

Chapter 3, verse 6, says that this message came to Jeremiah in the days of Josiah.

We saw in chapter 1 that the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah  
in the thirteenth year of Josiah (ca. 627 B.C.).

Jeremiah 1-6 presents itself as the basic message of the prophet Jeremiah.

This is the word of the LORD that Jeremiah proclaimed in the 620s and 610s –  
in the years of Josiah’s reforms –  
in the years when everything was glorious!

It must have seemed odd to King Josiah –

the best king in the history of Jerusalem –

to have this message proclaimed in the midst of reformation and renewal.

Disaster is coming from the north!

After all, the Assyrian empire was crumbling.

Babylon had revolted, and so the powers of the age were enmeshed in civil war  
and internal crises.

Jerusalem was free from external constraint.

It was a good time to be a reforming king!

But then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah:

it's too late.

Judgment is coming.

Jeremiah 2-6 summarizes the basic message of the prophet.

In chapter 2, the LORD accuses Jerusalem of infidelity and betrayal.

In chapter 3, the LORD says that the northern kingdom of Israel is *better* than Judah,  
and calls faithless Israel *and* faithless Judah to repent and return.

In chapters 4-6, the LORD declares the coming disaster from the north  
that is decreed for Jerusalem because they refused to repent and return.

Josiah might have said,

“But we have repented! Look at all my reforms in worship!”

But Jeremiah’s message is that your repentance is half-hearted!

Your repentance isn’t good enough!

The outward reformation of worship cannot save Jerusalem.

Your heart must change:

As we saw last time – “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD;  
remove the foreskin of your hearts” (4:4)

or as he says in 4:14 –

“wash your heart from evil, that you may be saved”!

Well, as Jon and I have pointed out from Matthew 3 –  
that’s why Jesus came!

That’s why Jesus was baptized.

It was necessary to fulfill all righteousness.

Israel’s repentance was never enough.

Israel’s repentance never lasted.

We needed someone whose repentance would endure until the end of the world!

And that’s why when the LORD turned his face toward us,  
and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,  
only then was there a repentance – a turning away from sin to God –  
that would endure forever!

And that’s why Jeremiah 4 is so important for us.

Jeremiah 4 is what happens when there is insufficient repentance!

And Jeremiah 4 ends with the undoing of Creation.

Sin brings death – and death is the undoing of Creation –  
a return to the primordial chaos before God ordered the world.

## **1. The Announcement of Coming Judgment: Disaster from the North (v5-18)**

### **a. “Blow the Trumpet”: a Destroyer of Nations Is Coming (v5-8)**

<sup>5</sup> *Declare in Judah, and proclaim in Jerusalem, and say,*

*“Blow the trumpet through the land;*

*cry aloud and say,*

*‘Assemble, and let us go*

*into the fortified cities!’*

<sup>6</sup> *Raise a standard toward Zion,*

*flee for safety, stay not,*

*for I bring disaster from the north,*

*and great destruction.*

<sup>7</sup> *A lion has gone up from his thicket,*

*a destroyer of nations has set out;*

*he has gone out from his place*

*to make your land a waste;*

*your cities will be ruins*

*without inhabitant.*

<sup>8</sup> *For this put on sackcloth,*

*lament and wail,*

*for the fierce anger of the LORD*

*has not turned back from us.”*

In verses 5-8 we hear the blast of the trumpet.

The trumpet blast will be used several times in chapter 4 and in chapter 6 to signal the coming judgment.

In verses 19 and 21 the prophet (or the LORD himself) will be in anguish over this trumpet blast.

The shophar – the ram’s horn – is designed for sending loud signals across the land.

When the people in the villages and fields hear the shophar they know that they must assemble quickly.

Jeremiah does not say whose army is coming.

He simply says that disaster comes from the north.  
(as usual!)

We can probably assume that this is the Babylonians – but the identity of the army does not matter.

After all, notice how Jeremiah says it:

“I bring disaster from the north.”

Hosea 5 and Amos 1-3 both spoke of blowing trumpets, disaster coming – and a lion roaring and destroying his prey.

Hosea and Amos were both quite clear that the lion was Yahweh himself.

The agent may be the nations – but the lion is the LORD!

The anger of the LORD is against Jerusalem.

Who can stand?

Listen to verse 8,

“For this put on sackcloth, lament and wail,  
for the fierce anger of the LORD has not turned back from us.”

There’s our word “turn” again!

Until the anger of the LORD turns back,  
until the LORD turns his face toward us and shines upon us –  
we are doomed!

