket,

a destroyer of nations has set out;

he has gone out from his place to make your land a waste;

your cities will be ruins without inhabitant.

Because of this put on sackcloth, lament and wail:

“The fierce anger of YHWH has not turned away from us.”

Jeremiah has a lot to say about divine punishment. This is to be expected for he lived through the capture of Jerusalem in 598 and its destruction in 587.

## Jeremiah 4:9-12

On that day, says YHWH, courage shall fail the king and the officials; the priests shall be appalled and the prophets astounded.

Then I said, “Ah, Lord YHWH, how utterly you have deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, ‘It shall be well with you,’ even while the sword is at the throat!” (false prophets! see 14:13)

At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem:

A hot wind (sirocco) comes from me out of the bare heights in the desert toward my poor people, not to winnow or cleanse – a wind too strong for that.

Now it is I (Jeremiah) who speak in judgment against them.

## Jeremiah 4:13-18

Look! He comes up like clouds, his chariots like the whirlwind;  
his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us, for we are ruined!

O Jerusalem, wash your heart clean of wickedness  
so that you may be saved.

How long will your evil schemes lodge within you?

For a voice declares from Dan

and proclaims disaster from Mount Ephraim (just to the north!).

Tell the nations, “Here they are!” Proclaim against Jerusalem,

“Besiegers come from a distant land;  
they shout against the cities of Judah.

They have closed in around her like watchers of a field,

because she has rebelled against me, says YHWH.

Your ways and your doings have brought this upon you.

This is your doom; how bitter it is! It has reached your very heart.”

## Jeremiah 4:19-22

My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain!  
Oh, the pounding of my heart! Feelings overwhelm me;  
I cannot keep silent; I hear the sound of the trumpet, the noise of war.  
One disaster after another, the whole land is laid waste.  
Suddenly my tents are destroyed, their coverings are in tatters.  
How long must I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet?  
My people are foolish, **they do not know me**;  
they are stupid children, they have no understanding.  
They are skilled in doing evil, but do not know how to do good

Ethical decisions flow from knowing YHWH.

Jeremiah sees his anguish as his sharing in the anguish that overwhelms God at the suffering of God's people

I looked on the earth, and lo, it was **waste and void**; (Genesis 1:2)  
and to the heavens, and they had no light.

I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking,  
and all the hills moved to and fro.

I looked, and lo, there was no one at all,  
and all the birds of the air had fled. (Revert to chaos)

I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,  
and all its cities were laid in ruins  
before YHWH, before his fierce anger.

For thus says YHWH: The whole land shall be a desolation;  
**yet I will not make a full end.**

Because of this the earth shall mourn,  
and the heavens above grow black;  
for I have spoken, I have determined;  
I have not relented nor will I turn back.

## Jeremiah 4:29-31

At the noise of horseman and archer every town takes to flight;  
they enter thickets; they climb among rocks;  
all the towns are forsaken, and no one lives in them.

And you, O desolate one, what do you mean that you dress in crimson,  
that you deck yourself with ornaments of gold,  
that you enlarge your eyes with paint?

In vain you beautify yourself.

Your lovers despise you; they seek your life.

For I heard a cry as of a woman in labour,  
anguish as of one bringing forth her first child,  
the cry of daughter Zion gasping for breath,  
stretching out her hands,

“Woe is me! I am fainting before killers!”

## Jeremiah 5:1-5

Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look around and take note! Search its squares and see if you can find one person who acts justly and seeks truth – so that I may pardon Jerusalem.

(compare Genesis 18:23-32; Abraham and Sodom)

Although they say, “As YHWH lives,” yet they swear falsely.

O YHWH, do your eyes not look for truth?

You have struck them, but they felt no anguish;

you have consumed them, but they refused to take correction.

They have made their faces harder than rock;

they have refused to turn back.

Then I said, “These are only the ignorant (יְדֹלִים), they have no sense;

for they do not know the way of YHWH, the law of their God.

Let me go to the important people (הַגְּדֹלִים) and speak to them;

surely they know the way of YHWH, the law of their God.”

But they all alike had broken the yoke, they had burst the bonds.



## Jeremiah 5:6-9

Therefore a lion from the forest shall kill them,  
a wolf from the desert shall destroy them.

A leopard is watching against their cities;  
everyone who goes out of them shall be torn in pieces –  
because their transgressions are many, their apostasies are great.

How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken me,  
and have sworn by those who are no gods.

When I fed them to the full, they committed adultery  
and trooped to the houses of prostitutes.

They were well-fed lusty stallions,  
each neighing for his neighbour's wife.

Shall I not punish them for these things? says YHWH;  
and shall I not bring retribution on a nation such as this?

