

OpenTheo

Jeremiah 4 - 5



Jeremiah - Steve Gregg

In this passage, Steve Gregg references Jeremiah 4 and 5 which sounds a trumpet warning of the Babylonians' impending destruction. He discusses the importance of being loyal to God even when false prophets arise, and highlights the social injustice and false teachings present in organized religion today. He emphasizes the need for individuals to be truly born again and following the headship of Christ rather than playing into positions of influence and power. Overall, Gregg encourages his audience to seek a genuine, personal relationship with God and to remain faithful even in difficult times.

Transcript

We're now in Jeremiah chapter 4 and he said, and God has been making an appeal in chapter 3, sort of a hypothetical appeal to the kingdom in the north, to Israel. I say hypothetical because there is no kingdom in the north at the time when Jeremiah is living. The northern kingdom had been destroyed decades earlier by the Assyrians and had been dispersed and intermingled and intermarried with non-Jewish people so that the people to the north were not really distinctly Israelites at all.

But he has been saying that the people of the northern kingdom, who were in fact very guilty of the crimes that brought the judgment upon them, were not as guilty as the people of the southern kingdom who were still alive because they of Judah had seen what happened to Israel and should have taken warning. They knew that God meant business and God had warned Israel to the north of the impending disaster and they had not repented and then God fulfilled his threats. And now God's been warning Judah and he's going to fulfill his threats to them too and they should know that because they've seen what happened to Israel.

So he says Israel is actually more justified than Judah in that Judah has had less excuse for not taking the prophets seriously. Having seen what happened to Israel, they should know that God will fulfill his threats. But then he is, as it were, prophesied in the northern direction toward where Israel used to be and saying, return to me.

Now what's up there is not Jews anymore, but basically the people who became the

Samaritans at a later time, people who are mixed racial. But the invitation is to people who are therefore not strictly Jewish, but who will come to Zion under the terms of the new covenant. And Jeremiah in chapter 4 introduces the idea of a circumcised heart.

As far as I know, he's the only person before the time of Paul that spoke in this way. And it says in chapter 4 verse 1, If you will return, O Israel, says the Lord, return to me. And if you will put away your abominations, which usually means idolatry, out of my sight, then you shall not be moved.

And you shall swear the Lord lives in truth, in judgment and in righteousness. The nation shall bless themselves in him. Now nations is Gentiles.

So we're looking at Gentiles as well as Jews in this picture. And this is, of course, the messianic hope of the messianic age. Ultimately, the Gentiles will bless themselves in him and in him they shall glory.

Now that says they shall glory in Yahweh. They shall glory in the Lord. This is something that an idea of glorying in God comes up in Jeremiah chapter 9. Also, in verse 24, where he says, but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am Yahweh, exercising loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth.

For in these I delight, says Yahweh, says the Lord. Now, he says a man should glory in the fact that he knows God. Now, in that passage in Jeremiah 9, the previous verse says, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom.

Let not the mighty man glory in his might. Let not the rich man glory in his riches. What do people glory in? What does the word glory even mean in a context like this? It means essentially to have confidence in or to boast in something.

The rich man's boast is that he's got riches. He can trust in those in the day of trial. Or the strong man in his strength.

Or the wise man can lean on his wisdom. He boasts in his wisdom. That's what's going to keep him out of trouble.

He says people shouldn't boast in those things. They should boast in the Lord only. To glory in the Lord.

And in chapter 4, verse 2, it says the nation shall bless themselves in him, that is in the Lord, and they shall glory in him. Now Paul, both in 1st and 2nd Corinthians, brings this up and actually quotes from Jeremiah. Though it's not really an exact quote from Jeremiah as we have the text, but he's referring to Jeremiah.

In 1st Corinthians chapter 1 and verse, well I'd like to start reading it, verse 26 through 31. It says, For you see your calling, brethren, in the church, that not many wise

according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. Therefore they can't glory in their wisdom or in their might or in their nobility.

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise. And God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty. Remember Jeremiah said don't let the mighty man glory in his might or the rich man his riches or the wise man his wisdom.

God has chosen weak and foolish things. So they can't glory in wisdom and they can't glory in their might. And he's chosen base things of the world and things which are despised God has chosen.

And the things which are not to bring to nothing those that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him you are in Christ Jesus who became for us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption that as it is written he who glories let him glory in the Lord. Now as it is written is actually a reference to Jeremiah chapter 9 and verse 24.

Although it's not quite verbatim because Jeremiah said let him that glories glory in this that he understands and knows me that I am the Lord. But he abbreviates the statement and who glory should glory in the Lord not in their might not in their wisdom not in their riches. And so God hasn't chosen or the people who have responded to God are not primarily the wise and the rich and the mighty.

Those people have something else to lean on. The people who are weak the people who are foolish the people who are poor they tend to come to God in larger percentages. And that is not because being mighty or wise or rich is a bad thing in itself.

It's just that it provides an alternative thing for someone to put their confidence in other than God. And so people who have that option often do that. In 2nd Corinthians 10 17 Paul quotes that verse again.

2nd Corinthians 10 17 Paul says but he who glories let him glory in the Lord. And in this case Paul is talking about how he's not boasting in successes and fruit of ministry that wasn't his own. And he doesn't exert his authority beyond that which is his proper measure.

He's not trying to promote himself or glory in anything except the Lord. In other words if we're going to find something to be proud of so to speak to boast in it should be that we know God. And Jeremiah says in chapter 4 in verse 2 that that's what the Gentiles will do who come to Christ in the new covenant.

They'll glory in God. They won't glory in their nationality. They won't glory in their natural circumstances or their rank or whatever.

