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Jeremiah 6 - 8



Jeremiah - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg in this talk delves into Jeremiah 6-8 where the prophet warns Jerusalem of its impending destruction by the Babylonians. Jeremiah warns the people to prepare for war and turn back to God, but instead, they trust in lying words and false gods. Gregg highlights the contrast between the worthlessness of Jerusalem - which is destined for destruction - and the value of what God is building, emphasizing the importance of surrendering to Christ.

Transcript

Let's start reading at Jeremiah 6 now. Jeremiah was from Anathoth, a town in the territory of Benjamin. And it may be that that's why he addresses the children of Benjamin at this point.

It's possible he was even at his hometown preaching the sermon to the Benjamite people there. Or else he might have been in Jerusalem directing his remarks to the Benjamites of his own town or his own region. But he warns them about the coming armies and the coming judgment.

He says, O you children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee from the midst of Jerusalem. Blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and set up a signal fire in Beth Hacharim. For disaster appears out of the north, and great destruction.

I have likened the daughter of Zion to a lovely and delicate woman. The shepherds with their flocks shall come to her. They shall pitch their tents against her all around.

Each one shall pasture in his own place. Prepare war against her. Arise and let us go up at noon.

Woe to us, for the day goes away. The shadows in the evening are lengthening. Arise and let us go by night, and let us destroy her palaces.

Now this imagery is not all that intuitive. He says he likens Zion to a delicate woman encamped around by shepherds who are apparently making war against her. It doesn't

seem like a very natural image, shepherds encamping and making war against a woman.

It may be that she is a woman pictured out in the fields without protection. And the shepherds, who pretty much dominate the area, see her as an easy target for taking advantage of. I don't know exactly why shepherds and women are mixed in this particular image.

But verses 4 and 5 seem to be the words of those who want to attack Jerusalem. And they say woe to us because the day is going away, the shadows are going away. We're so eager to destroy Jerusalem, we don't have to let up for the night.

We want to just keep on fighting. Too bad the day is drawing near, and then we're going to have to desist. But then they don't desist.

Arise and let us go by night, and let us destroy her palaces. This seems to be just describing an attitude of eagerness to destroy that would almost begrudge the end of the day, that would require them to stop their assault temporarily. And so they're just continuously attacking.

That is at least what they want to do. For thus has the Lord of hosts said, Hew down trees and build a mound against Jerusalem. This is the city to be punished.

She is full of oppression in her midst. As a fountain wells up with water, so she wells up with her wickedness. Violence and plundering are heard in her.

Before me continually are grief and wounds. Be instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from you, lest I make you desolate, a land not inhabited. Thus says the Lord of hosts, They shall thoroughly glean as a vine the remnant of Israel.

As a grape gatherer, put your hand back into the branches. Now it says they'll thoroughly glean. It means they really won't leave any remnants.

But this isn't entirely true. This is something of a hyperbole. There was very, very little left behind when the Babylonians burned down the city and deported the rest of the population.

A few peasants, farmers, and other people that were not threatening to the Babylonians were left behind. But it's almost like there's no remnant at all, that this is a thorough purging, a thorough stripping of the branches. To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear? Indeed, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot give heed.

Behold, the word of the Lord is a reproach to them. They have no delight in it. Therefore I am full of the fury of the Lord.

I am weary of holding it in. I will pour it out on the children outside and on the assembly of the young men together. For even the husband shall be taken with the wife, the aged

with him who is full of days.

Now the section we're about to read, verses 12 through 15, is something of a prophecy that is repeated. It's not verbatim, at least the first part is not verbatim in the second occurrence of it, but much of the later part is. It says, and it's repeated in chapter 8, verses 10 through 12, it says, Their houses shall be turned over to others, fields and wives together.

For I will stretch out my hand against the inhabitants of the land, says the Lord. So they're going to lose their houses, their fields, and their wives. Apparently their wives will be seized as slaves by the captors and probably be used as sex slaves when they are taken back to Babylon.

So this is, I mean, to lose your house and your fields is a terrible tragedy. But to see your family destroyed this way, see your wife taken from you by captors, would just be, if you cared about your wife at all, would be just the worst possible thing you could see, except maybe seeing your children tortured or killed in front of you. But they would see that too.

Because from the least of them, even to the greatest of them, everyone is given to covetousness. And from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely. They have also healed the hurt of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace.

They were ashamed, excuse me, were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed. Nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall.

At the time I will punish them, and they shall be cast down, says the Lord. This statement that they have healed the hurt of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace. Remember what the healing was that Isaiah was talking about.

The judgment of God coming upon them because of their rebellion against him was their sickness. They were wounded. They needed healing.

No one had tended to them, Isaiah said. And then Jesus is presented as the one who will be the healer later in Isaiah. By his stripes they're healed.

He's the one who binds up the brokenhearted, so to speak, binds up the wounds. And so Isaiah has this motif running through him of the nation is sick and wounded and very much like the man who fell among thieves in the story of the Good Samaritan. No one's taking care of him.

His wounds are open. He's bleeding. There's no doubt his wounds are festering.

He's in bad shape. If someone doesn't help him soon, he's going to die. And so in Isaiah

the nation is like that because God is bringing judgment upon them for their evil and they're alienated from God, but there's no healer.

