

OpenTheo

Jeremiah 9 - 10



Jeremiah - Steve Gregg

In this emotional and heartfelt talk, Steve Gregg discusses the book of Jeremiah, focusing on chapters 9 and 10. He notes how Jeremiah is known as the Weeping Prophet due to his emotional nature and his calls for God's vindication. Gregg emphasizes the importance of knowing God and not succumbing to deceit or idolatry. He also cautions listeners against mimicking pagan religions and highlights the imprecatory prayers of David as being directed towards those who oppose God, rather than merely one's enemies. Ultimately, Gregg reminds his audience that even when God corrects us, it is not to condemn us but rather to help us grow.

Transcript

Today we turn to Jeremiah chapter 9. Here we encounter the first instance of the behavior that has caused Jeremiah to be nicknamed the Weeping Prophet. We will find many references to his weeping in the book of Jeremiah. This is the first explicit reference in chapter 9. He says, Oh that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.

We find similar language in chapter 9 in verses 10 and 18. Also in verse 10 it says, I will take up a weeping and a wailing for the mountains. In verse 18, let them make haste and take up a wailing for us that our eyes may run with tears and our eyelids gush with water.

Now these two verses are actually encouraging others to join him in his attitude of grief and to wail, but uses the same language. May our eyes run with tears. As he says, my eyes, may they be a fountain of tears.

It sounds like he wishes he could actually pour out more tears than he's able to do. Sometimes when you're in grief, just shedding tears is a relief. He is a weeping prophet.

He is grieved. But he wishes that he could perhaps have more of a total release of that grief through shedding a river of tears. And what he sees coming on his people is occasion for grief, but he also has anger toward them, as we shall see.

He actually utters a number of imprecations, or as it were, prayers against his enemies. Now his enemies, I think he thinks of as a specific subgroup. There are people who are trying to kill him, as it turns out, and he wishes very much harm upon them.

He wishes and prays for vindication from God, which is something, in some cases, that's rather harsh and disturbing to us to read. Although if we would put ourselves in his position, we might find ourselves perhaps less patient than he was with the people who are persecuting him. They strike him.

They put him in stocks. They eventually put him in prison. They try to kill him, and for no other reason than that he is being obedient to what God told him to do.

This irritates him, obviously, and there are times when he wishes God would just vindicate him and punish those who are persecuting him. But apart from that subgroup within the city that he wishes so much ill upon, he weeps over the city in general. There are people in the city who are relatively innocent.

Apparently, nobody is really innocent. There's not much of a remnant there, but some people are more guilty than others. He does consider that there's a lot of suffering that is coming upon these people, which is to be pitied.

It brings him to tears sometimes, and of course, his enemies bring him to anger sometimes. He's an emotional man. In verse 3, he says, I just wish I could have a little cabin out in the woods where I could get away from everyone, not have to see what's going to happen to these people, not have to see day by day what they're doing.

As Lot in Sodom says in 2 Peter, Lot vexed his righteous soul day after day in seeing and hearing the unlawful deeds of the people of Sodom. It is a vexation for someone who's on God's side to see apostasy and evil and injustice on every side, and to think, man, this seems so hopeless. I seem so alone.

I might as well actually be alone. If I'm alone in my convictions, I might as well be alone literally, so that I don't have to feel so out of place and so grieved by everything I see. I wish I could just go out into the wilderness.

I wish I had a little hut out there, a cabin, where I could just hang out there and leave these people and go away from them, for they're all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. Like their bow, they have bent their tongues for lies. Now, they're shooting at him, not literal arrows, but lies, accusations, and it's like he's being shot at by arrows, but these are verbal arrows.

They are not valiant for the truth on the earth, for they proceed from evil to evil. They do not know me, says the Lord. This reference to not being valiant for truth is really, it's a surprising thing for people who do think that truth is all important.

You know, when you love the truth, and by the way, we are required to love the truth. Paul said in 2 Thessalonians that those who do not receive the love of the truth, God sends them strong delusion that they might believe a lie instead. If they don't love the truth, they're not worthy of it, and God sends them deception in its place.

But one who loves the truth can hardly imagine why everyone wouldn't love the truth, even if it's an unflattering truth, because it is truth. People who are honest, people who have integrity, by definition, love truth. People with integrity would rather tell an embarrassing truth about themselves than a whitewashing kind of lie, because truth is important.

Truth is a value, and it's very rare in certain seasons of apostasy to find anyone who cares at all about the truth, or as he puts it, who is valiant for the truth. To be valiant for the truth is necessary at times when truth is basically not only unpopular, but people don't tolerate it, and they don't care about it. They just want a happy fantasy rather than truth that might be a little unflattering or a little disturbing.

There are essentially two kinds of people, it would seem to me. Those who are devoted to truth and will not compromise the truth, no matter how painful or costly it may be to stand by it, and they are valiant. They have to be valiant, because the other people are more numerous and will make war against the truth.

There is a warfare between Satan, who is the father of lies, and Jesus, who is the truth. This is a spiritual warfare that's been going on from ancient times, and Jeremiah is feeling the pains of that, because he's one of the few standing on the side of truth and of Christ and of God against people who are shooting at him with their own accusations and lies. To find someone like himself, who's valiant for the truth, who's a warrior for the truth, is something that he would love to find, but he doesn't seem to know of any other than himself.

He says, everyone take heed to his neighbor, and do not trust any brother, for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbor will walk with slanderers. Everyone will deceive his neighbor and will not speak the truth. They have taught their tongue to speak lies and weary themselves to commit iniquity.