What do you until then?

“Put on sackcloth, lament and wail.”

I want you to think about this.

Jeremiah is not talking about the ordinary individual struggles we all face.

Jeremiah is talking about times of corporate, communal judgment – times when the whole people of God are suffering.

What can you do when Judah is overrun by a marauding army?

Get out your sword and fight!?

No, that's what Peter thought when Jesus was arrested...  
But Peter didn't understand what Jeremiah had said –  
much less what Jesus had said...

What can you do when the enemies of God are seeking to destroy the people of God?  
Put on sackcloth, lament, and wail.

Verse 9 reminds us of Jeremiah's focus on the leadership of Jerusalem:

**b. In that Day – Courage Shall Fail Kings, Priests, and Prophets (v9)**

<sup>9</sup> *“In that day, declares the LORD, courage shall fail both king and officials. The priests shall be appalled and the prophets astounded.”*

The kings and priests of Jerusalem will be shocked.

The palace and the temple had interpreted God's promises to David  
to mean that Jerusalem would never fall.

The presence of the LORD in the temple guaranteed that no enemy could defeat them.

(Twenty years later, the prophet Ezekiel would see a vision of the LORD  
departing from the temple – chased out by his rebellious people!)

So it was true.

So long as the LORD remained in the midst of his people,  
no enemy could destroy them.

And so Jeremiah voices the question that the kings, priests and prophets are asking:

**Interlude: Jeremiah's Query – Has God's Promise of Peace Deceived Jerusalem? (v10)**

<sup>10</sup> *Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD, surely you have utterly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, ‘It shall be well with you,’ whereas the sword has reached their very life.”*

The prophets had declared 'shalom' on Jerusalem.

For generations the prophets have been saying that it shall be well –  
that Jerusalem would have peace.

And not just the false prophets!

Many of the Psalms speak of God's faithfulness to his covenant.

The Psalms would have been sung in the temple –  
as Israel would be reminded

that God's covenant with David will endure forever!

The people of God sincerely believed that God had promised *shalom* –  
peace – to Jerusalem.

And he had!

And so Jeremiah says that the Lord GOD has utterly deceived this people and Jerusalem.

There may be a touch of sarcasm here.

But it is not the biting sarcasm of the mocker.

After all, in 1 Kings 22 the prophet Micaiah  
speaks of how the LORD sent a lying spirit into the prophets of Israel  
in order to deceive King Ahab.

I want you to think about that.

Sometimes God deceives his people.

When false prophets come and preach lies to the people of God  
it is because God *sent them* to preach lies!

Why does God deceive his people?

There is no one more easily deceived than a person who wants to be deceived.

If you want to do something –

I mean if you *really* want to do it –

but you know that God says that you shouldn't –

and then you ask God for a *sign* –

“I know you don't normally want people to do this, Lord,

but if you want *me* to do this,

could you please give me a sign...”

God may very well send you precisely that sign

in order to ascertain whether you will obey him –

or whether you will chase after your self-deception.

And so Jeremiah answers his own question.

Yes, God has deceived Jerusalem –

because Jerusalem wanted to be deceived.

They wanted to believe that Jerusalem was secure –

they wanted to believe that they would have peace on their own terms.

And so,

**b'. At That Time – a Wind of Judgment from the Desert (v11-12)**

<sup>11</sup> *At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem, “A hot wind from the bare heights in the desert toward the daughter of my people, not to winnow or cleanse, <sup>12</sup> a wind too full for this comes for me. Now it is I who speak in judgment upon them.”*

Please let that sink in!

A hot wind from the bare heights in the desert toward the daughter of my people,  
*not to winnow or cleanse!*

The east wind in Israel is the wind of judgment.

The east wind is a hot wind off the desert.

The east wind never brings rain – never brings blessing.

The east wind – the hot wind off the desert –  
comes bringing judgment.

But until today, the hot wind off the desert had come in order to chasten –

in order to winnow or cleanse the people of God.

But now the hot wind from the desert is blowing –  
a wind too full for this comes for me!  
Now it is I who speak in judgment upon them.

Of course, the word for *wind* is *ruach* (also translated “spirit”).  
When Jesus comes, John says that Jesus will baptize with the Spirit and with fire.

Spirit and fire baptism is precisely what Jesus must undergo –  
and Spirit and fire baptism is precisely what Jeremiah says that Jerusalem must undergo.