And then there comes the Messiah who is the healer. Now, Jeremiah uses the image of the wound and the healing and so forth similarly. And there is, in fact, there is no healer there, but there's fake healers.

There are false prophets who are claiming that they'll have peace. They are alleviating the fear and the stress and the tension by giving a false hope. It feels like healing because the pain is alleviated.

It's like taking an aspirin when you have a headache. It heals your headache slightly. It doesn't really heal it.

Whatever is causing the headache is still a problem, but you're numb to it. And so the false prophets were healing this disaster in the life of the community slightly like an aspirin. They were giving them a false sense of relief with a false message of peace.

Thus says the Lord, Stand in the ways and see and ask for the old paths. Where the good way is and walk in it. Then you will find rest for your souls.

And they said, we will not walk in it. Now, you will find rest for your souls. Jesus quotes it directly with reference to those who would follow him.

In Matthew 11 and verse 29, he said, Come unto me all you who labor and heavy laden. I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you.

Interesting, it's the yoke passage. Jeremiah wore a yoke too. And take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

For my yoke is easy, my burden is light, and you shall find peace to your souls. Or rest to your souls, he says. So, Jesus actually quotes Jeremiah in this one line.

And Jeremiah is telling people to try to investigate how things were done in the old days. That is back when Israel was not apostate. Ask about the old paths.

What did Moses define as the way to go? When people were doing well with God in the days of Joshua, what was the old way of living? That's what Israel has to get back to. Because that's the good way and they need to walk in it. And if they do, it will go well.

They will have rest. The false prophets are saying peace, peace, but there is no peace. But there could be peace.

If you walk in the old ways, you will find peace. You will find rest for your souls. And therefore, he's saying, I'm the true prophet, and I'm telling you there can be peace.

The false prophets are saying you have peace automatically just by continuing in your present way of doing things. I'm saying if you go to the old way of doing things, you could have peace. But you are not willing to walk in it.

They say, we will not walk in it. Verse 17, also I set watchmen over you, saying, listen to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, we will not listen.

So he's warning, you know, the trumpet watchman, the watchman on the wall watches for the invaders. And when he sees the invaders, he calls the people to attention by blowing the trumpet. It's a warning, you're under invasion.

And the people say, we don't want to hear that. We're not going to listen to that trumpet. It's not playing the tune we like.

Therefore, hear you nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth. Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not heeded my words, nor my law, but rejected it.

For what purpose to me comes frankincense from Sheba, and sweet cane from the far country? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifice sweet to me. Don't bring me all this fancy incense and so forth. I'm not interested in it, because you're not righteous.

Same thing that Isaiah said in his opening chapter, that God was sick of their sacrifices and their incense, because they were, in the same day, they were bringing their ritualistic worship to God. They were cheating and oppressing and doing evil things that God was offended by. So their worship was offensive to him.

So also here, I don't want your sacrifices, your burnt offerings. What good is that to me? You're not really sincere. Therefore, thus says the Lord, Behold, I will lay stumbling blocks before this people, and the fathers and the sons together shall fall on them.

The neighbor and his friend shall perish. Thus says the Lord, Behold, a people comes from the north country, and a great nation will be raised from the farthest parts of the earth. They will lay hold on bow and spear.

They are cruel and have no mercy. Their voice roars like the sea, and they ride on horses as men of war set in array against you, O daughter of Zion. We have heard the report of it.

Our hands grow feeble. Anguish has taken hold of us. Pain, as of a woman in labor.

Do not go out into the field, nor walk by the way, because of the sword of the enemy. Fear is on every side. O daughter of my people, clothe yourself with sackcloth and roll about in ashes.

Make mourning as for an only son. Most bitter lamentations for the plunderers will suddenly come upon us. So there's the call to repentance, to clothe in sackcloth and to roll in ashes.

This sounds like a little bit more demonstrative kinds of repentance than just sitting in ashes, which Job did, for example, and others are said to do in the Bible. They're told to roll around in the ashes. In other words, you need to be enthusiastic repenters.

You need to take this to the limit. You need to take it a step beyond normal repentance. Make mourning as if you were mourning for the loss of your only son.

That's probably the epitome of mourning. That's probably the epitome of grief. You need that kind of grief.

I have set you as an assayer and a fortress among my people that you may know and test their ways. An assayer, of course, is someone who tests the purity of gold and silver and things like that. And so Jeremiah is sort of in that role, so to speak, of seeing what kind of metal these people are.

He's, in a sense, testing their metal in a different sense of that word. They are all stubborn rebels walking as slanderers. They are bronze and iron.

They are all corruptors. The bellows blow fiercely. This would be probably the image of stoking a fire up to melt down gold and get the dross out or silver and get the dross out.

It says, the bellows blow fiercely. The lead is consumed by the fire. The smelter refines in vain.

For the wicked are not drawn off. People will call them rejected silver because the Lord has rejected them. Now, he's saying that Jeremiah's words are serving to sort of test whether there's any real silver or gold here or not.

Whether there's anything of value. Anything that's worth keeping or surviving the fire. There isn't.

These people are just, they're not worth anything. They're bronze and iron. Now, to say they're bronze and iron rather than gold and silver calls to mind what Isaiah said in chapter 60 when he was talking about the New Jerusalem.