They'll all come down to one level where we're all one in Christ and our only boast is that we are in Christ. And verse 3 says for thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem. Break up your fallow ground and do not sow among thorns.

Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and take away the front foreskins of your hearts. You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Lest my fury come forth like fire and burn so that no one can quench it because of the evil of your doings.

Now he says circumcise yourselves to the Lord. Well all these people no doubt were circumcised. That was customary just like all babies in Europe in the Middle Ages were baptized.

They were all Catholic and Catholics baptized their babies. So everyone living in Europe in the Middle Ages was baptized. But they weren't believers.

They might boast in their baptism. If someone said well are you going to heaven? Yeah I was baptized as a baby. I still meet people occasionally who have that kind of an attitude.

Well I was baptized when I was a baby so I'm saved. I'm a Christian. But Jews were circumcised as infants.

And that was their boast. I'm one of God's people because I was circumcised. And they felt that that was not related to anything that was really going on in their lives and their hearts.

And so Jeremiah says well you need to circumcise yourselves in another way. You're already circumcised but you need to be re-circumcised. This time you need to take away the foreskins of your heart.

Now the foreskin removed in circumcision was considered that which made a person unclean. Just because the clean people were the Jews and they were circumcised. So the uncircumcised Philistines for example were considered to be disgusting just because they were not Jews really.

Because they were not in the covenant with God and their uncircumcised foreskins were the evidence that they weren't godly people. They weren't of the people of God or else they would have been circumcised. And therefore the foreskin speaks of uncleanness.

And when he says remove the foreskin from your heart he's talking about the uncleanness of your heart. And Paul as I said is the next person after Jeremiah to make reference to this. In Romans chapter 2 and verse 28 and 29 Paul said for he is not a Jew who is one outwardly.

Nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly

and circumcision is that of the heart. In the spirit and not in the letter whose praise is not from men but from God.

So he's saying to be a Jew outwardly to be circumcised in the flesh isn't something that God even reckons as being significant. And that was a surprise to the Jews of Paul's day as with Jews of any day it would be. They thought they were God's chosen people because they were Jewish because they were circumcised.

They said well being Jewish outwardly that's not being Jewish as far as God's concerned. Being circumcised physically that's not being circumcised in any sense that God cares about. He said you need to be a Jew inwardly and you need to be circumcised in the heart.

Paul said in Philippians to a church that was largely Gentiles there were very few Jews in the city of Philippi. We know when Paul came to Philippi he didn't find a synagogue there. He had to actually go down to the riverside and meet a few Jewish women who were meeting on the Sabbath.

Because that's what Jews did when there weren't as many as 10 adult male Jews in a city. In the diaspora of the Jews around the Gentile world if there were 10 adult males of the Jewish population in the city they'd have a synagogue. If they had less than that they would still observe Sabbath but they wouldn't build a synagogue.

The Jews that were there would just go out under a tree or by a riverside or something and read scriptures and meditate on God and pray. That's what Paul found in Philippi. There were not so many as 10 Jewish males in Philippi.

In fact the first convert there was a Jewish woman Lydia. In the Philippian church which is obviously predominantly Gentiles since there's so few Jews there. Paul said to them in Philippians 3 and verse 3. For we are the circumcision.

Now Paul was Jewish and you might think well he's talking about himself as a Jew. He's the circumcision but he says no. We means himself and his readers and they're Gentiles.

We are the circumcision who worship God in the spirit. Who rejoice in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. To say we put no confidence in the flesh I think he means we don't put any confidence in being Jewish.

In being physically circumcised. Of course his readers being Gentiles couldn't put any confidence in that anyway. But Paul could have but neither he nor they put any confidence in physical attributes but rather in spiritual of the heart.

They worship God in the spirit. They rejoice in Christ Jesus. That's what being circumcised in the heart means.

Now Jeremiah of course didn't know about rejoicing in Christ Jesus. But he did know about God and he knew that God was looking at the heart. And that people should be glorying not in the flesh.

Not in the fact they were Jews and hoping that being Jews was going to save them from the Babylonians. But rather they realized that they are unclean in their hearts and need to be clean there too. And he said in verse 4 Jeremiah 4. Lest my fury come forth like fire and burn so that no one can quench it.

The idea of unquenchable fire is common in the prophets. It's not referring to hell. Although we think of the term unquenchable fire in the New Testament.

And we sometimes apply it to hell. Jesus said in Gehenna the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. But he's simply using language from Isaiah chapter 66 and verse 24.

Where Isaiah does not seem to be talking about hell. He's talking about the condition of corpses. He said their corpses shall be piled up and their fire will not be quenched.

And the fire that is not quenched in the Old Testament is just God's wrath in judgment. And in most cases it's the Assyrians judging Israel. Or the Babylonians judging Judah.

That is the conquest of these nations was God's wrath. And it's likened in the imagery of judgment to fire. And when it says it's unquenchable or it is not quenched.

What it means in those passages is what it actually states in this passage. No one can quench it. To say it's unquenchable doesn't mean it's an eternal fire.

It doesn't mean it could never go out. It means no one can resist God's judgment. No human being could quench the fire of God's wrath when he brings it.

And so unquenchable fire just means as it says here no one can quench it. Many people just assume unquenchable means a fire that will never go out. And it will be burning forever and ever and ever.

But the unquenchable adjective means by man's efforts no one can quench it. It's not something that man could resist. Verse 5. So it's like he's sounding a trumpet of warning that the Babylonians are coming.

They're not at the moment when he's speaking. He's seen it prophetically. But he's warning them you better get inside the fortress and shut the gates because the enemy is coming.