## Holladay (Volume 1, 182)

There are many surprises in these verses. What sounds like a barked military command by Yahweh quickly becomes a search for an honest man in Jerusalem (v 1), so that he might pardon her as he might have pardoned Sodom of old. Jeremiah for his part marvels at the intransigence of his people ... The end of the new covenant passage (31:33-34) will offer several echoes of this passage. Whereas now each male neighs for his neighbour's wife, then no one will need to teach his neighbour; whereas now the people do not know the law of their God, neither poor nor great, then the law will be written on the heart so that they will all know God, from the least of them to the greatest; whereas there is little hope now that Yahweh will pardon Israel, then he will pardon their sins. If we are to understand the new covenant in chapter 31 as a description of Yahweh's solution in the future to the present tangle between himself and Israel, then we must understand the present passage as a central description of that tangle.

## Jeremiah 5:10-12

Go up through her vine-rows and destroy,

but do not make a full end. (see 4:27)

Strip away her branches, for they are not YHWH's.

For the house of Israel and the house of Judah

have been utterly faithless to me, says YHWH.

They have denied YHWH,

and have said, "He will do nothing.

No evil will come upon us, and we shall not see sword or famine."

## Jeremiah 5:13-14

The prophets are nothing but wind,  
for the word is not in them.

Thus shall it be done to them!

Therefore thus says YHWH, the God of hosts:

Because they have spoken this word,

I am now making my words in your mouth a fire,  
and this people wood, and the fire shall devour them.

## Jeremiah 5:15-17

I am going to bring upon you a nation from far away, O house of Israel, says YHWH. It is an enduring nation, it is an ancient nation,

a nation whose language you do not know,

nor can you understand what they say.

Their quiver is like an open tomb; all of them are mighty warriors.

They shall eat up your harvest and your food;

they shall eat up your sons and your daughters;

they shall eat up your flocks and your herds;

they shall eat up your vines and your fig trees;

they shall destroy with the sword

your fortified cities in which you trust.

## Deuteronomy 28:49-52

‘YHWH will bring a nation from far away, from the end of the earth, to swoop down on you like an eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, a grim-faced nation showing no respect to the old or favour to the young. It shall consume the fruit of your livestock and the fruit of your ground until you are destroyed, leaving you neither grain, wine, and oil, nor the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock, until it has made you perish. It shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout your land; it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout the land that YHWH your God has given you.’

## Jeremiah 5:18-19

But even in those days, says YHWH,  
I will not make a full end of you.

When your people say,

“Why has YHWH our God done all these things to us?”

you shall say to them,

“As you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your land,  
so you shall serve strangers in a land that is not yours.”

## Jeremiah 5:20-22

Declare this in the house of Jacob, proclaim it in Judah:

Hear this (אָעֲרָא, Deuteronomy 6:4), O foolish and senseless people,  
who have eyes, but do not see, who have ears, but do not hear.

(quoted by Jesus: Mark 8:18)

## Isaiah 6:10

Make the mind of this people dull.

Stop their ears, and shut their eyes,  
so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears,  
and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed.”

Do you not fear me? says YHWH. Do you not tremble before me?

I placed the sand as a boundary for the sea,

a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; (Genesis 1:9)

though the waves writhe, they cannot prevail,

though they roar, they cannot pass over it.



## Jeremiah 5:23-25

But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart;  
they have turned aside and gone away.  
They do not say in their hearts,  
“Let us fear YHWH our God,  
who gives the rain in its season,  
the autumn rain and the spring rain,  
and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest.”

Your iniquities have turned these away.  
Your sins have deprived you of good.

## Jeremiah 5:26-29

For scoundrels are found among my people;  
they take over the goods of others.

Like fowlers they set a trap; they catch human beings.

Like a cage full of birds, their houses are full of treachery.

Therefore they have become great and rich,  
they have grown fat and sleek.

They know no limits in deeds of wickedness;  
they do not judge with justice the cause of the orphan,  
to make it prosper, and they do not defend the rights of the needy.

Shall I not punish them for these things? says YHWH,  
and shall I not bring retribution on a nation such as this?

## Jeremiah 5:30-31

An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land:  
the prophets prophesy falsely,  
and the priests rule as the prophets direct;  
my people love to have it so,  
but what will you do when the end comes?

## Jeremiah 6:1-5

Flee for safety, O children of Benjamin!

Flee from the midst of Jerusalem!

Blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and raise a signal on Beth-haccherem (?);  
for evil looms out of the north (1:14), and great destruction.

I have likened daughter Zion to the loveliest pasture.

Shepherds with their flocks shall come into her.

They shall pitch their tents around her; (siege: 2Kings 25:1; Jeremiah 34:6-7)  
they shall graze, each in its own area.