And he made a statement just kind of hanging there without any explanation which may be somewhat explained by this imagery. The people who should be gold and silver they are actually bronze and iron. Worthless, essentially.

They're not precious metals. And in Isaiah 60, verse 17, it says, instead of bronze, I will bring gold. Instead of iron, I will bring silver.

And instead of wood, bronze. Instead of stone, iron, I will also make your officers peace. This is probably talking about people.

That people who are worthless, bronze and iron, will be replaced with gold and silver people. Now, this is important because in Isaiah it's talking about the fall of the Old Jerusalem and the coming of the New Jerusalem. The Old Jerusalem was characterized by people like Jeremiah describes.

They're bronze, they're iron. Worthless as far as God is concerned. But, the people of the New Jerusalem are people who are real, genuine gold.

Genuine silver. People that God values. Look what God said over in Malachi chapter 3. When Malachi is talking about the judgment of Jerusalem in AD 70, which is what chapter 3 largely is about.

There's this little segment about the remnant in Malachi 3.16 and 17. Malachi 3.16 and 17 says, Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another. That's the remnant in Israel.

And the Lord listened and heard them. And a book of remembrance was written before him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate in His name. And they shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, on the day when I make them my jewels.

And I will spare them as a man spares his own son and saves him. It's as if when the house is on fire, you can't pull everything out. You've got to get out of the fire fast.

But, you'll grab the things most valuable to you. You'd certainly save your son. You'd grab your children and get them out.

And your silver and your gold, your jewels. You'll take your jewels out of the house because they are worthwhile. You'll let the house go down on everything else, but you'll take the valuables.

Take your children, you take your jewels. And he says that when Jerusalem comes under this conflagration of the Holocaust in AD 70, it's all the trash, all the worthless stuff is going to be burned up. But God's going to rescue the things of value.

The remnant were rescued out of Jerusalem. They were like the jewels that God spared from the house or his children. And so, God compares his people to valuable things worth keeping as opposed to things not worth keeping.

And silver and gold is an image that he uses there in Isaiah and in Jeremiah. Now, I might just point out that this may give some information for interpreting Paul's words so often misunderstood in 1 Corinthians 3. Remember, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3, in verse 9, he said, and in the context, we means Paul and Apollos, we are God's fellow workers. You,

meaning the church in Corinth, are God's field.

You are God's building. Now, you are God's field and Apollos and I are workers on that field. I plant and he waters.

You are God's building. Apollos and I are workers on that building. I laid the foundation.

Apollos and others come and build on the foundation. He's talking about Christian workers developing the church, building the church. And he says, now, verse 12, Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, each one's work will become manifest, for the day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire.

And the fire will test each one's work of what sort it is. Now, Paul is talking about building the church. He's talking about people like Apollos coming after him.

Paul laid the foundation. Others like Apollos will come and build on that foundation. What will they build the church out of? Will they build the church out of wood, hay, and stubble? If so, that church will go down.

It will not stand the test. There will be fiery trials that Christians face. And churches made out of wood, hay, and stubble will be consumed.

There won't be anything there. The minister who built them might be saved, but he'll be without any reward, because his works did not endure. However, if you build the church with gold, and silver, and precious stones, those are images in the Old Testament for genuine, godly people.

Well then, the church you build will stand the test of the trials. And the minister will have a reward at the end. Who built the church that way? That's what Paul is talking about.

Commonly, preachers use this passage to say, the foundation is Jesus in your life. Now, you build your life with wood, hay, and stubble, or with gold, silver, and precious stones. And on the Day of Judgment, what you have done with your life will either be burned up or not.

And if you've just wasted your life doing ungodly things, you'll be saved. Yet, as by fire, you'll lose your rewards. But Paul is not talking about that.

He's not talking about individual lives. He's talking about building the church. He says to the church, you are God's field.

You are God's building. Paul and I are workers in the field and in the building. Planting, watering the field.

Laying foundations and building on the foundations of the building. This is what Christian

workers do. This is the church being built up.

And he says, a worker may build the church with gold, silver, and precious stones, or not. And there will be a test of what he has done. The church in America will perhaps face tests.

We are maybe facing tests already, and maybe worse ones to come. And we'll see what churches that have been built will still be churches. And which ones will be museums.

Because there are churches that are built out of wood, hay, and stubble. The persons in the walls are not living stones. They're burnable, combustible material.

They are people who are not really converted in terms of the real gospel. They have come for the wrong reasons. They have the wrong motivations.

They're not surrendered to Christ. When the persecution comes, they'll be gone. They won't stay around.

But if you build a church preaching the gospel of the kingdom, the lordship of Jesus, and people surrender to him, they are the real Christians. You're building a building of living stones then, of gold and silver and precious stones. And that kind of a church will survive testing as has been seen in many countries in the last century or so when the communists took over parts of Eastern Europe and China.

The church there, some of the churches simply became museums. Others survived in the woods at night, underground, because they were real Christians in those ones. Whoever built that church that was the underground church had used the right materials.

So anyway, Jerusalem in Jeremiah's time wasn't the right materials. They were worthless. He was an assayer of metals, and he could not conclude that they were gold and silver, but the opposite.