Of course literally that wouldn't do them any good. They did in fact go into the city and shut the gates. But Babylon breached the walls anyway and destroyed them.

So he's not really saying there's going to be safety there. What he's saying is it's time for you to react as people who are under siege or who are under attack because you are. And he says the lion has come up from his thicket.

That's Babylon is the lion. Daniel sees Babylon as a lion too. In Daniel 7 when the four beasts come out of the sea, the first one is like a lion and it's Babylon.

In Daniel 7, the opening verses. The lion has come up from his thicket and the destroyer of nations is on his way. He has gone forth from his place to make your land desolate.

Your cities will be laid waste without inhabitants. For this clothe yourself with sackcloth, lament and wail, for the fierce anger of the Lord has not turned back from us. And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord, that your heart, excuse me, the heart of the king shall perish and the heart of the princes.

The priests shall be astonished and the prophets shall wonder. There you have the king, the priests, the prince, the priests, the prophets again. Then I said, ah, Lord, surely you have greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem saying you shall have peace.

Whereas the sword reaches to the heart. That is, we are in fact not going to have peace. We are going to be stabbed in the heart.

We're going to be destroyed as a nation. But God, you have told us you've deceived these people with the message that we will have peace. Now, what is Jeremiah referring to here? God hadn't promised peace.

He was promising judgment. Why does he say the Lord had deceived them by saying they'll have peace? Well, you'll see if you look at chapter 5 and verse 12, it's talking about the false prophets in Jerusalem. And it says they have lied about the Lord and said it is not he.

That is, the Babylonians, it is not the judgment of God as Jeremiah says it is. Neither will evil come upon us, nor shall we see sword or famine. Now, the false prophets were claiming there'd be peace and the people were believing them.

Why does Jeremiah then say that God was deceiving them? Well, I believe it's because he's saying that God has turned them over to the false prophets. We have evidence of this in other passages of scripture like 1 Kings chapter 22. When God wanted to judge Ahab, God put a lying spirit in the mouth of his prophets to convince him to go and fight a battle that he would die in at Ramoth Gilead.

You can read the chapter if you want to, but there's a prophet there named Micaiah who saw a vision. And in his vision he saw heaven. And in heaven God had all the angels and such gathered around him and he said, who will go and persuade Ahab to fall at Ramoth Gilead? And the prophet says he heard one angel or one spirit made one suggestion, one

made another, and finally one came up and said, I will persuade him.

And the Lord said, how? And the spirit said, I'll be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the Lord said, go and do so. And Micaiah said, therefore know that the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of your prophets.

Now you might say, well, that's not very nice of the Lord to deceive them like that. But it was also the Lord who was revealing through Micaiah that that was a lying spirit. Notice God was telling the truth as well.

They got to choose, would they go with the lying spirit that was put in the mouth of their prophets or would they go with the prophet of Yahweh? But God had sent the lying spirit to the mouth of the prophets. These false prophets were in a sense God's judgment upon them. He was warning them that those prophets are false.

But since people were determined not to listen to Jeremiah, it was driving them to believe the false prophets. There's a sense in which God seems to be deceiving the people by sending them this strong delusion. And that's what the New Testament says God will do to it.

It's part of the character of God that we don't really reflect on very much and maybe we don't feel very comfortable with. But in 2 Thessalonians 2, beginning at verse 9-12, it says, The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

This sets a picture for us that God sends the truth to people and if they don't love the truth and don't receive the truth and they prefer their unrighteous ways and reject the truth, God says, okay, then I'll send you what you want. You don't want truth? I'll send you a deception. And He says God sends them strong deception.

Now that deception comes with the power of Satan, He says. The man of sin comes with the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders. But it is God who releases this deception on them.

And so also the false prophets, no doubt they were speaking from Satanic sources. But it was God that unleashed them, just like the lying spirit, it was no doubt a demonic spirit that came and asked permission from God to go to the mouth of Ahab's prophets and God said, go ahead. So that it is the devil who's the liar and it's God who sends him.

You know, there's a warning about this in Deuteronomy chapter 13 about false prophets and it's interesting how God is complicit with them in the passage. In Deuteronomy 13, and by the way, since Jeremiah had read Deuteronomy, recently rediscovered book, he

might have been even aware of this. In fact, this could even be what he's referring to.

He said, Lord, why have you deceived these people? He means through the false prophets. In Deuteronomy 13, 1, it says, if there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams and he gives you a sign or a wonder and the sign or the wonder comes to pass of which he spoke to you saying, let us go after other gods, which you have not known and let us serve them. Here's a prophet that gives a sign that comes true.

There's some kind of seemingly supernatural backup to this false prophet. Apparently demonic, we would assume. And his message is to draw them away from Yahweh.

Notice verse 3. You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul. Moses said that God would test the people of Israel by allowing false prophets, apparently demonically inspired false prophets to tempt them, to test them, to see if they will stay loyal to God or if they'll go after these other gods. It's apparently, I mean, that's, we know it's God's policy to test people.

That's why he put Adam and Eve in a garden where there's a serpent. It was God who put the serpent there. The serpent didn't make itself.

And it was God who put Adam and Eve in the same garden with the serpent instead of somewhere far from him where he would never, they'd never encounter him. God set things up for there to be a test. So also with false prophets, when false prophets come, God is setting things up to be a test.

When Mormons tell me, you know, would you be willing to pray and ask God if Joseph Smith is a prophet? I say, no, I would not. Because he is leading away from the true God. His teachings are contrary to the teachings of Jesus and of the Bible.