“Prepare war against her; up, and let us attack at noon!”

“Woe to us, for the day declines, the shadows of evening lengthen!”

“Up, and let us attack by night, and destroy her palaces!”

## Amos 3:9-11

Proclaim to the strongholds in Ashdod,  
and to the strongholds in the land of Egypt,  
and say, “Assemble yourselves on Mount Samaria,  
and see what great tumults are within it,  
and what oppressions are in its midst.”

They do not know how to do right, says YHWH,  
those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds.

Therefore thus says the Lord YHWH:

An adversary shall surround the land,  
and strip you of your defence;  
and your strongholds shall be plundered.

## Jeremiah 6:6-8

For thus says YHWH of hosts:

Cut down her trees;

cast up a siege ramp against Jerusalem.

This is the city that must be punished;

there is nothing but oppression within her.

As a well keeps its water fresh,

so she keeps fresh her wickedness;

violence and destruction are heard within her;

sickness and wounds are ever before me.

Take warning, O Jerusalem,

or I shall turn from you in disgust,

and make you a desolation,

an uninhabited land.

## Jeremiah 6:9-12

Thus says YHWH of hosts:

Glean thoroughly as a vine the remnant of Israel;  
like a grape-gatherer, pass your hand again over its branches.

To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear?

See, their **ears are closed**, they cannot listen.

The word of YHWH is to them an object of scorn;  
they take no pleasure in it.

But I am full of the wrath of YHWH; I am weary of holding it in.

Pour it out on the children in the street,  
and on the gatherings of young men as well;  
both husband and wife shall be taken, the old folk and the very aged.

Their houses shall be turned over to others,  
their fields and wives together; for I will stretch out my hand  
against the inhabitants of the land, says YHWH.

## Jeremiah 6:13-15

For from the least to the greatest of them,  
everyone is greedy for unjust gain;  
and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely.  
They have treated the wound of my people carelessly,  
saying, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace.  
They acted shamefully, they committed abomination;  
yet they were not ashamed, they did not know how to blush.  
Therefore they shall fall among those who fall;  
at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says YHWH.



## Jeremiah 6:16

Thus says YHWH:

Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths,  
where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.

(nepesh)

But they said, “We will not walk in it.”



## Jeremiah 6:17-19

I raised up sentinels for you:

“Give heed to the sound of the trumpet!”

But they said, “We will not give heed.”

Therefore hear, O nations,

and know, O congregation, what will happen to them.

Hear, O earth; I am going to bring disaster on this people,

the fruit of their schemes, because they have not given heed

to my words; and as for my teaching (תּוֹרַתִּי), they have rejected it.

## Jeremiah 6:20-21

Of what use to me is frankincense that comes from Sheba,  
or sweet cane from a distant land?

Your burnt offerings are not acceptable,  
nor are your sacrifices pleasing to me.

Therefore thus says YHWH: See, I am laying before this people  
stumbling blocks against which they shall stumble;  
parents and children together, neighbour and friend shall perish.

## Jeremiah 6:22-25

Thus says YHWH:

See, a people is coming from the land of the north,  
a great nation is stirring from the farthest parts of the earth.

They grasp the bow and the javelin, they are cruel and have no mercy,  
their sound is like the roaring sea; they ride on horses,  
equipped like a warrior for battle, against you, O daughter Zion!

“We have heard news of them, our hands fall helpless;  
anguish has taken hold of us, pain as of a woman in labour.

Do not go out into the field, or walk on the road;  
for the enemy has a sword, **terror is on every side.**”

‘I hear the whispering of many – terror is on every side!’ (Psalm 31:13)

## Jeremiah 6:26-30

O my poor people, put on sackcloth, and roll in ashes;  
make mourning as for an only child, most bitter lamentation:  
for suddenly the destroyer will come upon us.

I have made you a tester and a refiner among my people  
so that you may know and test their ways.

They are all stubbornly rebellious, going about with slanders;  
they are bronze and iron, all of them act corruptly.

The bellows blow fiercely, the lead is consumed by the fire;  
in vain the refining goes on, for the wicked are not removed.

They are called “rejected silver,” for YHWH has rejected them.

## Jeremiah 6:27

I have made you a tester and a refiner among my people  
so that you may know and test their ways.

Jeremiah has been given by God the task of seeing if it is possible to separate the innocent from the guilty, much as someone tries to separate silver from dross. It was customary to pour lead in as part of the smelting procedure. The trouble is that the conflagration is so extreme that the bellows are damaged and the lead is consumed. The process fails. The people are so stubborn that it is impossible to syphon off the innocent. Everyone will undergo the catastrophe.