They were bronze and iron, not really valuable. When the city's burned up, you don't just grab all your pennies, your brass pennies, and get them out of the house. Unless you've got a jar of thousands of them, maybe.

But if the penny's on the desk, you just leave them there when you run. You grab your gold bullion. And so these people are not worth preserving, is what he's saying.

They're not valuable. Now, chapter 7 of Jeremiah. This is a really good chapter.

It has some very valuable things in it for us. Jeremiah actually goes to the temple and prophesies there in the temple courts themselves. And what he addresses here is the attitude that many of the Jews had, that because the temple was present in Jerusalem, that's God's house.

And therefore, God would never allow Jerusalem to fall to pagan invaders. God's temple is like the good luck charm that they were counting on to ward off zombies or something. They were thinking that God's temple would prevent all attackers from being able to succeed, because God will defend his temple at all costs, no matter what.

And Jeremiah's message, that isn't exactly true. He said, do you remember what happened to the tabernacle at Shiloh? Where is it today? And that's a good question. Where was the tabernacle at Shiloh? The tabernacle of Shiloh apparently had ceased to exist by this time, long before this in all likelihood.

And it had been abandoned. It had once been God's house, like the temple currently was. It was where the ark was.

It was where the priests ministered. It was where people went to meet with God. That's where the Holy of Holies was.

But it was no longer. It had come under God's judgment in some unrecorded incident. We don't have any record of it happening, but it's taken for granted by Jeremiah that God destroyed Shiloh.

No doubt, as an act of judgment. In principle, not much different than what he was going to do in destroying the temple here. And so he reminds them of Shiloh.

And he says basically what God did to Shiloh He's going to do here too. After all, Shiloh had the tabernacle. Jerusalem has the temple.

What's the difference? If God will destroy Shiloh with the tabernacle there, why wouldn't He destroy Jerusalem with the temple there if He had the same good cause to do so? And so that is essentially what the message is going to be here. The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, Stand in the gate of the Lord's house and proclaim there this word and say, Hear the word of the Lord all you of Judah who enter in at these gates and worship the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings and I will cause you to dwell in this place.

Do not trust in those lying words saying the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these. They're just saying this is God's temple here. This is God's temple here.

It's like a broken record as if that is a significant statement about their destiny. It is not. You can say it as many times as you want to.

It's not going to make any difference because it's going down if you don't amend your ways. For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after

other gods to your hurt, then I will cause you to dwell in this place in the land that I gave to your fathers to forever and ever. Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit.

Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know and then come and stand before me in this house which is called by my name and say, we are delivered to do all these abominations. In other words, God has kept us safe so we can keep living this pagan lifestyle. God has delivered us from our enemies so that we can just keep living in adultery and murder and stealing and swearing falsely and worshipping Baal.

That's what they're saying. Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? This is the verse Jesus was quoting when he said in Matthew 21, 13, my house is supposed to be called a house of prayer for all nations. That's actually a quote from Isaiah.

But then he says, but you have made it a den of thieves, quoting from this verse. In Jeremiah's day, the house of God had become a den of thieves and it was going to be destroyed by the Babylonians. In Jesus' day, the house of God had become a den of thieves.

It was going to be destroyed by the Romans. Jesus was in a parallel situation and the house of God in his day was in a parallel circumstance, a den of thieves. Behold, I, even I, have seen it, says the Lord, but go now to my place which was in Shiloh where I set my name at the first and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel.

And now, because you have done all these things, says the Lord, and I spoke to you rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you, but you did not answer, therefore I will do to this house, which is called by my name, in which you trust, and to this place, which I gave to you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight as I have cast out all your brethren, the whole posterity of Ephraim, that's the northern kingdom of Israel. Therefore, do not pray for this people, God tells Jeremiah, and he repeats that in chapter 11 and verse 14, and also later in chapter 14 and verse 11, and it's kind of a repeated refrain, don't pray for this people.

It's like their past repentance. Preach to them, but don't pray for them. Why? Because God is not going to answer the prayers.

God is not going to convict them anymore. He's given them up. As Romans chapter 1 says, that God does eventually to people who have the knowledge of God, but don't like to retain the knowledge of God in their hearts, therefore God gives them up to their own devices, gives them over to a reprehensible mind.

He's given them up. He's not going to continue, you know, answering prayers for them. However, you still preach to them because that will increase their responsibility, but

they're not going to get a divine assistance toward repentance.

Therefore, do not pray for this people, nor lift up this cry for prayer for them, nor make intercession to me, for I will not hear you. Do you not see that they do in these cities of Judah and what they do in these cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood. The fathers kindle the fire.

The women knead their dough to make cakes for the Queen of Heaven. Now, the Queen of Heaven is Ishtar, the wife of Baal. Of course, the Roman Catholics call Mary the Queen of Heaven.

That's only because they bought into the terminology of Baal worship when they institutionalized that Mary worship stuff. But the Queen of Heaven, though, of course, any modern person would think of that as a reference to Mary, if they have any familiarity with Catholicism, this was a term that referred to Ishtar, the wife of Baal. And so, it's a whole family affair.

It's like get the kids all dressed up for Sunday school, get the whole family night and scrubbed up and put them in the car and drive on down to the house of Ishtar and get the kids involved. Let them gather the sticks so you can build the fire to bake the bread. Daddy will make the fire.