Your habitation is in the midst of deceit, though through deceit they refuse to know me, says the Lord. Now, this business about beware of your neighbor, beware of your brother, don't trust your brother, is essentially saying that deception has become such a way of life for these people, that they even lie to their own family members. You have to be careful not to trust them, that nobody's trustworthy, even among those persons that you would expect to be loyal to by family relationship.

Micah said the same thing, although Micah was talking about conditions in the north, and he said, in Micah 7, 5, and 6, do not trust a friend, do not put confidence in a companion,

guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your bosom, for son dishonors father, daughter rises against her mother, daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's enemies are the men of his own house. You'll recognize, obviously, that Jesus quoted this verse in Matthew 10, 36, where he said, he did not come to bring peace on the earth, but a sword, or in the parallel, it says division. He says, I've come to set a man against his brother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and those kinds of things, he says, and those of his own house will be his enemies.

So Jesus is quoting from Micah, saying, as it was in Israel in the days of Micah, or as we can see, as it is in Jerusalem in the days of Jeremiah, so Jesus said, it will be among his disciples. They will have even members of their household against them because of their loyalty to Christ. Whenever you're valiant for the truth, you'll find that people, even people who are blood relations, will often despise you because the truth exposes the lies that they prefer to believe.

In verse 6 here, Jeremiah 9, 6 says, your habitation is in the midst of deceit. Through deceit they refuse to know me, says the Lord. That is, they could know God if they would simply take the side of truth, but they don't want the truth.

They choose deceit, and therefore refuse to know God, and the issue, the complaint that God has about them is that they don't know him. At the end of this chapter, in verse 24, not the very end, but near the end, he says, but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me. Knowing God is the thing that is most desirable, the thing in which a person can trust and in which they can put their confidence and boast, as it were, but these people refuse to know him, and it's because they prefer the lies.

You can't know God if you're not committed to truth. Jesus said, I am the truth, and no man comes to the Father but through me, in John 14, 6, so you can't compromise on truth. You have to be devoted to integrity, and if you compromise your integrity, you compromise your knowledge of God, your ability to know him.

In verse 7, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, behold, I will refine them and try them, for how shall I deal with the daughter of my people? Their tongue is an arrow shot out. It speaks deceit. One speaks peaceably to his neighbor with his mouth, but in his heart he lies in wait.

That is, he's setting a trap. So this is the reason you can't trust your neighbor, is that they speak peaceably. They speak as if they're your friend, but they really are trying, waiting to exploit or in some way cheat you.

Shall I not punish them for these things, says the Lord? Shall I not avenge myself on such a nation as this? This refrain we've already encountered twice before in chapter 5, verse 9, and also chapter 5, verse 29. This is kind of a rhetorical question that now is repeated for the third time. God is saying, when you have all of this stuff going on, how in the

world can you expect me to withhold my judgment? I will take up a weeping and wailing for the mountains, he says in verse 10, and for the habitations of the wilderness, a lamentation, because they are burned up so that no one can pass through them, nor can men hear the voice of the cattle.

Both the birds of the heavens and the beasts have fled. They are gone. Now, you can't hear the cattle.

You can't hear the birds. In times of peace, those are kind of reassuring sounds. Just the ordinary pastoral sounds of a peaceful time, waking up to the birds singing, hearing the cattle outside lowing, and all those signs of normalness are gone.

The reference to the birds having fled, of course, is an echo of what we already read in chapter 4, where I mentioned that some people try to make this a support for the gap theory, because it says all the birds had fled, and now the earth was formless and void, and some make that a connection to Genesis 1 too, but that is simply describing poetically the devastation coming on Judah. But it was in chapter 4 and verse 25 that the conditions of the land being formless and void include the absence of the birds. Now, I don't know if the birds actually did flee.

It's possible that with the defoliating and the removal of trees and so forth, the deforestation, which Babylonians, like the Romans later, would do in cutting down the local trees to make siege works and all, that it basically destroyed the habitat for the birds, and so they had to find somewhere else to go. In any case, the normal rather pleasant things that we take for granted, like the chirping of the birds, they're conspicuous by their absence. I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins and a den of jackals.

I will make the cities of Judah desolate without an inhabitant. Now, Jeremiah is going to get in trouble for this particular word. We'll see in chapter 26 that this word is quoted against him by those who want to kill him.

They say, we should kill him because he said that Jerusalem is going to be a heap of ruins, and somebody stood up for him and said, well, didn't Micah previously say similar things? And they didn't kill him, and so someone sympathetic to Jeremiah got him out of trouble, but this was the word that they quoted against him. In chapter 26, verse 9, I think it is. Now, verse 12, who is the wise man who may understand this, and who is he to whom the mouth of the Lord has spoken that he may declare it? He said, why does the land perish and burn up like a wilderness so that no one can pass through? And the Lord said, because they have forsaken my law, which I set before them, and have not obeyed the voice, excuse me, my voice, nor walked according to it.

But they have walked according to the imagination of their own heart, and after the bales, which their fathers taught them. 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. We saw a similar statement back in chapter 8 and verse 14.

I pointed out then that that's one of the plagues that comes on Jerusalem in Revelation, chapter 8, verses 10 through 11, the third trumpet causes their water to be turned to gall and wormwood, and many people drink the water and die. No doubt it is a symbolic statement in Revelation, and it's probably symbolic here too. But it is obviously a reference to God's judgment on Jerusalem in both places.

