

Kings and Prophets 16-07-14

This is 14 July 16, 14th of July 2016. We're continuing our study of the history of the nation of Israel in its divided kingdom times. We began with Jeroboam and Rehoboam.

We have come all the way through the disappearance under God's discipline of the northern kingdom and we're on the threshold of seeing the same thing happen to Judah and the prophet that is currently ministering at God's command is the prophet Jeremiah. We're in the vicinity of 610 or so, somewhere in the low 600s BC in the southern kingdom of Judah and the remaining kings of Judah are down to a small single-digit number. We'll be tonight centering our study on Jeremiah chapter 15, Jeremiah chapter 15.

Because we can't cover the whole book much as I would like to, I'm choosing some representative sections that give us the essence of the message and help to summarize the theme, the purpose and the message that God gives His people. Actually I should say messages that God gives His people because depending on their status the message varies. Some of God's people get one message, others of God's people get another and we'll see the gist of that tonight.

Let's take a moment as is our custom to go to the prayer and then we'll begin. Father, we're thankful for Your grace and Your faithfulness toward us. It's an understatement to recognize Your mercy and Your compassion toward us in ways that we probably will never fully appreciate in this life.

There are so many unseen workings and provisions and protections that You have woven into the circumstances of our lives so that we are carried along, we are secure, we are comforted, we are enabled, we're provided for in so many ways and we thank You for that. We know that these things come to us not by anything that we have done or any merit that we have but because of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior and our standing in Him. We thank You for that privilege.

We thank You for appointing us this time in history in this nation. We're seeing momentous events and the plan and purpose that You revealed in Your Word continuing to unfold not only in our individual lives but also in our communities and in our nation and around the world. We know that this passage that we're currently studying, this book, addresses a similar situation in Old Testament days and we know that in it You have for us wonderful encouragement and direction and guidance.

We pray that as we study it together tonight that God the Holy Spirit will make those things clear to us, help us to see its pertinence and how we should then live in these immediate days ahead, the tactics as well as the strategy that we should have in our lives as we face uncertain times, increasing intolerance for Your Word and the name of Your Son, the Lord Jesus, and therefore of us. We pray that we can shine as lights in the midst of our generation and that

others will see Christ in us and be drawn to that light and can find salvation and peace and hope as we have in relationship with You. We thank You for all these things and we ask Your blessing on our study tonight.

In Jesus' name, amen. We've chosen, I have chosen, you didn't choose, I didn't take a poll, maybe I should have. I have chosen to cover a representative chapter out of the book of Jeremiah tonight.

These themes and doctrinal points recur throughout the book as a thread in a tapestry will weave in and out of the warp and woof. It emerges and then disappears and returns, but you see it across a larger fabric. This particular chapter has several elements that do that and so it's a convenient place for us to focus our attention in lieu of being able to do a verse by verse coverage.

So if you'll turn with me to Jeremiah chapter 15, this is a very helpful section for us to cover. In the previous chapter, Jeremiah has delivered a message of drought and we know that God has used this sort of thing in the past. The ministry of another great prophet was introduced with the announcement that there would be no rain except at His word.

You remember that? Similar situation in the northern kingdom. Who was that prophet? Elijah. Elijah, 1 Kings 17 if memory serves or 2 Kings, 1 Kings.

I believe it's chapter 17. But remember Elijah, there will be no rain. Servant goes up, see a cloud like a man's hand and very pregnant with interpretive meaning.

In the same way, Jeremiah is looking at the suffering and deprivation in the land of Judah. The land is mourning and its citizens are acting like guests, not guests, maybe attendees at a funeral. The guest of honor of course doesn't have a lot to say.

But because of the sins of the people of Judah, God is withholding rain. This is the attention getter. And by the way, as we've noted before, in our own lives, if we note a mysterious loss of provision, what we have normally come to rely on and count on as a part of God's logistical grace for us, if it suddenly disappears, one of the first things to check is whether it is an attention getting device as it is for God's people in the Old Testament.

God would bring famine to the land. God would bring various forms of pestilence, one of which is drought, as an attention getter. Sometimes parents do this with small children.