Children bring the sticks. Mommy will knead the dough. We're all participating in this nice little activity of making cakes to offer to this pagan goddess.

So, in other words, it's right down to every family member is just totally committed to this idolatry. He says, they do this to make cakes for the Queen of Heaven and they pour out drink offerings to other gods that they may provoke me to anger. Do they provoke me to anger, says the Lord? Do they not provoke themselves to the shame of their own faces? Therefore, thus says the Lord God, behold, my anger and my fury will be poured out on this place, on man and on beasts, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground, and it will burn and not be quenched.

There's that unquenchable fire again, but this is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. It's not talking about hell. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, add your burnt offerings and your sacrifices and eat meat, for I did not speak to your fathers or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Now, this translation is a little misleading because, of course, he did. When they came out of Egypt, he did speak to them about sacrifices and burnt offerings a great deal in Leviticus, shortly after they came out of Egypt. But this translation is a mistake.

It shouldn't say concerning burnt offerings. It should say for the sake of burnt offerings. I didn't bring them out of Egypt for the sake of burnt offerings.

It wasn't because I really was craving burnt offerings that I saved you guys out of Egypt. That's not why I did that. I was looking for a relationship with you people.

Sacrifices and burnt offerings were part of the worship that I commanded, but it wasn't for that. It's not like you can ignore the relationship and just give me the burnt offerings and I'll be happy. That's not what I brought you out of Egypt for.

But this is what I commanded them, saying, Obey my voice. That's what I wanted, not burnt offerings. I wanted obedience, not sacrifice.

To obey is better than sacrifice, Samuel said to Saul. You thought I just wanted sacrifices. No, what did I tell you? I told you, Obey my voice, and I'll be your God, and you should be my people, and walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.

That's what I brought you out of Egypt for. Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward. Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt, until this day, I have even sent to you all my servants, the prophets, daily, rising up early and sending them.

Yet they did not obey me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck, and they did worse than their fathers. Therefore, you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not obey you. God's telling Jeremiah.

You shall also call them, but they will not answer you. So you shall say to them, this is a nation that does not obey the voice of the Lord their God, nor receive correction. Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth.

Cut off your hair and cast it away and take up a lamentation on the desolate heights. For the Lord has rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath. Cutting off the hair would be a sign of mourning or repentance.

Instead of cutting off truth from your mouth, you should cut off your hair and mourn. Verse 30. For the children of Judah have done evil in my sight, says the Lord.

They have set their abominations in the house which is called by my name to pollute it. Apparently, there was an Asherah pole set up in the temple by Manasseh. And right there in the temple of God, there was an idol really for Asherah, which was Ishtar, the Queen of Heaven.

And they have built the high places of Tophet. Now we've heard of Tophet. Tophet is a Hebrew word that means the drum.

Why this place was called the drum, I don't know. Maybe there were ceremonies that

involved drumming there. Maybe the shape of the valley there reminded someone of the drum, who knows.

But the place was called Tophet. And it was also called the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, which is the Valley of Hinnom to the southwest of Jerusalem, just outside the walls of the Old City. Now it says, They have set up Tophet.

They built the high places of Tophet, which is the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. To burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come to my heart. By the way, not only did they not command it, and it's not just I forgot to mention it.

It's not I really did want you to do this, I just forgot to mention it. It never wanted you to do it. It never came to my heart to ask you to do that kind of thing.

Burning their sons to Molech. Molech was this god that was, I believe, had a goat head and a human body and its arms were extended at the elbow with the hands up and it was hollow and it was bronze. And they would build a fire inside it so it would glow red hot.

And then they would take live babies and put them in the hands of this red hot idol and burn them alive. Now you might think they might have pity on the baby as it screams in agony as it's being burned alive. No worries, they took care of that.

As soon as they put the baby in the arms, the band would strike up with trumpets and sounds and people would dance and have an orgy in front of the idol. This is how they worshiped Molech in the Valley of Hinnom. This is what Manasseh did.

It actually says in the scripture that Manasseh caused his own sons to pass through the fire which is the euphemism for burning your children up to Molech. And it says, They burned their own sons and their daughters in the fire which I did not command, nor did it come to mind. Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when it will no more be called Tophet or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter.

For they will bury in Tophet till there's no room. The corpses of the people will be food for the birds of the heaven and for the beasts of the earth, and no one will frighten them away. Then I will cause to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth, the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, the voice of the bride, for the land shall be desolate.

Now, this reference to Tophet being filled with corpses is quite possibly literal. It's not known for sure that this literally happened, but he is at least painting a picture. Tophet is the valley right next to the city.

The idea is the Babylonians will slaughter so many Jews when they invade the city that

they'll have to put the corpses somewhere and the valleys convenient, they'll just toss all the corpses into the Valley of Hinnom. Now, Isaiah had also mentioned the Valley of Hinnom. He mentioned Tophet, and he mentioned a funeral pyre there.

Many people believe that there was a use already for Tophet at that time for the Valley of Hinnom. Many say that when Josiah came to power, well, we know he defiled. We know he defiled the Valley of Hinnom and he tore down the idol Tamolech.