I will scatter them also among the Gentiles, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, that is their dispersion among the Babylonians and the other lands that the Babylonians had already conquered, to which they dispersed the people of Judah when they deported them. And I will send a sword after them until I've consumed them. So even after they've been exiled, they'll still be in danger, and many of them will be killed.

You know, in Esther's day, there was a war waged against the Jews, and actually the diaspora has not ended for them. They are still scattered throughout the world, and that sword sometimes reappears in the Russian pogroms or, of course, the Nazi Holocaust and other things that even, frankly, the persecution that Jews have experienced in the diaspora ever since the time that they were scattered. Because even though God scattered them to Babylon and throughout the regions of the world and drew them back in the days of Zerubbabel, he only drew back a remnant of them.

Only, I believe, 50,000 came back, if I'm not mistaken, with Zerubbabel. And therefore, the vast majority of Jews have always lived outside of Palestine ever since the days of Jeremiah. They've never, as a majority of them, ever come back to Palestine except on pilgrimages, but they live elsewhere to this day.

The situation that came upon them here has never been reversed completely, and they have experienced danger and insecurity in the lands where they've been driven. Verse 17, Thus says the Lord of hosts, Consider and call for the mourning women that they may come, and send for skillful wailing women that they may come. People in Israel, they had actually a profession that you could hire someone to come and mourn if you have someone die.

It was considered to be an honor to the dead, out of respect to them, to have many people mourning. And if you really wanted to respect the dead, you'd hire additional mourners to come. They might not have even known the person who was dead, but they know how to fake sorrow.

And we see that, for example, in the house of Jairus. Jairus was an important man. Apparently, when his daughter died, the mourners, like vultures, were already lurking around because they knew she was near death.

By the time Jesus got there, the mourner was inside the house mourning for the girl. And

Jesus said, Why are you mourning? She's not dead. She's only sleeping.

And then they all started laughing. It shows how sincere their sorrow was. They could go instantly from mourning to laughter if they found something amusing, because they had no real sorrow at all.

They were professionals. And so it makes reference here to those who are skillful wailing women. That might be a special skill some women have.

It'd be good to be able to make money out of that, wouldn't it? If you're a whiner, a wailer, to be able to advertise, you know, in the Yellow Pages, you know. Wailers, mourners available. Skillful women.

Now, there were skillful men, too. There were men who mourned, but I think the women did it more. I'm not sure why, but remember when Jesus was carrying his cross out of Jerusalem, it says that there were wailing women following him.

And they weren't probably sincere, either. He told them that they and their children were going to be destroyed by the Romans. They weren't his disciples.

They were probably professionals, or maybe not. But it does specify the women, perhaps because women are considered to be more emotional. It seems more genuine, maybe, when they mourn than men who are more stoic.

Anyway, for whatever reason, it's the women he calls for, the skillful mourning women, wailing women. Let them make haste and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run with tears and our eyelids gush with water. For a voice of wailing is heard from Zion, how we are plundered.

We are greatly ashamed because we have forsaken the land, because we have been cast out of our dwellings. Yet hear the word of the Lord, O women, and let your ear receive his words of his mouth. Teach your daughters wailing, and everyone her neighbor a lamentation.

For death has come through our windows, has entered our palaces, to kill off the children, no longer be outside, and the young men no longer in the streets. That is, you can't go out of your house because it's too dangerous out there, that peace has been taken away from the land. But in telling these women to teach their daughters to wail, it's a little bit like Jesus saying to the wailing women, weep for yourselves and for your children.

And both he and Jeremiah are saying because the city of Jerusalem is going to be destroyed, and they and their children are going to be the victims of that judgment. They're not really victims, they have victimized God, and that's why they're being punished. But they will certainly suffer, and that's something to wail about.

Speak, thus says the Lord, even the carcasses of men shall fall as refuse on the open field, like cuttings after the harvester, and no one shall gather them. Thus says the Lord, 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. But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, exercising loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.

For in these I delight, says the Lord. Now the knowledge of God is a very important subject in Scripture, and we can't go off into a tangent about it. This is a text for preaching.

It's a great three-point sermon, and preachers use it frequently, and rightly so. It basically catalogs the false security that people have in natural advantages, whether it's wisdom or strength or money. All of these things are things which those who possess them are inclined to trust.

If you grow up stronger than the other kids, wiser, smarter than other people, richer, you grow up feeling like you've got an advantage over them. You can buy your way or fight your way or reason your way out of situations that others cannot. And therefore, you grow up thinking that this is your security, your strength, your wisdom, your money.

And once you have developed a habit of trusting in things of the world for your security, it becomes very difficult to trust in the Lord. I mean, it doesn't mean that you can't profess Christianity or even truly believe in God. But when it comes down to really relying and trusting in God, it's a very hard thing to do when you have anything else that you can trust in instead.

Things that are seen are much easier to rely upon for the natural man and for the carnal Christian than the unseen. I never really had a lot of money. In fact, I was almost always poor.

But when my wife was killed in an accident, I received an insurance settlement. Suddenly, I had much more money than I'd ever had at any one time. Actually, much more than I ever thought I would ever have at one time.

It wasn't all that much now. I mean, this was back in 1981. I received the settlement, so money was worth more than it is now.

But it was a chunk. It was a chunk of money. By my current standard of living at the time, it was enough that I could have lived for probably five years off of the money that I received.

It was about five times or more what my annual income usually was. It was a lot of money for someone like me who had lived really hand-to-mouth. My living hand-to-mouth had been a lifestyle choice.