They seem to have their minds in other places. You speak to them. You try to remind them that they have certain responsibilities, that certain things they should and shouldn't do, and they're just elsewhere.

You can't get them to focus. You can't activate their self-control. And so you do something to get their attention.

Sometimes it's a little bit of corporal punishment. Sometimes it is the removal of privileges as they get older. You can do this in more sophisticated ways.

But the more childish someone acts, the more primitive become the attention getting devices. And when God chooses to withhold basic provision in the form of rain for an agricultural economy, it's because His people have become so childlike in their disobedience and rebellion and distraction, apathy, and all the rest of it, that adult conversation and an intellectual appeal, a spiritual appeal, has already failed. And of course God has been speaking to Judah through the prophets now for some time, and they just don't respond.

They're not making any changes. And so this is a fairly drastic measure. Well, this is what happened back in chapter 14.

So the people plead for mercy and for relief. They're not so much seeking a return or a restoration of relationship with God as they are, please take this bad situation away. And there becomes a pattern, and you can observe the spiritual status of ourselves, and in some cases those near at hand to us, by noting when bad times come, is this a Pharaoh situation where Pharaoh says, sure, I'll let the people go, whatever, just make the plague stop.

No sooner has the plague stopped, all interest in God immediately evaporates again, and they return to the same symptomatic behavior, symptomatic of indifference and utter lack of interest. Rebuke and discipline on a child, a responsive child, a generally obedient child, will produce the desired effect of restoring good behavior and strengthening relationship. Whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and He scourges every son whom He receives, a son that can come into His presence.

We're always going to get disciplined, and we want to respond and benefit from and improve ourselves like the vine that the Father prunes so that it will bear more fruit. That's a positive, productive relationship with God. If God prunes and if God disciplines and there is no response, the Bible is replete with examples of this.

God compares Israel to a vineyard that He hedges about and cultivates. The Lord Jesus told a parable about the vineyard owner who had tried for three straight seasons to get this vineyard to produce, and it would not, and he's ready to destroy it, and there's an appeal, one more try. See if one more try, it will respond and begin to bear fruit.

If not, I will break down its walls and hedges, burn it with fire, destroy it. I'll use that land for other purposes. So this is a situation.

Anytime that God is intervening in a disciplinary way, there is a decision point of either return and renewal or of discipline and discipline and judgment and disappearance. In the extreme case, this can be the sin of death for an individual. So that's where Judah is, and it ought to ring a bell.

Didn't this happen with her sister to the north not that many years ago? So in chapter 14, the

prophets have come, and they're giving false hope. They prophesy in God's name, but they're not telling the truth. They're making up stories.

And at some caution in my own mind, I am going to say that I think there is an awful lot of this going on in our Christian culture in the United States today. There is a great amount of really bad talking being passed off as preaching of philosophy and of sugar-coated hope that has nothing but air inside. It's placebo.

It's panacea. It isn't the truth of God. It isn't substantial.

It lets the people ride a wave of emotion instead of bringing them in the presence of holy God, accountable, responsible to take charge of their own lives, to escape subjectivity and self-centeredness, be objective, be focused, setting eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, and so forth. Instead, eyes are directed toward prosperity, toward well-being, toward quick and facile problem-solving. And God becomes something that is only in the service of our own happiness instead of our lives being devoted to pleasing Him.

The roles are reversed. We are God, and He is the servant that is supposed to please us and respond to our desires. And it's just backward.

And the name of God is scattered all through it. It has all of the trappings. People have Bibles.

They sing songs that are ostensibly Christian. But the content is not there. Look at what has been happening in Jeremiah chapter 14.

And he's going to say this again in chapter 15. Look at verse 10. The Lord says to this people, thus they have loved to wander.

They have not restrained their feet. Therefore the Lord does not accept them. He will remember their iniquity now and punish their sins.

He will remember their iniquity now. You remember in earlier times we've talked about how God suddenly unearths the sins going all the way back to Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. I thought we were past all of that.

There is a sobering principle in the Word of God that is encapsulated in Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant who owed a great debt to his master and was forgiven. Then he had an underservant, a servant of servants, if you will, who owed him a small debt. And he harasses the fellow and threatens him with all kinds of mayhem.