Therefore, if I am not loyal to what I know to be true, God himself could send me a strong delusion. I believe that when Mormons have this inward witness and this burning in their bosom that confirms to them that Joseph Smith is a prophet, that's the sign or the wonder by which he says, let's go after other gods. They don't realize the Lord is testing them.

They should say, wait a minute, I'm not going to believe that. This is not what God says. This is not what the word of God says.

And people who succumb to these false religions, they have been tested. Those religions are there because God allows them to be there to test the loyalty of people. And those who succumb to them have failed the test.

The people of Jeremiah's time were failing the test. God had allowed these false prophets

to come to test them. And the people were deceived by them.

Therefore, in a sense, Jeremiah says, you've deceived these people with this message of peace. Well, in a sense, that's true. But God wasn't deceiving.

The false prophets were. God was allowing the prophets to come to give their false messages. He wasn't stopping them, in other words.

And allowing the people to be tested and the people's failure to hold fast to what God said and going along with what the prophets said is their failure of the test and their deception. In other words, they were in a situation that God had put them in to test them. Their failure resulted in their deception.

So, God was sort of behind that deception somewhat. Just like He was when He sent a lion spirit to the prophets of Baal. But in both cases, here and in the case of Micaiah, God said, okay, there's a false prophet here.

There's a false teaching. Don't listen to them. I'm telling you.

So, if they listen to the false prophets that God sent the lion spirit to, is that God's fault? He's already told them not to listen to them. And way back in Deuteronomy, God warned them. There's going to be these false prophets.

They're going to do signs and wonders. God's testing you. Don't go for it.

There's never an excuse for people to go for the false prophets. God allows the deceiver to come so that the truth, there's actually a war between truth and error. And we decide which loyalty, which side we'll be on.

Verse 11, At that time it will be said to the people and to Jerusalem, a dry wind of a desolate heights blows in the wilderness toward the daughter of my people, not to fan or to cleanse. A wind too strong for these will come for me. Now I will also speak judgment against them.

This wind is not going to be useful as the wind they used to fan and purge the grain floors when they separate the wheat from the chaff, they would use a shovel like item, a fan. And they'd throw the grain, the wheat and the chaff into the air. And the wind would blow the chaff when the grain would fall back down.

They'd keep doing this till the chaff was all separated. So a wind could be a useful thing. But he said that another wind that's coming is too strong for that.

It's not going to be a good or useful wind. It's a wind of judgment coming. It says, behold, he shall come up like the clouds and his chariots like a whirlwind.

His horses are swifter than Eagles. Whoa, to us for we are plundered. It's referring to the

Babylonians coming.

Oh, Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness that you may be saved. This is another way of saying the same thing as circumcise your heart. You got dirty hearts.

You need to be cleansed. Wash your heart from wickedness that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you? For a voice declares from Dan and proclaims affliction from Mount Ephraim.

Make mention to the nations. Yes, proclaim against Jerusalem that watchers come from a far country and raise their voice against the cities of Judah like keepers of a field. They are against her all around because she has been rebellious against me, says the Lord, your ways and your doings have procured these things for you.

This is your wickedness because it is bitter because it reaches to your heart. Now, what a prophet is able to do is see behind the events to the reason for them, the divine reason for them. Anyone can see that the nation's in trouble.

Anyone can see that Babylon, which has previously conquered a Syrian and Egypt and other nations is also coming and looks like they may conquer Judah too. It doesn't take a prophet to know that what it takes a prophet to tell us is why, why is this happening and what could be done if what to get God's rescue. It's the prophet who could say, this is a judgment from God.

He's, he's got this complaint about you. Here's what he's requiring of you. When the towers fell in New York on nine 11, lots of people said it's a judgment from God on America.

Is it? I don't know. Maybe it is. Maybe it's not.

I don't have a prophet informing me. All I know is it's an event without a prophet to say, this is a judgment from God. Then we don't know if it's just a coincidence or if it's really significant.

That's where profits come in handy. Lots of people thought that, uh, the hurricane that came against, uh, new Orleans was a judgment on new Orleans because of certain things that were going on there, uh, in the city, Katrina. Um, maybe it was, but that's, it's really just anyone's guess.

It might make sense to say, so it might say, well, new Orleans kind of had some ways in which it deserved judgment from God or New York has some ways or America has some ways in which we deserve God's judgment. But to know for sure if these events really are from God, or if they're just bad fortune, it really takes a revelation from God. And most nations have never had that.

Judah had the advantage of prophets like Jeremiah who could say, you know, this isn't just bad luck. This isn't just the course of human events, you know, flowing naturally in your direction. This is God bringing judgment upon you.

And there are ways you can avert it. That's the value of having someone who can see behind and who has the word of the Lord. Oh, my soul, my soul.

I'm in pain in my very heart. My heart makes a noise in me. I cannot hold my peace because you have heard my soul.

The sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war destruction upon destruction is cried for the whole land is plundered. Suddenly my tents are plundered and my curtains in a moment. How long will I see the standard and hear the standard? The sound of the trumpet.

There's how long will the, the emblems of warfare be a common sight in our land for my people are foolish. They have not known me. They're silly children.

They have no understanding. They're wise to do evil, but to do good, they have no knowledge. Now this passage is interesting.

We'll have to talk about it. I beheld the earth and indeed it was without form and void and the heavens. They had no light.

I beheld the mountains and indeed they trembled and all the hills moved back and forth. I beheld and indeed there was no man and all the birds of the heavens had fled. I beheld and indeed the fruitful land had become a wilderness and all its cities were broken down at the presence of the Lord by his fierce anger.

I've mentioned when we were going through Isaiah that there are people who believe in a doctrine about a pre Adamic creation. That's before Adam and Eve were created. It's called the gap theory in Genesis chapter one verse one.