**a’. “Behold, He Comes – Woe to Us, for We Are Ruined” (v13)**

<sup>13</sup> *Behold, he comes up like clouds;  
his chariots like the whirlwind;  
his horses are swifter than eagles—  
woe to us, for we are ruined!*

And verse 13 concludes the first section of the chapter with a reflection on the coming  
of the one who comes in judgment.

Woe to us – for we are ruined.  
When God comes in judgment,  
we are ruined.

And that’s why Jeremiah interjects in verse 14:

**Interlude 2: A Plea for Repentance (v14)**

<sup>14</sup> *O Jerusalem, wash your heart from evil,  
that you may be saved.  
How long shall your wicked thoughts  
lodge within you?*

Wind and fire are coming (verses 4 and 12),  
but there is a washing that can save you!

Wash your heart from evil – that you may be saved.  
Baptism saves – not just the external washing of the body  
(Jerusalem thought that the external reforms of Josiah could save them!)  
but only the washing of the heart.

The word “evil” is the same word translated “disaster” in verse 6.  
God brings evil/disaster from the north.  
So wash your heart from evil/disaster.

In one sense, our English translations do the right thing.

The Hebrew word ra'a means more than just "evil" –  
it includes the idea of "disaster."

But there is also to drawback to the different translations.  
Because Jeremiah's point is that the same thing that is coming from the north –  
the disaster – the evil – the destruction from the north –  
is also *in our hearts*.

Yes, the wicked are coming against Jerusalem.  
But why is that?  
It is because of the wicked thoughts that lodge within you.  
Disaster comes because disastrous thoughts take root within your heart.

I don't think that I need to comment on verses 15-18 –  
they simply explain the reason in very straightforward terms:

**a". 'He Is Coming' – But Your Ways Have Brought This Doom upon You (v15-18)**

<sup>15</sup> *For a voice declares from Dan  
and proclaims trouble from Mount Ephraim.*  
<sup>16</sup> *Warn the nations that he is coming;  
announce to Jerusalem,  
"Besiegers come from a distant land;  
they shout against the cities of Judah.*  
<sup>17</sup> *Like keepers of a field are they against her all around,  
because she has rebelled against me,  
declares the LORD.*  
<sup>18</sup> *Your ways and your deeds  
have brought this upon you.  
This is your doom, and it is bitter;  
it has reached your very heart."*

There are four "kiy's" in our passage –  
the Hebrew word "kiy" is translated "for" or "because" –  
and usually gives the reason for what is happening!  
Four times – in verse 15, in verse 22, in verse 27, and in verse 31 –  
the word 'kiy' begins a sentence.  
Each time explaining the reason for the judgment that is coming.

Here in verses 15-18, we see that  
when evil dwells in the heart of the people of God,  
then evil comes upon the people of God.  
Our disastrous hearts are the root of the disaster that destroys us!

**2. How Should We Think about the Coming Judgment: The Prophet and His God (v19-31)**

So how should we think about this coming judgment?  
There is, perhaps, a tendency for some to respond by saying,

“Ah, they deserved it!”  
Bad things happened to them because they sinned!  
They had evil hearts, and so evil came them.

That is certainly *not* the way that Jeremiah responds.

It is certainly *not* the way that God teaches us to think!  
Listen to the words of Jeremiah – the word of the LORD!

**a. The Knowledge of Good and Evil (v19-22)**

**i) Anguish and Agony: I Hear and I See the Coming Judgment (v19-21)**

<sup>19</sup> *My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain!*

*Oh the walls of my heart!*

*My heart is beating wildly;*

*I cannot keep silent,*

*for I hear the sound of the trumpet,*

*the alarm of war.*

<sup>20</sup> *Crash follows hard on crash;*

*the whole land is laid waste.*

*Suddenly my tents are laid waste,*

*my curtains in a moment.*

<sup>21</sup> *How long must I see the standard*

*and hear the sound of the trumpet?*

Who is writhing?

Who is in anguish?

In verses 16-18 the “I” is Yahweh who announces the coming judgment.

Is Yahweh still speaking in verses 19-21?

Or is it Jeremiah?

Certainly in verse 22 it is Yahweh speaking:

“My people are foolish; they know me not.”

But the “I” of verses 23-26 probably is Jeremiah –

as it speaks of how the cities were laid in ruins “before the LORD.”

This is why we opened the series on Jeremiah by focusing on the relationship between  
“the words of Jeremiah” and “the word of the LORD.” (Jeremiah 1:1-2)

More than any other prophet, Jeremiah uses first person address  
to blur the distinction between the prophet and the LORD.