And the Lord when the master hears about it, he says, you know that debt that I forgave you? It is now unforgiven. That debt is now due and payable and you're going to the poor house until you recompense every farthing. Well, it's by today's standards millions of dollars.

How are you going to earn that? What it basically means is you've lost your freedom for the duration. You're never escaping this. But the idea of unforgiveness, of de-forgiving sin, that's

just seems scary to me.

That you think something is settled, it's been separated as far as the East is from the West. Well, you remember God surrounds the East, the West and the North and the South. And getting as far as the East is from the West doesn't mean that it is out of the mind of God.

And that can return. I doubt that there are three places in the United States in a year that will bring this up. But the Bible clearly teaches you can be forgiven and then by your malfunctioning, that forgiveness can be revoked and you can lose it.

It's a scary thing. That's what's happening here. They love to wander, they restrain their feet, therefore the Lord does not accept them.

He will remember their iniquity now and punish their sins. Iniquities that he has overlooked, that he has set aside, that he has made non-essential. So the Lord said to me in verse 11, Jeremiah 14, 11, Do not pray for this people for their good.

Second scary thing. Your sins return in terms of their recompense, their discipline, their punishment. And prayer for you does no good.

God will not listen to prayer on behalf of people in this category. He says you're wasting your time, don't even pray to me about this. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, but it doesn't avail everything.

And believers, pictured here as the recalcitrant citizens of Judah and Jerusalem can go so far astray that prayer won't help. There is no interdiction. You think about the Lord Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father interceding on our behalf.

There's four or five passages in the New Testament that talk about Jesus at the right hand of the Father and He interposes. Remember the words of the Lord. He interposed His precious blood.

Oh to grace, how great a debtor daily I am inclined to be. Well, if we don't feel that debt, if we don't rely on that grace, God will withdraw it. That's what happens here.

When they fast, I will not hear their cry, verse 12. When they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence.

Even when they approach, even when they go through the motions of worship, God will not hear. He is deaf to their cry. He hears no banging on the closed door of the ark at this point.

So then Jeremiah says in verse 13, Lord God, behold, the prophets say to them, you shall not see the sword, nor shall you have the famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place. Watch your Christian television. Browse your Christian book aisles.

Self-help, here's the way to have better relationships. Here's the way to raise better kids. Here's the way to have better jobs.

Here's the way to get God to bless you, this, that, and the other. Here is the way to be happy. Do this and you will be happy.

The problem is you just need to do something a little bit different. Instead of confession, acknowledgment, repentance, a change of mind away from dead works and faith toward God, the biblical solution is humility, it is confession, it is repentance and a turning away from works of death. Hebrews chapter 6. Instead, this is a change of mind and this is the feel-good message.

There's no big problem, nothing that can't be fixed with a little bit of sugar-coated advice. The prophets say this stuff is not coming and notice that this is in contrast, this contradicts what God's Word says. The standard is the Word of God.

This seems so obvious, why am I even saying it? But when you hear someone saying something that is counter to what's in the Word of God, it's not the truth. That simple observation seems to be escaping thousands upon thousands upon thousands of our brothers and sisters in Christ right now. They go to church and hear the worst, distorted, watered down, repurposed treatments of Scripture.

It is deceit. It is false prophecy. The Lord says in verse 14 of Jeremiah 14, the prophets prophesy lies in my name.

I have not sent them, I have not commanded them, I have not spoken to them. They prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, the deceit, a product of their own heart. You know two chapters hence we've got Jeremiah 17, 9, right? The heart is deceitful above all things.

You get the idea that these false prophets in fomenting and distributing these lies are self-deceived. They can be sincere and they can sincerely believe that what they say is the truth and it's still a lie. And it's their fault.

There's a responsibility for those that have been assigned a communication gift to use it properly in the same way that when you are given a driver's license, you are enjoined to operate the vehicle in a safe manner. And just because you have the license doesn't mean you can do whatever you want to behind the wheel. And just because someone has a communication gift doesn't mean that they're not going to weave all over the highway and eventually harm others.