It says God created the heavens and the earth and then the next verse says, and the earth was formless and void. Now the theory says formless and void was not the original condition of the earth. It became formless and void and therefore between chapter one where God created the earth and verse one and chapter one verse two where the earth was formless and void.

There must have been some changes took place because God didn't make it formless and void. It became formless and void and they say there was therefore a gap that is not recorded for us of some disaster. After God created the earth originally it eventually must have rebelled against him.

There must have been a society there before they say maybe Lucifer was there, the ruler of it. They say this could explain maybe where the dinosaurs lived and things like that.

That there was a whole society, a whole history of a humanity before Adam.

And because of Satan's rebellion and his corruption of that society it came under judgment and it got covered with water and therefore the conditions of Genesis one two came into being. The earth was formless and void. Now the Bible gives no real hint that any of this is true.

It's all speculation. It's all imagination. There's no exegetical reason to believe it but some do because they feel one thing that does is it helps us to accept the standard notions of the age of the earth.

If geologists tell us the earth is 4.5 billion years old but we can only account for a few thousand years judging from the dates given in Genesis therefore maybe the gap theory would explain some of that they say that the earth was created 4.5 billion years old and for billions of years this other society, this other history, this pre-Adamic human history and this fall and judgment came and then it's only been in the last few thousand years that Adam was created and a new chance for the world. It's all very romantic and alluring like a fantasy tale but there's really nothing in it. But where do they get scripture to support it? One thing I pointed out when we were going through Isaiah was there's a passage in Isaiah where it says that God did not make the earth in vain.

The word in vain can be translated void and is the same word that's in Genesis 1-2 the earth was formless and void. And when it says God did not make the earth in vain or void they say that proves that God didn't make the earth originally that way it had to become that way. But as we saw in that passage in vain means in vain not void in that passage because the next verse he says I did not say to Israel seek me in vain the same word.

The word void would not work there. He says I didn't make the earth in vain I made it to be inhabited and I did not tell Israel to seek me in vain. Obviously the expression in vain is a better translation in both those places than void and it's just a mistake to try to apply it to Genesis 1-2.

But likewise those who hold the gap theory use this passage. This is the other passage. There are two passages they use.

There's one in Isaiah and there's this one here and it says behold I beheld the earth and indeed it was without form and void. That expression without form and void is the same Hebrew expression in Genesis 1-2 the earth was without form and void. So they say okay now we're looking at Genesis 1-2 here.

We're looking at the earth when God first declared it was formless and void. And they say but look at this. It says the birds of the heavens had fled in verse 25 and the fruitful land had become a wilderness.

That means it had been cultivated previous to this in verse 26 and the cities were broken

down in verse 26. So this earth that was formless and void in Genesis 1-2 had a history. A history which included birds and man and cities and cultivated fields but they've all been destroyed now.

There's been a judgment of God upon it and now the earth has become formless and void in Genesis 1-2. This is the argument of the gap theory from this passage. Sorry I have to waste so much time talking about it but you do encounter it and there are lots of people who believe the gap theory and this is one of the two passages they'll use to prove their point.

But it doesn't prove their point. This is not talking about Genesis 1-2. True it does use the same expression and deliberately so.

This is describing the land of Judah after the Babylonians have denuded it and defoliated it and depopulated it. This is the result of the Babylonian destruction of the land. It is deliberately likened to the earth at the early creation before things were made.

In other words it's saying all that God had done. It's like he's pushed the reset button here. All that God had done in developing Israel has been undone.

It's gone back to square one. It's like you might as well be back at the beginning of creation when the earth was formless and void. That's what it looks like.

But it's not the beginning of creation. This is in fact when the cities of Judah and the cultivated fields have been overrun, destroyed and so forth. So this is actually not talking about the original creation in Genesis 1. This is only using language of that passage, figuratively, to liken the condition of Judah after it's been overrun by the Babylonians, likening it to the condition of the world before anything was ever made there in the first place.

So this gives no support to the gap theory. Verse 27, For thus says the Lord, the whole land shall be desolate, yet I will not make a full end. There's always a remnant that God preserves.

For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black, because I have spoken, I have purposed, and will not relent, nor will I turn back from it. The whole city shall flee from the noise of the horsemen and the bowmen. No doubt the city is Jerusalem.

They shall go into thickets and climb up on the rocks. Every city shall be forsaken, that is the other cities of Judah, and not a man shall dwell in it. And when you are plundered, what will you do? Though you clothe yourself with crimson, though you adorn yourself with ornaments of gold, though you enlarge your eyes with paint.

Now this is again picturing Judah as a woman, a wife who's an adulteress and become like a prostitute. She's going to have to go and try to invoke the pleasure of her gods to

save her, so she dresses up real pretty, puts on her best clothes, makes up her face, and goes out with her ornaments on to try to allure the false gods to come and rescue her. But in vain you will make yourself fair.

Your lovers, that is the false gods, will despise you. They will seek your life. These false gods, these pagan gods are bringing their own nations against you.

These pagan gods that you worship, their worshipers are coming to destroy you. You can't seduce them now. For I have heard a voice as a woman in labor, the anguish as of her who brings forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion bewailing herself, who spreads her hands saying, Woe is me now, for my soul is weary because of murderers.

Now chapter five. Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem and see now and know and seek in her open places if you can find a man, if there is anyone, who executes judgment, which means justice, who seeks truth, and I will pardon her. Though they say, As the Lord lives, surely they swear falsely.

Now when they say, They say, As the Lord lives, that's how you take an oath. When you're affirming that you're telling the truth, you say, As the Lord lives, I will do this. As surely as the Lord lives, I promise this is true.