That is recorded in scripture. But what happened to the Valley of Hinnom after that is not recorded in scripture exactly. Isaiah, of course, does refer to it as a funeral pyre there.

There is tradition that it was a garbage dump, that the Jews actually used it to just have perpetual fires burning, and they'd haul all the garbage out of the city and toss it in there, and they'd just keep the fires burning night and day. And also it is argued that sometimes criminals, when they were put to death, instead of giving a decent burial, would be thrown into the Valley of Hinnom. These traditions are not confirmed from any very early sources.

And there are some Christian writers who are refuting them and saying, well, we don't have any real evidence that the Valley of Hinnom was a garbage dump. Well, we might not. It may be that it was, and it may be that it was not.

But whether it was or not, we do have biblical evidence that it was used as an image of where the corpses of the slain would be accumulated after the destruction of Jerusalem. And there's no reason to believe this was not literal. Jeremiah predicted that the Valley of Hinnom would be called the Valley of Slaughter because of the abundance of the bodies that would be there, and they'd be left apparently exposed for the birds to eat.

This either literally happened, or at least was a figurative way of saying how many bodies there would be, that it would be enough to fill up the Valley of Hinnom. But the point, of course, that I make every time we come to the subject is that this is a term that Jesus spoke about. Jesus talked about Gehenna, and Gehenna means the Valley of Hinnom.

And so, therefore, when Jesus threatened that people would be thrown into the Valley of Hinnom, it was in the same connection that Jeremiah spoke of. That is, Jeremiah was saying the Babylonians are going to destroy Jerusalem, and the corpses would be so many of the slain, it'll fill up the Valley of Hinnom. Jesus is in a similar situation.

Jerusalem is going to be invaded by the Romans. The corpses are going to be numerous. He says to his people, the people in Jerusalem, who are rejecting his message, you are in danger of the fires of Gehenna, of the Valley of Hinnom.

And he makes several references to it in his teaching. And to my mind, it seems to me, he's using it just the same way Jeremiah did. Now, traditionally, Gehenna is translated as

hell in our Bibles, so that most people just assume Gehenna means hell.

It's a traditional rendering. There's no biblical reason to call it hell. There may be a cultural reason, and that is that the rabbis in the intertestamental period had begun to use the word Gehenna to speak of an afterlife for the wicked, a place of punishment for one year, for 12 months, for the wicked.

It was not a place of eternal torment, but a place of annihilation in the minds of some rabbis, and of purging in the minds of others. You read different rabbis, and some of them thought Gehenna was where people would be burned up. Some thought it was where they'd be punished and then restored to heaven.

Obviously, these different views of hell even exist among Christians today, but this is the rabbinic speculations. And the rabbis before Jesus' time had begun to use the word Gehenna that way. But the Old Testament didn't.

No inspired writer ever did. There's no biblical reason to say that Gehenna means something after this life in hell. That was a rabbinic idea.

But because the rabbis had come up with this idea, the fact that Jesus spoke of Gehenna or the Valley of Hinnom frequently, many scholars believe that he was using it in the way the rabbis used it, which is a possibility. And it is that conviction that caused the English translators to translate Gehenna as hell, because they believed that Jesus was using Gehenna the way the rabbis did. I would suggest it's more likely he was using it the way that Jeremiah did.

Jesus never had much respect for the rabbis and their teachings and their traditions, and it's hard to imagine that rabbis uninspired by God would come up with a theory about the afterlife that would be correct. How would they know? I mean, they're just guessing. Why would Jesus affirm what the rabbis said about this? If he did, it's suggesting that the uninspired rabbis, in guessing about the afterlife, got it right.

And maybe they did. Maybe they did guess right. But interestingly, God never revealed to the inspired prophets anything about the afterlife.

There's no mention of it in the Old Testament. And therefore, what the rabbis came up with was more borrowed from Egyptian and Persian religious ideas of the afterlife. For Jesus to affirm that and confirm it would be unusual, strange.

But it would not be strange for him to use Gehenna the way that it is used in Jeremiah and Isaiah. So, in my opinion, Jesus, when he used the word Gehenna, was not following the rabbinic tradition of using it to speak of hell. I think he was following the prophetic tradition of using it to speak of the judgment coming on Jerusalem.

That's what Isaiah and Jeremiah both used it to mean, and I believe that's probably what

Jesus used it to mean, because he was in a situation parallel to that of Jeremiah. Now, chapter 8. At that time, says the Lord, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah and the bones of its princes and the bones of its priests and the bones of its prophets and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem out of their graves. They shall spread them before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven, which they have loved and which they have served and after which they have walked, which they have sought and which they have worshipped.

They shall not be gathered nor buried. They shall be like refuse on the face of the earth. Then death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of those who remain of this evil family, who remain in all the places where I've driven them, says the Lord of hosts.

Now, this is when the Babylonians would carry the Jews off into Babylon. That's where he talks about the places where I've driven them in verse 3. But apparently he's saying that when the Babylonians would conquer the city, one thing they would do is desecrate the graves just as a means of showing contempt, just as an insult to take the bones of the kings and the princes and the priests out and just scatter them on the ground for the dogs and the vultures to attend to. This is something that to the Jewish mind, to any ancient mind, was considered to be horrendous.