It was not simply a necessity. It came of my decision to live by faith and to actually be content with what things I had and if I had extra to give it away and things like that. I had lived very poor, and it was a conviction of mine that I did.

I lived in such a way that I had to trust God, not just in general for my salvation, but I had to trust him for my rent. I had to trust him for my phone bill to be paid. I had to trust him to keep my car running because I didn't have the money generally to fix it if it broke down, and I drove an old car.

I remember when suddenly this money was given to me as an insurance settlement after my wife died. I just thought, well, this is in danger of changing the way I relate to God, because I now don't need to trust God for the next several years. I could pay my rent in advance.

I could pay my phone bills in advance. I could buy a new car. I can fix my car if it breaks.

There's really nothing that can happen to me that this money would not repair or would not remedy. I remember thinking the temptation would be great to trust in this money for the things that I'm accustomed to trusting God for. I actually made a commitment that I would get rid of the money.

I wouldn't just throw it away. I was going to give myself a year to give it all away. I was going to spend some on what I needed at the moment, and I did need a few things, and I spent a portion of it on things I needed.

But apart from that, I decided to give it all away, and I gave myself a year. I thought, okay, from a year from this point, I want it all to be dispersed, because I don't like the idea of living with the knowledge that I can bail myself out of any situation, when I actually have always enjoyed a nearness to God that comes with being totally dependent on Him. I did, in fact, do that.

All the money was gone a year from the time that I got it. But that year was a difficult year for me, with reference to trusting God. Not that I distrusted Him.

Sometimes, we just think that trusting God just means we don't distrust Him. We believe what He says, and it's our conviction that things are true that God says, but to me, trusting God always had meant leaning on God, relying on God, depending on God. That was what a life of faith looks like to me.

It was, frankly, impossible to rely on God for some things that I had relied on Him for, because there's no reason to. I mean, I could have said, I'm not going to spend \$1 on myself, and I could have done that. I suppose that would have changed things, but I didn't.

That money, as long as it was there, prevented me from trusting God for my rent,

because you can't pretend that you need God to provide for you when you don't. He's already provided. I realized there was a reason why God had provided for Israel, one day at a time, the manna.

They would have to depend on Him each day. He provided enough for them to live each day, and they couldn't store it up overnight, because it would rot. God made sure of that.

It wasn't just a natural phenomenon that it rotted, because on the Sabbath, the day before Sabbath, they'd gather two days' worth, and it wouldn't rot. So they'd have some for the Sabbath. But it was obvious that God was deliberately orchestrating things, that they had to trust Him day by day.

When Jesus told His disciples to pray, He said, give us this day our daily bread, that it is a help to our relationship with God, if we can trust Him for everything. Now, that doesn't mean it's wrong to have money. I never felt like I was guilty, having money in the bank.

I wouldn't feel guilty if I had money in the bank now. It would probably be a while before I do, but the fact is, it wouldn't bother me. But it would, in a sense, change some things.

It just changes the dynamics. The more you have in the natural that you can lean on, the less you can really lean on God for those things. You can convince yourself that you're leaning on God for those things, and you can also correctly understand that the things you have may not bail you out of every contingency.

I mean, there are things that could come up that your resources cannot handle. So in the back of your mind, you're trusting God for the surplus of disaster that you can't cover with what you've got. So in other words, you can have things and still be trusting God in measure.

But the less you have, in some respects, the more you're thrown upon God. And the scriptures often say that the poor cast themselves on the Lord, that the poor trust in the Lord. Now, I'm not advocating a poverty ethic.

I'm saying that in my experience, I found out something I never thought I'd have the opportunity to find out, and that is when I had enough money sitting around to pay all my bills in advance, it was not really possible to have that desperate trust in God that had been the norm for my life previous to that time. And frankly, because I was accustomed to that, it was an uncomfortable thing. I was actually much more comfortable after that money was gone, and I could go back to just leaning on God and being desperate for God.

And I'm just giving you a testimony because I think that that is the nature of trusting, that if there's ever something easier, something closer at hand, something more visible you can trust in, it's difficult to impossible. I won't say it's impossible. I found it impossible.

But maybe somebody has spiritual disciplines that I lack. But the point is that it's very, very difficult to trust in what is unseen when there's something visible and tangible right there that you can trust in for the same deliverance. And so the wise and the rich and the powerful, the strong, they have the kinds of advantages that you grow up, if you have those things, you grow up just counting on those things to cover the problems for you.

And while it could be seen that wisdom and strength and money are all blessings from God, there's nothing – these are not negatives. They are blessings that God gives some people, but they become a test too. God tests us with poverty, but he also tests us with prosperity.

He tests us with sickness, but he also tests us with good health. You know, all circumstances become in their own way a test in our fallen state. Like the agor said in Chapter 30 of Proverbs, he says, Give me neither poverty nor riches, lest I be rich and forget God.

And say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor and be tempted to steal and take the name of the Lord of my God in vain. In other words, you know, in a sense I'm damned if I do and I'm damned if I don't. If I have money, it can make me forget God.

If I don't have money, it can make me desperate and nothing. If I don't trust God, I might be even steal and compromise. So prosperity is a test.

Poverty is a test. And every state of life in this fallen world is an opportunity for us to, for the devil really, to bring us into some kind of compromise to deaden our confidence in God. And so Jeremiah urges these people who happen to be, of course, forgetting God altogether.