That's a typical way of making oaths, but he says, They say these words as if they're swearing by Yahweh, but they're liars. They don't even know Yahweh. They don't keep their oaths.

They lie. They make oaths in the name of God as if to hold themselves honest, and yet their conscience doesn't hold them honest. They don't honor God's name, and they lie.

They swear falsely, even invoking the name of God. They're taking the name of the Lord in vain. He says, If you could find anyone in the city who loved justice and who loved truth, I'd pardon the city.

This is probably a hyperbole because Jeremiah certainly was in the city, and he loved justice and truth, and probably Baruch and a few others that were sympathetic did, but essentially it's sort of like God saying, If you could find ten righteous in Sodom, I will not destroy her. God couldn't find ten righteous in Sodom. This is somewhat more of a hyperbole.

If you could find one man, I'll spare her, but it's simply a way of emphatically saying, You can't find righteous people in this town. You can't find people who care about what's right and the truth. If you could, it'd be a different story for the city.

I'd spare them. Oh, Lord, are not your eyes on the truth? You have stricken them, but they have not grieved. You have consumed them, but they have refused to receive

correction.

They have made their faces harder than rock. They have refused to return. Therefore I said, Surely these are poor, they are foolish, for they do not know the way of the Lord, the judgment of their God.

I will go to the great men and speak to them, for they have known the way of the Lord, the judgment of their God. Now, Jeremiah is saying, I was a little naive about these people. They look pretty evil, but I thought they can't be that evil.

They must be just like foolish children. They just don't know. They just need someone to inform them.

They're just ignorant. Certainly I'll go to the older men, the priests and the elders and so forth, the people who know God, and tell them, We need to talk to these people. These people are ignorant.

Look at the ways they're going. But it says, But these, meaning the older men, the great men, who have known the way of the Lord in the past, who have known the judgment of God, these have altogether broken the yoke and burst the bonds. That is God's yoke.

They're not serving God anymore. They've broken his yoke off their necks. Therefore a lion from the forest shall slay them.

That lion is Babylon. Earlier it said a lion has come up from the thicket in chapter 4, verse 7. That was Babylon. So a lion from the forest shall slay them.

A wolf of the deserts shall destroy them. A leopard will watch over their cities. Now these are all references to Babylon here.

Though in Daniel, different animals represented different kingdoms. A lion actually was Babylon. In Daniel 7, a bear was Medo-Persia.

A leopard was Alexander the Great and the Grecian Empire. But the point is, these are standard wild animals that really attack sheep. These were the animals that threatened livestock.

God's people were sheep. They were God's flock. And he usually would protect them against animals.

David would go out and he'd fight with his bare hands against a lion or a bear to save his sheep. That's how shepherds were. Shepherds defend their flocks.

God usually defended Israel from such nations as these, but not now. They're not really like his sheep anymore. He's just going to give them up.

They're someone else's sheep now. Let the lions eat them. Let the leopards and the wolves have them.

Now remember, these are the same animals that are mentioned over in Isaiah 11, which we have seen when we were studying Isaiah, to be a passage about the present age, the Messiah's kingdom. And in that passage in Isaiah 11, 6, it said, The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb. The leopard shall lie down with the young goat.

The calf and the young lion and the fatling together. A little child shall lead them. Now this reference to these predatory animals lying down with the sheep comfortably and peaceably is, as I suggested, an emblem of these nations once hostile to Israel.

Now at peace with Israel in Christ, in the kingdom of God, the Jew and the Gentile, formerly deadly hostile toward each other, are now at peace. Christians who are Jews and Christians who are Gentiles don't have that animosity where they lie down together in peace. But here in Jeremiah, the wolf and the leopard and the lion are all very much not at peace with the sheep.

They are coming to destroy them, and God is not going to stop them. Verse 6 in the middle, it says, Everyone who goes out from there shall be torn in pieces because their transgressions are many and their backslangs have increased. How shall I pardon you for this? Your children have forsaken me and sworn by those that are not gods.

When I had fed them to the full, they committed adultery and assembled themselves by troops in the harlot's houses. They were like well-fed, lusty stallions. Everyone neighed after his neighbor's wife.

Shall I not punish him for these things, says the Lord, and shall I not avenge myself on such a nation as this? Now, this statement, Shall I not avenge myself on a nation like this? is a line that is repeated in verse 29, and it also comes up again in a later passage. I think it's chapter, I forget, later on he has, what is it? Chapter 9. Yeah, it comes up again in chapter 9. So, this rhetorical question, Shall I not judge people like this? Obviously, shall I not avenge myself on a nation like this? What I find interesting about this is there's a reference to adultery, and this time it's not spiritual adultery. This time it's not the nation personified as a woman cheating on her husband.

It's not about people neighing after their neighbor's wife. In addition to being idolatrous, they were adulterous in the ordinary sense of the word. And his complaint here is that, I fed them to the full and they went out and committed adultery.

And to the harlot's houses. And they were like stallions who just couldn't get enough sex, and they didn't care whose wives it was they were seeking. But what I find interesting is that God refers in verse 9 to his punishing for this adultery as him avenging himself.

Now, if you've ever had a wife that was adulterous, you will know that you are the wrong

party. You know you're wrong. You feel wrong.

You feel like someone's just slapped you in the face, or more like stuck a knife in your gut. You might feel like avenging yourself, because you, the husband or the wife who's been cheated on, is the one who seemingly needs to be avenged. But God says that he's going to punish them for their adulteries and avenge himself.

As if the crime of adultery is a crime against him. It is his sacred institution of marriage that is being trampled on here. And so his destruction of them for these actions is avenging himself.