Jeremiah writhes in pain as he hears the sound of the trumpet.

It hasn’t happened yet.

We are still 20 years away from the Babylonian invasion –

but as Jeremiah hears the sound the trumpet

his heart beats wildly,

because he knows what will surely come to pass.

How long must I see the standard and hear the sound of the trumpet?

In saying this, Jeremiah inhabits the standpoint of Yahweh.

Our Confession says that God does not have a “body, parts, or passions” (2.1).

People sometimes think that scripture contradicts this.

Plainly scripture teaches that God loves, grieves, rejoices, and more!

But when the church has taught that God does not have *passions* –  
that God is *impassible* –

we do not mean that God does not love, grieve, rejoice, etc.

You will better understand divine impassibility when you think about  
the closely related word “passive.”

The one who is *passionate* is being acted upon by external forces.

Why are you angry?

“Because of what he said!”

Our God is not like the Greek or Roman gods.

The Greek and Roman gods were subject to all sorts of passions –  
their mood swings were truly epic!

If God has *passions*, then you would need some way of divining his mood  
before you would dare approach him in prayer!

(This is what pagan priests did on a regular basis –  
consulting oracles, reading the stars, omens, etc.)

One of the greatest and most comforting things about our God  
is that you don’t have to worry about what kind of mood he is in today!

And so we can speak of “the Passion of the Impassible God,”  
because Jeremiah understood that God’s impassibility  
does *not* mean that God is aloof and indifferent.

If it seems strange to say “the passion of the impassible God,”  
think about the parallel – “the body of the bodiless God.”

Scripture everywhere talks about the “right hand” of the LORD –  
the eyes of the LORD watch over his word,  
and his ears are open to the cry of his people.

The mouth of the LORD has spoken – and his face is turned toward us.

That’s a lot of body parts for a God who has no body or parts!

We are created in the image of God.

God gave us eyes so that we could see –  
but our eyes only see *some* things.

God's eyes see everything.

The physical eye was designed as a dim copy of the true eye.  
Because God sees all things with his uncreated eye,  
therefore we see some things truly with our created eyes.

Our bodies were designed to reflect all sorts of things about God –  
we are finite pictures of the infinite.

In the same way, the passions are the created and (since the Fall) the corrupted picture  
of God's affections.

Our love, hope, anger, jealousy – and every other emotion –  
are dim and now twisted reflections of the true passion of God.

God has no physical body – and he has no emotional passions –  
but just as our bodies reflect something fundamentally true about God,  
so also our passions reflect something about him as well.

Our text tonight helps illustrate this.  
God is angry with his people.  
He is jealous of their dalliances with other gods.

How would you respond if your wife was sleeping around with other men?  
You would be angry and jealous!

But God's anger is not "like" ours –  
in the same way that God's ears are not "like" our ears!  
Rather, our ears are *like* God's ears –  
his ears that hear all things before they are spoken!  
And our anger is only *like* God's anger –  
his holy anger that always does justice and loves mercy!

In the same way that my right arm is a pitiful and pathetic picture of God's power –  
so also my anger is a pitiful and pathetic picture of God's anger!

Verse 22 explains why all this is happening –  
and clearly takes on the voice of the LORD:

**ii) "For My People Are Foolish; They Know Me Not" (v22)**

<sup>22</sup> *"For my people are foolish;  
they know me not;  
they are stupid children;  
they have no understanding.  
They are 'wise'—in doing evil!  
But how to do good they know not."*  
Our second 'kiy' is found in verse 22.

In verse 18 we heard that it was our ways and deeds that led to this doom – this evil.  
Now we hear that it was our foolishness – our lack of understanding.  
They know how to do evil – but not how to do good.

Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.  
Unfortunately, their descendants only know how to do evil.  
They are stupid children!  
If you would know how to do *good*,  
it is not enough to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil!  
If you would know how to do good,  
then you must know God himself.

Clearly the image of creation and fall is in Jeremiah's mind.  
After all, in verse 23, he speaks of how the earth has returned to "tohu vbohu" –  
the phrase used in Genesis 1 to speak of how the earth  
was barren and empty – before God said "Let their be light."  
The sin of Jerusalem has returned the world to darkness.  
And the judgment of Jerusalem will be the end of the world!