He's not talking to Christians who love God but happen to have the challenges of being, having worldly advantages that might compete with their trust in God in their lives. These are people who don't have any trust in God at all. These are people who have forsaken God and instead of God, they're trusting in wisdom and might and riches.

And he's saying that's not, you tell these people not to do that. You need to be boasting in God. Now, of course, those who are not believers can't boast in God because they don't have him.

But the idea is you should put yourself in a position where God is your entire confidence. Your total confidence is in him. It doesn't mean that you make yourself stupid if you're wise or weak if you're strong or poor if you're rich.

It just means you recognize that trusting in God is the only true way to be in touch with reality. Because God actually can resolve every issue that comes up, but money cannot, strength cannot, wisdom cannot. There comes a limit to those things.

The natural resources exist in measure. But God, of course, his power and his wisdom, his resources are infinite. And therefore, a person should trust in and seek confidence in God and getting to know God.

Now, what does God want us to know? He wants us to know that he is the Lord exercising loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. And he delights in those things. Now, notice what he wants people to know.

It may be that someone would think, well, I need to get to know God, so I need to take a course in theology. And so I learn about God's omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, the Trinitarian doctrine, and all the ways that theologians explain these mysteries about God, saying, now I know God. Well, not really.

You know about God. It's one thing to know about God. It's another thing to know God.

It's one thing to know facts about God. And for God to be to you a combination of all the theological propositions that you've memorized, that's not knowing God. That's knowing theology, the study of God.

Knowing God is knowing his character and knowing it by experience. Just like you get to know anybody else that is a close friend or acquaintance that you get to know them by experience. You find out what they are like.

You may not know what their blood sugar level is or their blood pressure level is. You don't know these details about them. You don't have to.

You know if they're a faithful person. You know if they're a kind person. You know if they're loving or if they're greedy or whatever.

You know somebody's character, and that's knowing somebody. Your doctor may know all about you. He can tell you all the facts about you, just like a theologian can tell all the facts about God.

But knowing God is knowing him as a person, and his personal characteristics are what he wishes them to know. If anyone glories, let him glory in that he knows God as a person, that he knows God's character, that he knows the kind of person he is. When we talk about theology, there are - and I don't know if theologians make this point.

I'm sure they probably do. I haven't studied theology with them. But it seems to me obvious there's two things, two sets of attributes of God that one should try to know.

One is the attributes that I mentioned first that theologians do, the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of God's omniscience and omnipresence and omnipotence, those kinds of traits of God. If you don't know those things, then you don't know what kind of a being he is. You might think he's altogether such a one as yourself.

You might think he's like a god of stone or of wood. If you don't know these things about him, you need to know he's eternal. You need to know he's invisible.

He's always present. These are facts about God which tell you what kind of a being he is. He's a different kind of being than any other - than any created being.

He's a unique being. And those things tell you what kind of a being he is. But then there's the other attributes of God that tell you what kind of a person he is.

Is he loving or is he callous? Is he just or is he capricious? What kind of a person is he? And this is where I think theologians make the mistake of thinking we need to know about God, meaning what kind of a being he is. And there are certain people whose whole theology and whose whole way of judging other Christians' theology is whether they are right about these facts about God, about what kind of a being he is. Such people would be offended, for example, by the openness theologians who think that God doesn't know the future.

I was offended by that for many years myself, and I still am not an openness theologian. I still think that openness does not take into full account all that the Bible says about God. But I used to be very offended by it because it was a different God, a different theology, a different concept of God's omniscience.

And, you know, as I've gotten older, I've realized that God, when he says, let him who glories glory in this, that he knows me, he doesn't say that he knows how much I know or knows how powerful I am or knows how invisible I am or omnipresent, but rather that he knows how good I am, that I'm a God who exercises loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. And I delight in these things. This tells you where his heart is.

And to know somebody, to know God, you need to discover what kind of a person he is. And you learn that from experience with him. You learn that from walking with him.

You learn that from his providence in your life and the way he handles situations in your life. You discover his faithfulness. You discover that he is inexplicably generous, you know.

And even in times where things are going terribly for you, you find that he's near and that he's comforted and that he's compassionate and so forth. Knowing God like this is what people should trade in their confidence in natural things for. To know God is security.

To be on good terms with God, to be a friend of God, that's security. Or as Jesus said it in John 17, 3, this is eternal life that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. That, he says, is eternal life itself.

Salvation is knowing God, not knowing about God, but knowing God. And so God says if

anyone glories, if you want to boast about something, boast of the fact that you know me, rather than that you are wise, strong, or rich, those things will no doubt give you rank and status among men. And will give you a sense of security in some situations where those are the factors that can deliver.

But even in those situations where wisdom, strength, and money might be expected to deliver, God can deliver from those situations too. And others besides. Verse 25, Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will punish all those who are circumcised with the uncircumcised.

Egypt, Judah, Edom, the people of Ammon, Moab, and all that are in the farthest corners who dwell in the wilderness. For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart. It was in chapter 4 he urged them to be circumcised in their hearts.

By the way, I made an error when I was commenting on chapter 4. I said that Jeremiah, as far as I knew, was the first person prior to Paul to talk about circumcision of the heart. It was pointed out to me I was forgetting. Moses in both Leviticus and Deuteronomy had made reference to circumcision of the hearts too.

So just a correction there. Jeremiah, in fact, is probably getting the term from Moses from Deuteronomy. Because the book of Deuteronomy apparently was found by Josiah, the high priest in the time of Josiah.