He's vindicating his own cause, which is, of course, marriage. God takes it as a personal affront when people cheat on their husbands or wives, because it is his sacred institution that is being trampled upon. And he cannot endure that for very long, apparently.

Our own nation, of course, has almost institutionalized adultery, at least among the movie stars and the celebrities and so forth. And as go the celebrities, so go the worshippers. As go the deities, so go the worshippers of the deities.

And so the idols live this way, and so the population has gone this way. And adultery is, of course, often practiced somewhat shamelessly, even without the expedient of divorce. But probably more commonly, people who wish to be a little more respectable, they get a divorce first and then commit adultery.

Jesus said if you divorce your wife without proper cause and marry another, you're committing adultery. So, obviously, divorce and remarriage, in many cases, perhaps most cases, is, in fact, adultery. And so we have kind of institutionalized adultery, too.

And we might ask whether God can not avenge Himself on such a nation as this. In verse 10, Go up on her walls and destroy, but do not make a complete end. Take away her branches, for they are not the Lord's.

For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously with me, says the Lord. Interesting, he says that Judah, the people of Israel, are not His. Israel is not God's chosen people just unconditionally and permanently and so forth.

Sometimes they're His, or they have been when they've been faithful. But sometimes, he says, they're not mine. These are not my people.

They're not my branches. They've dealt treacherously with me. They have lied about the Lord and said, It is not He, neither will evil come upon us, nor shall we see sword and famine.

Now, it is not He means this danger we're in from Babylon. It's not God. It's not God judging us.

Don't listen to Jeremiah. He's wrong about that. And the prophets become wind, for their word is not in them.

The word is not in them. That is, God's word is not. Thus shall it be done to them.

Therefore, thus says the Lord God of hosts, Because you speak this word, behold, I will make my words in your mouth fire, and this people would, and it shall devour them. Now, Jeremiah's words would be like fire devouring these people. In Hosea chapter 6 and verse 5, it says that the prophets' words were like, they were like axes hewing the people, cutting the people like cutting down a tree.

The words of the prophets would feel that way to the guilty. They'd feel stabbed in their conscience by what he says. And, of course, the words would actually be a foreglimpse of the actual destruction that they were going to experience, the death and so forth.

And Jeremiah's words would consume these people as wood is consumed by fire. It'd devour them. Probably meaning the fulfillment of his predictions would do so.

His words are connected to the fulfillment inseparably because they are the words of God. And, therefore, what he speaks is identified with its actual fulfillment that will, in fact, burn them up, the judgment that's coming that he's predicting. Behold, I will bring a nation against you from afar.

O house of Israel, says the Lord, it is a mighty nation, it's 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. They are all mighty men, and they shall eat up your harvest and your bread, which your sons and daughters should eat.

They shall eat up your flocks and your herds. They shall eat up your vines and your fig trees. They shall destroy your fortified cities, in which you trust with the sword.

Nevertheless, in those days, says the Lord, I will not make a complete end. This is the third time he's said that. There's always a remnant he will preserve, who are righteous, a very small remnant, probably at this particular time.

And it will be when you say, why does the Lord our God do all these things to us? Then you shall answer them, just as you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve aliens in a land that is not yours. You brought the foreign gods here. Well, I'm going to take you to their home.

You want to worship them? This isn't their land here. You brought them here illegitimately. You want to worship them? You can go where they live.

You can go to Babylon. You brought the foreign gods to my land. I'm going to send you off to the foreign gods' own land.

And you can live there instead, if you like those gods better than me. Declare this in the house of Jacob and proclaim it in Judah, saying, Hear this now, O foolish people, without understanding, who have eyes and see not, who have ears and hear not. Do you not fear me, says the Lord? Will you not tremble at my presence? Who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea, that is, I who have done that, by a perpetual decree that it cannot pass beyond it.

The sea can't go beyond the boundary that God sets forth. Don't you fear the God who can do that? He can command the seas what to do and they obey him. And though its waves toss to and fro, yet they cannot prevail.

Though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it. But this people has a defiant and rebellious heart. They have revolted and departed.

They do not say in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God, who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season. He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest. Your iniquities have turned these things away, and your sins have withheld good things from you.

What? The rain. It said earlier, he said that the latter rain has been withheld from them. And now he says these things have been withheld from you.

They're actually experiencing a drought. God normally would send two rainy seasons in the year. The first rainy season would prepare for the planting and the sprouting of the crops.

And then there'd be a long dry season while they grew. And then they'd have a latter rain which would ripen the crops. And apparently both the latter and the early rain have been withheld from them now.

And they're not thinking, Well, you know, God's the one who gives us that. We should turn to him and see what's wrong. Maybe he's got something against us.

They're not thinking that way. They're foolish children. They don't think in their heart.

Let's turn to the Lord who gives us the former and the latter rain. Verse 26, For among my people are found wicked men. They lie in wait as one who has set snares.

They set a trap. They catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so their houses are full of deceit.

Therefore they have become great and grown rich. They have grown fat. They are sleek.

Yes, they surpass the deeds of the wicked. They do not plead the cause of the fatherless. Yet they prosper.

And the right of the needy they do not defend. Shall I not punish them for these things, says the Lord? Shall I not avenge myself? On such a nation as this, this is the second time he seems to be able to say, man, when I think about these, I just can't see how I can hold back. How could I not punish this? Now, the first time he said it was because of the rampant adultery and men going after each other's wives.

This time it's because the people who are prospering and could help the poor, they not only don't help the poor, but they don't even uphold the cause of the poor in the courts. There's social injustice here. Of course, this is the same problem Isaiah often spoke of and the other prophets.