They didn't know what the afterlife involved, but they knew they wanted to be remembered with respect by those who survived them. That was kind of the hope of an old man or any man in Israel or in the Middle East or any time in ancient times. They didn't know if they're going to heaven or hell or if there is such a place, but they did believe that they could be revered in the memory of their survivors.

But to drag their bones out of the grave and spew them out on the ground and leave them for the vultures and the dogs was the ultimate indignity. Sometimes the great judgment that God would predict against somebody like Jezebel was that they would not be buried and the dogs would eat them. Well, you might say, well, when I'm dead, what do I care if dogs eat me? I don't care if worms eat me or dogs eat me.

What's the difference? But the idea was they cared. They felt that they wanted to be remembered in a dignified way and to have their bones taken out of their grave and set out in the open air to be dispensed with by wild animals and so forth. That was just the last insult, the final indignity before the Babylonians carried the survivors away.

Moreover you shall say to them, Thus says the Lord, Will they fall and not rise? Will one turn away and not return? Why then has this people slidden back? Jerusalem is in a perpetual backsliding. They hold fast to deceit. They refuse to return.

Now he's saying, when people fall down, don't they get back up again? Isn't that normal? Do people fall and not rise again? I mean, do they turn away from the right path and not turn back? Typically people, when they make a mistake, they catch their mistake and

return and correct it. Or if they fall, they get back up again. But he says, somehow that rule doesn't work with you people.

You people are backsliding and you keep backsliding. You'd think you'd backslide and then return. But you just backslide and backslide and backslide some more.

It's a perpetual backsliding. They hold fast to deceit. They refuse to return.

I listened and heard, but they do not speak a right. No man repented of his wickedness. God says, I was listening to see if anyone was repenting.

Couldn't hear anyone doing it. No man was repenting of his wickedness, saying, what have I done? Everyone turned to his own course. As the horse rushes into the battle, even the stork in the heavens knows her appointed times.

And the turtle dove, the swift and the swallow, observe the time of their coming. But my people do not know the judgment of the Lord. This negative comparison of the people being more stupid than animals, in this case birds, which we don't usually regard as intellectual creatures.

Generally speaking, birds are considered to be, well, bird brains, and not very bright. But he says, even they know things that my people don't know. Very similar to Isaiah's comment in Isaiah chapter 1, verse 3, where he says, the ox knows its owner, and the donkey knows its master's crib, but Israel does not know.

My people do not consider. The dumb ox, the dumb donkey, they know who their master is. How come my people don't know who their master is? The donkey knows where its home is and where it gets its food.

How come my people can't figure this out? In other words, it's an insult to their intelligence that they are unfavorably contrasted with donkeys, oxen, birds. Now, to tell you the truth, it may be that God built those amazing migratory instincts into storks and swallows and so forth so that he could just give this illustration. You've got to wonder why God did all the amazing things he did with animals and plants and so forth that are so complex that it's taken scientists 6,000 years to learn as much as we have and who knows what more.

They say in the rainforest there's probably more species we haven't discovered than we have discovered. Maybe so. I'm not sure how many of you know that.

The point is, God has so many intricate things he's built into nature, but all of them he built, I think, in order to make a point. Eventually, when we discover them, we can try to deduce what his point was. But one of the things that has been known for a long time, obviously even in Jeremiah's day, is that the birds, some birds, and for that matter, we know salmon do the same kind of thing and sea turtles do it, butterflies, monarch

butterflies do it, hummingbirds do it.

Creatures have migratory instincts and they are not explainable by natural terms. They travel over thousands of miles. The stork travels more than any other bird.

It goes basically from northern Canada down to the Antarctic and back in the course of a year. It knows where it's going. It doesn't have any charts.

It doesn't have any maps. It looks down and half the time it just sees open ocean, no markers, and yet it goes where it's going to go. The hummingbirds do the same thing.

They cross the Gulf of Mexico. They go 500 miles across open water. Hummingbirds.

You'd just think a little wind would knock them out of the sky and they'd be over with, but they fly 500 miles across open water and end up where they want to end up. That is the same place their parents ended up and their grandparents and their ancestors always flew to the same place. How do they know? How do the monarch butterflies know to fly from New England across the country and across part of the Gulf of Mexico and to mate in a grove of trees in central Mexico where their grandparents did? Not their parents, their grandparents because their parents flew from there back up to Massachusetts and died, laid their eggs, and their babies hatched and they fly back to where their parents were born, not where their parents bore them.

They've never been there. How do they know where they're going? It's miraculous. I mean, it's one of the things that will never be explainable by natural terms and God no doubt delights in doing that kind of thing to snub the naturalists and show that they don't know anything, but in this case, he brings it out to say, these birds, they know where God wants them to go.

They go right on time. They go right to the place that he sends them to. How come you don't go where I send you? Are you less intelligent than they? My people do not know the judgment of the Lord.

How can you say we are wise and the law of the Lord is with us? Look, the false pen of the scribes certainly works falsehood. The wise men are ashamed and are dismayed and taken. Behold, they've rejected the word of the Lord and what wisdom do they have? This is a great rhetorical question.