### **b. The Judgment of Jerusalem as the End of the World (v23-28)**

#### **i) Tohu vBohu: I Looked at the Unmaking of Creation (v23-26)**

- <sup>23</sup> *I looked on the earth, and behold, it was without form and void;  
and to the heavens, and they had no light.*
- <sup>24</sup> *I looked on the mountains, and behold, they were quaking,  
and all the hills moved to and fro.*
- <sup>25</sup> *I looked, and behold, there was no man,  
and all the birds of the air had fled.*
- <sup>26</sup> *I looked, and behold, the fruitful land was a desert,  
and all its cities were laid in ruins  
before the LORD, before his fierce anger.*

Four times the prophet says "I looked" –  
the same word that God used in Genesis 1 –  
"and the LORD saw that it was good..."

Is this Jeremiah looking?  
Or is it the LORD – looking out upon the earth –  
the earth that he brought out of tohu vbohu! –  
now returned to barrenness and emptiness;  
the heavens where he made the great lights –  
now returned to darkness;  
the mountains and hills that he established to remain secure forever! –  
now quaking and shaking to and fro;  
the man and the creatures who were to be fruitful and multiply! –  
now there is no man;

the fruitful land which was to bring forth plenty! –  
now a desert and all its cities laid in ruins.

Why?

Because the LORD himself has come in fierce anger  
to destroy his own creation!

**ii) For Thus Says the LORD: My Purposes Will Stand (v27-28)**

And so in verse 27 we hear our third 'kiy' –

<sup>27</sup> *For thus says the LORD, “The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end.*

Here there is a faint ray of hope!  
The whole land (same word as in verse 28 – so it could mean “all the earth”)  
will be a desolation – but God promises that he will not make a full end.

I will return the earth to primordial chaos – but not entirely!

<sup>28</sup> *“For this the earth shall mourn,  
and the heavens above be dark;  
for I have spoken; I have purposed;  
I have not relented, nor will I turn back.”*

At the cross of Jesus we see where this leads.

The passion of the impassible God will lead him to the incarnation.

After all, he looked, “and behold, there was no man.”

There was no Adam.

Adam’s race would never produce a second Adam.

There was no one whose repentance would satisfy the justice of God.

We were all half-hearted! (at best!!)

At the cross of Jesus we see the heavens above become dark.

Creation itself lamenting the passion of its impassible Creator –  
now hanging suspended between heaven and earth!

Chapter four concludes with a painful contrast between two women:

**c. The Two Women (v29-31)**

The first is the Jerusalem that now is. [don't read]

**i) The Painted Whore – the Jerusalem that Now Is (v29-31)**

<sup>29</sup> *At the noise of horseman and archer  
every city takes to flight;  
they enter thickets; they climb among rocks;  
all the cities are forsaken,  
and no man dwells in them.*

<sup>30</sup> *And you, O desolate one,  
what do you mean that you dress in scarlet,  
that you adorn yourself with ornaments of gold,  
that you enlarge your eyes with paint?  
In vain you beautify yourself.  
Your lovers despise you;  
they seek your life.*

When the invading armies come,  
every city takes to flight –  
the people flee to the hills.  
And so the desolate one – Jerusalem – dresses herself in scarlet, paints her eyes,  
and seeks to seduce her invaders.

It's a pathetic last ditch effort to save herself.

But it doesn't work.

And so we hear the final 'kiy' – the final reason in our chapter:

**ii) For I Heard a Cry as of a Woman in Labor – the Jerusalem Above (v31)**

<sup>31</sup> *For I heard a cry as of a woman in labor,  
anguish as of one giving birth to her first child,  
the cry of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath,  
stretching out her hands,  
“Woe is me! I am fainting before murderers.”*

In Revelation 12, we see the glorious Zion – the heavenly Jerusalem –  
giving birth to her firstborn child.  
There is a dragon there, waiting to kill the child –  
but her child was caught up to God –  
and she fled into the wilderness.

Jeremiah does not see the end of the story.  
He only hears the first part –  
the woman in labor – the cry of the daughter of Zion.

Many see verse 31 as the dying cry of the whore.  
I cannot.

Whenever the prophets speak of the cry of the woman in labor with her firstborn child –  
it is the heavenly Zion.  
After all, the earthly Zion has had plenty of children!  
And all of them are, at best, half-hearted in their repentance.  
Jeremiah hears the cry of the heavenly Zion –  
as she is in labor with her firstborn son.

But will she survive?  
Will he survive?

The very next verse will say,  
“Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem,  
look and take note!  
Search her squares to see if you can find a man,  
one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her.”

In the incarnation – and in the cross –  
God has found the one man who does justice and seeks truth.

Therefore, to you who have fled to Jesus – and who trust in him for salvation –  
I declare to you, your sins are forgiven!