And many times Jeremiah seems to make reference to things in the book of Deuteronomy. So even his reference to circumcision of the heart might be an echo of Moses' reference to it in Deuteronomy chapter 10. Now what it says in verses 25 and 26 here is that the circumcised, that is the Jews, are going to be punished equally with the uncircumcised.

That is, God's not going to show them special favor. The Jews boasted in their circumcision. That was basically their ticket to God, their being circumcised.

The way they kept God on their side was by being circumcised and circumcising their children. He says, no, you're not any different than the uncircumcised to me. And he lists them together, Egypt, Judah, Edom.

Notice he puts Judah in the middle. He doesn't list the circumcised and the uncircumcised as separate categories. Judah is circumcised.

The others are flanking Judah in the list. So Judah is included among the Gentiles in God's assessment. And then of course the people of Ammon and Moab and others.

These are all uncircumcised people, but Judah is uncircumcised in the heart. Chapter 10. Hear the word of the Lord, that the Lord speaks to you, O house of Israel.

Thus says the Lord, do not learn the way of the Gentiles. Do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them. For the customs of the peoples are futile.

For one cuts a tree from the forest in the work of the hands of the workmen with an axe. They decorate it with silver and gold. They fasten it with nails and hammers so that it does not topple.

They are upright like a palm tree, and they cannot speak. They must be carried because they cannot go by themselves. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil.

Come to think of it, they can't do any good either. Now, of course you saw about idols here, but some of the wording of this passage has encouraged Christians who are not very careful in reading things in context, to say this is a reference to Christmas trees. There's reference to going out to the woods, cutting down a tree, bring it in the house, fasten it with nails so it doesn't fall over, deck it with silver and gold, tinsel, and so forth.

Literally, many Christians use this passage to condemn the practice of Christmas trees. In fact, they even suggest that it is the practice of bringing trees like this into the house and decorating them that is being alluded to here. But anyone who reads the whole book of Jeremiah recognizes this is not talking about the practice of decorating a tree.

It's the practice of carving a tree into the image of a man or an animal, plating it with gold or silver, and setting it up in your house as an object of worship, an idol. The reference to that it should not topple is something that he's mentioned about idols before. They tend to topple over if you don't fasten them down, and they really are helpless.

They can't even stand up, in other words, on their own strength. You've got to kind of keep them from falling over. And it says, don't be afraid of them.

They can't really do you any harm or any good either. There's just no reason to have them. They don't do anything.

They're helpless to do anything, even for themselves, much less for you. Now, this forbidding of making idols is introduced by the statement, do not learn the way of the Gentiles or of the heathen, in verse 2. Idolatry is no doubt something that people could figure out on their own, but the Jews were in danger of learning their religious practices from their neighbors, and that's why God told them to drive all the Canaanites out of the land, which they didn't do, by the way, but he had commanded them to. He says because if you leave them in the land, they will stumble you.

They will allure you into their idolatry. And it was very important to God that Israel would not mimic anything about pagan religions. In fact, in Deuteronomy 12, when Moses is warning them as they're about to go into the land, Deuteronomy 12, verses 29 through

32, Moses said, When the Lord your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourselves that you are not ensnared to follow them after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.

You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way. For every abomination to the Lord which he hates they have done to their gods. For they burn even their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.

Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it. You shall not add to or take away from it. In other words, do not try to borrow religious practices from the heathen, even to incorporate into the worship of Yahweh.

Don't say, You know, I wonder how the heathen worship their gods. We can bring that on into our religion. That's what Aaron did when he made the golden calf.

The golden calf was an image probably from the Egyptian god Ra. But he said, This is Yahweh who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Let's take the pagan way of worship, the forms and so forth, and we'll apply them to Yahweh.

By the way, this is something that should convict many churches too, I believe, because in many cases we take the ways that products are sold by the heathen to each other, the way they worship their god Mammon, and we try to promote Jesus with those same methods, which is different than the way that he promoted himself or that the disciples promoted him. But we say, Well, hey, the heathen, they've got a great success. They make a lot of money.

Their god Mammon is well served by these methods, these advertising methods, these promotional methods, this marketing. And so why don't we just market Jesus those ways? Well, that is, in my mind, learning the ways of the heathen, how they worship their gods and saying, Let's worship Yahweh that way. Learning the ways of the heathen is forbidden.

Jeremiah 10.2 says, Do not learn the ways of the heathen. He says, Do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven. Apparently, he's talking about astrology and how certain configurations of the heavenly bodies dismay astrologers.

I don't know that much about the calendar that's telling us that 2012 is the end of the world or whatever that people are interpreting that way. But I got a feeling it was from astronomy or astrology, rather, that these dates were calculated originally. And if people are being dismayed by that, it probably goes back to the heathen who were dismayed by the signs of the heavens or who at least took their guidance and their revelation from astrology.

In any case, many in America, quite apart from the Aztec calendar, there are many who read their horoscopes every day, and some of them actually take them seriously. And if they say, This is not a good day for going outdoors, this is not a good day for taking risks, this is not a good day for investing or buying, then they don't do it because they're troubled by the signs of the heavens. That's superstition.

It's placed here on the same level with building idols to worship because it turns the stars, as it were, into gods. It basically says your destiny is being determined by them, gives them divine powers in your imagination, just like the pagans would make statues and attribute to them divine powers that they don't possess. Now, verse 6, Inasmuch as there is none like you, O Lord, you are great, and your name is great in might.

Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For this is your rightful due. For among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like you. But they are altogether dull-hearted and foolish.