It's a common problem that God complains about in the Old Testament is that the courts favored the rich. And the reason was because the judges were corrupt and the rich could benefit them. The rich could grease their palms.

The poor people whose cause was just couldn't do that and so the judges ignored their cause and injustice prevailed. It was institutionalized oppression of the poor. So you've got institutionalized adultery and institutional oppression of the poor.

These conditions, when a country gets in that condition, God says, you know, how can I not judge a nation like that? How could I not avenge myself on a nation like that? An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land. The prophets prophesy falsely. The priests rule by their own power.

And my people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end? This is the thing. The people, their rulers are corrupt.

You might think there'd be an outcry against that. Why do we have corrupt rulers? Why can't we get some honest men in power? Why can't we overthrow the wickedness when we've got corrupt prophets? Corrupt priests? I mean, the religious system is corrupt. The prophets are corrupt in that they will say what you want to hear instead of what God wants you to hear.

The priests, they rule the temple system and they do it by their own power, not in submission to God. By the way, that is the danger, of course, of institutionalized religion, is that once it's institutionalized, it runs like a machine. And I don't think that that's necessarily what Jesus intended to set up, but that got set up quite early on, like at least in the second century A.D., we begin to see the church is becoming institutional.

And one of the things that constitutes an institution is that it has the methods in place for its own continuation after the first generation of people in it. That is, an organization that plans to exist for a long period of time will have in its bylaws some way in which to replace board members. If their board members die or leave, they have to be replaced, so we replace them this way.

The executive director is replaced in this manner, and so forth. And when you have a secular corporation institutionalized to last for generations, they have to figure on the first generation dying off and they have to have some method by which continuation goes on. God didn't set things up in Israel that way initially.

He set it up in the time of the judges where there was no succession. When there was a need, God raised up a judge. The judge delivered Israel.

He served for his lifetime. He died, and there was no one there to replace him. There was no need to.

God expected the people just to follow God without a succession. And so God raised up another judge when there was a need. There was no institutionalized leadership.

It was more what we call a charismatic leadership. God's gifting would come on a Gideon or on a Samson, and he'd lead for a while. But when the people wanted a king, what they were asking for was an institutionalized government where when the king died, there's an automatic successor, his son.

And when his son dies, there's an automatic succession, his son. That's institutionalizing the thing so that there's succession in the authority of the leadership. And I'm not sure that God ever set up the church to have that kind of succession.

But the church set itself up that way. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, claims that the pope today is the successor of the apostles. Why? Because they say before Peter died, he appointed a successor in Rome.

When that man reached the end of his life, he appointed a successor. And before that man died, a successor was appointed so that there's been a continual succession from Peter all the way to the present pope. And therefore, the authority that the pope claims is one of the authority of succession, of an institutionalized system where leaders come up in a mechanical way rather than God raising up really spiritual men.

So what happens when you've got an institution like that, people who aren't spiritual can get into the works of it because there's offices to be held. You can get elected. You can get appointed.

You can get whatever. And then you can get the worst kinds of leaders in positions of leadership, and that's what happened in the Roman Catholic Church. That's why there was so much corruption in it in the Middle Ages.

They didn't have spiritual leaders. They had institutional leaders, leaders who were appointed by the institutional succession. And that's how the priesthood was in the Old Testament too.

A person became a priest not by being a good man but by being the son of Aaron or the son of Aaron's son or the son of Aaron's grandson. It was a hereditary succession. And so we have the priests who are ruling the religion by their own power.

That is, they have the power of natural succession. They don't have the power of spirituality or of God's, you know, they don't have godliness as their qualification. And that happens in churches.

I mentioned the Catholic Church, but it's not much better than some Protestant churches. Almost every Protestant church is set up as a corporation. And in a corporation, there's some, you know, when the pastor leaves, we have a way of appointing the new pastor.

And when he goes, we'll appoint another because we want this institution to continue beyond the lifetime of an individual. And you might say, well, isn't that the way things should be? I mean, the church has to last longer than an individual. Well, the body of Christ lasts longer than the lifetime of an individual, but an organization, which is what we call churches these days, are really organizations.

The body of Christ is a spiritual fellowship made up of people who are really born again, really have the spirit of Christ, and really are following the headship of Christ. Some of them can be found in organizations called churches. Some of them aren't.

But the point is, the organizations that we call churches aren't the church. Those are human organizations. Each one of those has been formed by some group of people who incorporate it.

So now we've got something going here. We want to keep it going. Well, the problem is, when you've got an institutionalized church like that, that you might have a very godly man who starts the church.

And his successor might be godly. But if it keeps going generation after generation, you can get people into those positions who don't know God at all, but they've just worked the system. They've just come up through the ranks.

They just know how to play their cards right to get into the positions of influence. And then eventually, they get appointed to be the pope of that organization. And then you've got people there because they love the power, not because they're godly.

And we have the same problem. Whenever institutionalized religion goes for very many generations, eventually it becomes less than it was at the beginning in terms of its purity and its spirituality. It becomes more the leaders rule by their own power.

And that was the case with the priesthood too, which God did set up in Israel. But it had its own tendency toward corruption like every other organization does. If the priests did

not themselves know God, and that was often the case that they didn't, they were just corrupt religious leaders working the system for their own financial gain or whatever.

And you'd say, well, the people should rise up against this and insist that the priests behave godly. No, my people love it this way. The priests and the prophets are doing things the way people want it to be done.

They're not pleasing God. They're pleasing the carnal desires of the people. And so he says, what can you do now? When the people are led astray by their spiritual leaders and they want to be led astray by their spiritual leaders, what will you do in the end though, he says.

And that is where we'll have to break this time.