The wise men who have rejected the word of the Lord, what wisdom really do they have? Why should you be intimidated by them? When you have a college professor who's a jerk and mocks Christianity and mocks God, and you know, I mean, students are so intimidated by this. Why? Who is he? He's just a jerk who doesn't know, he rejects the word of the Lord. He doesn't have any wisdom in him.

He's nobody. He might be the guy who gives you your grade, but maybe that's why. But

the point is, he's not impressive.

Why should you be impressed with Richard Dawkins? Because he's a great scientist. What does he know about God? How is it that he can write a book about atheism? He's not an expert about atheism. He's an expert about biology.

Biology and atheism are entirely different subjects. Atheism is a question of philosophy. Dawkins doesn't have any more authority to speak on that subject than any high school kid or junior high kid would.

He's an expert at one thing, and he gets all this, he's viewed as one of the great, wise, intelligent people, so he can speak about anything, and there's a group of people who say, well, if he says so, it must be true. He's so smart. He's rejected the word of the Lord.

There's no wisdom in him. There's expertise in his field. That's different.

But when he tries to teach philosophy or tries to tell us what life is all about, he's as ignorant as a child. In fact, more ignorant than some children, because some children know there's a God. Verse 10 then through 12 actually repeats what we saw in chapter 6, verses 12 through 15.

Everyone deals falsely. For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed.

Nor did they know how to blush. Therefore, they shall fall among those who fall. In the time of their punishment they shall be cast down, says the Lord.

Yeah, that should sound familiar. We just read that a couple of chapters ago. It's a good sermon.

Good preachers sometimes repeat their better sermons at different times. I will surely consume them, says the Lord. There shall be no grapes on the vine, no figs on the fig tree.

The leaf shall fade, and the things I have given them shall pass away from them. Why do we sit still? Assemble yourselves, and let us enter the fortified cities, and let us be silent there. For the Lord our God has put us to silence, and given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against the Lord." Now it's interesting that Jerusalem under judgment is said to have been given water of gall to drink.

This is probably not literal, probably not reference to the water they were really drinking. It means that they're drinking bitter waters, means their circumstances have turned bitter on them. It's even expanded on in chapter 9 and verse 15 where it says, Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will feed them, this people, with

wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink.

In Revelation 8 verses 10 and 11 when the second trumpet is blown, or third trumpet, excuse me, when the third trumpet sounds, there's a star that falls from heaven like a flaming torch and it turns the waters into wormwood, into bitterness. I've suggested that that is an imaginative image of this very thing that we're talking about here, God's judgment on Jerusalem. They had been in bitter bondage in Egypt and God healed their circumstances by bringing them out, emblemized that by turning the waters of Marah, bitter waters, into sweet waters, and told them that if they continued to be obedient, they could keep those sweet waters, they could keep those conditions.

He would not put on them all the diseases he put on the Egyptians. But they did turn from him and as Jeremiah says, he's given us wormwood to drink, the water of gall to drink. And so we see that pictorially represented in Revelation.

Now verse 15, We looked for peace, but no good came, and for a time of health, but there was trouble. The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan, the whole land trembled at the sound of the name of his strong ones. For they have come and devoured the land and all that is in it, the city and those who dwell in it.

For behold, I will send serpents among you, vipers which cannot be charmed, and they shall bite you, says the Lord. Now these serpents might be a figurative for the enemy coming in. Although of course, you never know, there's plenty of snakes in that region, there could have been a lot of cobras and vipers that infested the area too as a judgment from God.

God did do that, you remember, to the Jews in the wilderness when they worshipped Baal Peor. He sent fiery serpents among them to bite them. That's when Moses had to lift up the serpent in the wilderness, the bronze serpent for them to look at to be healed.

He might have done that again at this time. I would comfort myself in sorrow, my heart is faint in me. Listen, the voice, the cry of the daughter of my people from a far country.

Is not the Lord in Zion? Is not her king in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their carved images and their foreign idols? The harvest is past, the summer has ended and we are not saved. So we've seen several seasons come and go and things have not improved. For the hurt of the daughter of my people, I am hurt.

I am mourning, astonishment has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no recovery for the health of the daughter of my people? Now, is there no balm in Gilead? Gilead was that region to the east of the Jordan that was inhabited by the half-tribe of Manasseh and Gad and Reuben. When the tribes divided the land in the days of Joshua, they were permitted to stay over in the land of Gilead.

That place was known for certain products that were produced there that were used for medicines and so forth, like balm for aching muscles, balm for wounds and so forth. And so, he's basically saying, as he said in verse 15, we looked for health, we were looking for a time of health but we didn't have any health. We need a healer.

Isn't there any balm over there in Gilead we could use? Isn't there anything internal here in our country that we can grab and help this problem? Well, yeah, there is something in Gilead. There is something in the country that could heal them. It's mentioned in verse 19.

Is not the Lord in Zion? Is not her king in her? Certainly, there is balm in Gilead. There is a healer in the country. And so, why is it that they're not being healed? Obviously, they're not availing themselves of that.

Why then is there no recovery for the health of the daughter of my people, he asks. And he goes into chapter 9 weeping. He started kind of weeping here around verse 21.

But he talks about his eyes being like a fountain of tears in chapter 9 verse 1. And there's some, really some great material in the upcoming chapters but we're going to have to wait until another time to get into those.