A wooden idol is a worthless doctrine. Silver is beaten into plates. It is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Euphaz.

The work of the craftsman and the hands of the metalsmith. Blue and purple are its clothing. They actually dress these idols up in apparently actual cloth, or else paint them these colors.

And they are all the work of skillful men. But the Lord is the true God. He is the living God and the everlasting King.

At his wrath, the earth will tremble, and the nations will not be able to abide his indignation. Thus you shall say to them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens. So these gods that the heathen make are not going to be here forever.

He says that God is the everlasting God, but these aren't. They're going to perish. By the way, when New Agers say, you know, we're all gods, you might point this verse out to them.

Well, all the gods that didn't make the heavens and the earth, that would include you and me if we're gods, we didn't make the heavens and the earth. Well, we're all going to perish from under the earth. So better take precautions against that.

God has made precautions that those who believe in him shall not perish. But these gods will perish. Any god that didn't create the heavens and the earth, you can make a god out of yourself or out of something else.

But whatever it is, it's going to perish because that's not the God who made the heavens, the earth. There's only one who did that. Verse 12, he has made the earth by

his power.

He has established the world by his wisdom and has stretched out the heavens at his discretion. When he utters his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens and he causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain and he brings the wind out of his treasuries.

In other words, he makes the weather happen, including the hydraulic cycle of evaporation and rain. Everyone is dull-hearted without knowledge. Every metalsmith is put to shame by the graven image, for his molded image is falsehood and there is no breath in them.

They're futile, the work of errors. In the time of their punishment, they shall perish. The portion of Jacob is not like them.

The portion of Jacob is a term for God. He's Jacob's inheritance, his portion. For he is the maker of all things and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance.

The Lord of hosts is his name. Gather up your wares from the land, O inhabitant of the fortress. For thus says the Lord, behold, I will throw out at this time the inhabitants of the land.

I will distress them that they may find it so. Woe is me for my hurt. My wound is severe, but I say truly, this is an infirmity and I must bear it.

Now, who's speaking here is not entirely clear. It's obviously either Jeremiah, who is experiencing this pain of heart, or maybe God, because the prophet bears the burden of the Lord and therefore feels God's pains. Maybe it's God, or maybe it's the nation as a whole mourning over its losses.

In any case, it's not always clear. But he says, my tent is plundered and all my cords are broken. My children have gone from me.

Now, this hardly could be Jeremiah because he didn't have any children, didn't have a wife or children. So, it's either God or else it's Israel or Judah claiming, you know, I've lost all my children. They've gone into captivity.

And they are no more. There is no one to pitch my tent anymore or to set up my curtains. For the shepherds have become dull-hearted and have not sought the Lord.

Now, these are shepherds. They're supposed to be leading the people of God under Yahweh's direction. And yet the shepherds, the leaders, these are the people so often listed as the princes, the priests, the prophets, etc., the kings.

They don't seek the Lord. So, obviously, they're leading the wrong direction. They're certainly not doing what they are ordained by God to do.

Therefore, they shall not prosper and all their flock shall be scattered. Behold, the noise of the report has come and a great commotion out of the north country to make the cities of Judah desolate, a den of jackals. Then Jeremiah prays this prayer.

O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. O Lord, correct me, but with justice, not in your anger, lest you bring me to nothing.

Pour out your fury on the Gentiles or the heathen who do not know you. This is another imprecation. Well, actually, this may be the first we've come to.

There are many coming up. But pour out your fury on the heathen who do not know you and on the families who do not call on your name. For they have eaten up Jacob, devoured him and consumed him and made his habitation desolate.

I might just say that this imprecation is one of the few, if not the only one, that he actually names the heathen as the objects of his imprecation. He wishes God's wrath on the heathen. Almost all the other, if not all the other, imprecations in the book are directed toward Jews who persecute Jeremiah himself.

For example, in chapter 11, verse 20, he says, But O Lord of hosts, you who judge righteously, testing the mind and the heart, let me see your vengeance on them, for you have revealed my cause. Let me see your vengeance on them is actually a reference to the men of Anathoth, his own hometown, who are seeking to kill him. They're plotting to kill him, it says in verses 18 and 19.

So he says, let me see your vengeance on them. Then in chapter 15 and verse 15, we have another imprecation. He says, O Lord, you know, remember me and visit me and take vengeance for me on my persecutors.

And then in chapter 17, verse 18, he says, and this again is his persecutors he's referring to, let them be ashamed who persecute me, but do not let me be put to shame. Let them be dismayed, but do not let me be dismayed. Bring on them the day of doom and destroy them with the double destruction.

This is not a friendly wish. And then in chapter 18, we have the strongest of the imprecations, I believe, in verses 21 through 23. He says, therefore, deliver up their children to the famine and pour out their blood by force of the sword.

Let their wives become widows and bereaved of their children. Let their men be put to death, their young men be slain by the sword in battle. Let a cry be heard from their houses when you bring a troop suddenly upon them, for they have dug a pit to take me and hidden snares for my feet.

Now, he even says in verse 23, don't provide any atonement for their iniquity. Don't blot

out their sin from your sight. This is not the kind of prayer Christians pray, although Christians may rightly pray for God's intervention, even judgment upon wicked institutions and people that are seeking to destroy the work of God in the world.

Yet to say don't provide any atonement, don't forgive them, is not really quite what our sentiments are to be. Jesus, after all, said, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they do.

Jesus did decree judgments upon his enemies, the scribes and Pharisees, woe unto them. Paul and others in the New Testament, especially the martyrs in heaven in Revelation chapter 6, they do wish for God to intervene and judge the wicked, but also Paul is merciful to people who have wronged him. And he wishes God not to—he doesn't wish ill on those who wronged him.

He wishes ill on those who oppose God. David also has his share of imprecatory prayers, but generally speaking, they are against those who oppose God, not those who oppose him. And even in the few cases where he wishes it on those who oppose him, it is probable that his thought is they're opposing him in the sense of God's kingdom.

He is God's king over Israel, and those who are trying to overthrow him are trying to overthrow God's purposes and God's kingdom. When it came to personal foes, David was very soft-hearted toward them in most cases. At the end of his life, he was a little crusty, a little vindictive toward people who had done wrong to him earlier, but he had not wished ill on them during his lifetime.

He did kind of feel there were some unsettled scores with some of the people who had wronged him in the past, and he did tell Solomon to do them harm. This is not one of David's finest hours. David did many things that were not commendable, and his vindictiveness toward those people and putting it off on his son to punish them when he wouldn't do it himself is perhaps not commendable.

But in general, in David's life, he cared for those who persecuted him and respected them and wished they wouldn't— well, I don't know if he wished they wouldn't die, but when they did die, he mourned them. He had compassion on them. And so it is that there's this nuanced, conflicted kind of experience of godly people.

On one hand, they weep as Jeremiah wept for the disaster that's coming on the city, or Jesus wept over Jerusalem, or Paul said, I could wish myself a curse from Christ if it would bring salvation to my brethren. There's this compassion, but there's also this anger that these people oppose God, and in some cases that they oppose God's spokesman, and harsh, harsh things are uttered against them. Not everything Jeremiah said necessarily exhibits a godly heart that we should imitate, but it is a genuine outpouring of his vulnerable and wounded spirit.

And he's not entirely Christ-like in this. In many ways, Jeremiah is a type of Christ, but not so much in the way he kind of loses patience with those who are wrongfully persecuting him. One can sympathize with his sentiments.

How could a person not be tempted to think evil of people who are trying to kill him when he's doing nothing wrong? But not all of his imprecations necessarily reflect the way Christians should pray about their persecutors, obviously. Now, I'm going to have to close here, but at the end of chapter 10 of Jeremiah, verses 23 and 24, he acknowledges that man, even a godly man, needs God's direct guidance. It's not in a man to direct his own way.

Even a godly man like Jeremiah needed God to direct him, and as he said, to correct him. He, as a godly man, sometimes wasn't without the need for correction. Perhaps even when he had some of these bitter prayers toward his enemies, that was maybe something that he realized might need to be corrected.

And he says, Lord, correct me, but not in your full anger, you know. If you're angry at me, cool down a little bit first before you spank, because you could obviously bring me to absolutely nothing. God judges, but in most cases, well, when he's judging his own, he's chastening.

That's what Paul said. The church in Corinth had actually lost some members because of compromises made at the Lord's table. According to the 11th chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul said, for this reason, many are sick and weak among you, and some have even died.

And then he says, for if we would judge ourselves, we wouldn't be judged, but when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we might not be condemned with the world. That is, God does judge the church. God does judge and correct his children, but it's not to destroy them.

It's to correct them. It's so that change will come before judgment, final judgment comes, because if Christians are no better than non-Christians, then there will be no reason for God to give them a break at judgment because we'll be judged by our works. And so, this is 1 Corinthians 11, verse 30 and 31.

It's in verse 31 and 32 that he says, if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. He means by God. We actually have an option here.

Things we do that might bring the judgment of God upon us, we can judge them ourselves. We can repent of them. We can condemn those behaviors and bring them before God and receive forgiveness so that we won't be judged for those things, ultimately.

But verse 32 says, even when we are judged, he means by God, even when God does

judge us, it's not to condemn us, but rather to correct us that we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. So Jeremiah knew that if God didn't show some discretion here and make a distinction between a godly man like Jeremiah, on the one hand, and the wicked on the other, if God's anger was just unleashed against Jeremiah as against them, he'd be brought to nothing as they would. So he's saying, do it not in your fury.

Do it with justice, not in anger, lest you bring me to nothing. And so that's a prayer for guidance. That's a prayer for direction and correction.

It's the prayer of somebody yielded to the will of God, willing to be corrected, even painfully, but hopefully not disastrously. And his acknowledgment that he does not seek to direct his own way and can't. It's not in man to direct his own way.

How could we direct our own way when our way is into the future? A minute from now, conditions will prevail that we may not anticipate at this moment. An earthquake could knock this building down in the next 60 seconds. We have no inkling of it.

We don't know what the future holds. We don't know what the needs will be, what the responses from us may be called for. And therefore, we don't have the capacity to direct our way.

I can drive a car when I can see ahead on the road, but when the fog is so thick I can't see, I have to pull over. I don't have the power to direct the vehicle if I can't see what's ahead. And I don't have the power to direct my life if I can't see what's ahead.

But God can see what's ahead, and therefore, he's saying, I need you to direct my steps. And that is, of course, a prayer that every Christian should pray, an attitude that every Christian should have about life. You know, if the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that, James said.

We will trust in God to provide the guidance for the next things, the things that only he knows are coming. And knowing what we need to do and what we need to become, he'll correct us. But he will correct us as children are corrected, not as enemies are punished.

And that's what Jeremiah is affirming and imploring. Well, that brings us to the end of our time, and so we will have to pick up at Chapter 11 next time.