That's what's happening here. They prophesy a false vision. They claim they've got knowledge from God, a word from the Lord.

Here's the landscape and it's false. Therefore, thus says the Lord, verse 15, concerning the prophets who prophesy in My name, whom I did not send, and who say sword and famine shall

not be in this land, by sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed. They are going to find out firsthand.

Circumstance and outcome are going to demonstrate to them. God's not going to send an angel with a flaming sword. The Lord Jesus isn't going to appear at the foot of their bed in the middle of the night.

They will suffer reality entering their lives. Blasting to the ground. They are going to shred these false visions.

And the people to whom they prophesy, verse 16, shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword. They will have no one to bury them, them nor their wives, their sons nor their daughters, for I will pour their wickedness on them. Pour their wickedness on them.

Remember in the New Testament we have a passage that says in Romans, storing up wrath against the day of wrath, you store it up. Pouring out their sins, pouring out their unrighteousness, well if it's a little unrighteousness, that's a small flask. If it's a lot of unrighteousness, it's a big barrel.

But this speaks to proportionality. If you've malfunctioned in small ways, you're going to get small consequences. If you malfunction in large ways, large consequences.

It will be proportional to their wickedness. Therefore you shall say this word to them, Let my eyes flow with tears night and day, and let them not cease, for the virgin daughter of my people has been broken with a mighty stroke, with a very severe blow. If I go to the field, behold there are those slain with the sword.

I enter the city, look, these sick from famine. Both prophet and priest go about in a land they do not know. It has become unrecognizable.

And the more they have filled their heads with these visions of grandeur and prosperity and peace, the more unrecognizable reality is to them. So then the people say to the Lord, Have you utterly rejected Judah? Has your soul loathed Zion? Why have you stricken us so that there is no healing for us? Puts you in mind of Malachi. In what way? How can this be our fault? What's the matter with you God? Have you fallen off your throne? Have you fallen asleep on the job? What happened to our prosperity? Why have you stricken us? We look for peace, but there is no good, and for the time of healing, and there is trouble.

We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness and the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against you. Do not abhor us for your namesake. Do not disgrace the throne of your glory.

Remember, do not break your covenant with us. Are there any among the idols of the nations that can cause rain, or can the heavens give showers? Are you not He, O Lord our God? Therefore we will wait for you, since you have made all these." So no rain, and this prayer

arises. You have to wonder, what's the level of sincerity in this prayer? Is this the faithful remnant praying? Is this a superficial pharaoh-like momentary turn to the Lord? Well, we know you're the one that makes rain, so make it rain.

The clue here is twofold. First, it's in the prayer itself. Do not abhor us for your namesake.

Do not disgrace the throne of your glory, as though it's God's fault. They're saying in verse 21, O Lord, don't disgrace the throne of your glory. The people have disgraced the throne.

You remember the Garden of Uzzah. You remember the idolatry. You remember their blatant amalgamation of idolatry and Baal and Molech and all the rest of it with the worship of God.

They've syncretized it. They've just put it in the blender and mixed it. And now they say, well, Lord, you'd better not disgrace your own throne.

This is the classic case of somebody who is wrong accusing the person who points that out of that very wrong. Have you ever had this in a conversation? It happens all the time if you engage in online dialogue. Somebody will be abusive and launch personal insult after ad hominem attack, and then when you keep pointing out the flaws in their argument and stick to the facts and the logic and the reason of the debate, they come back and accuse you of personal insults and abuse and ad hominem attacks.

And you say, have you read your own stuff? Are you listening to your own voice? But this is the blindness, and this is the third scary thing. The first scary thing is losing forgiveness of your sins. The second scary thing is God saying, don't even pray for these people.

That's how hopeless their plight is. The third scary thing is look at the blindness of people who believe that they are coming to the Lord, praying to the Lord, making a legitimate case. Well, this will work.

We'll plead the name. The false prophets have been prophesying in the name of the Lord. Now they come before the Lord in this prayer and invoke that very name and say, do not abhor us for your name's sake.

Just citing the name, claiming the name, is supposed to be like a talisman or a magic formula, an abracadabra that's going to make everything all right. Well, we just need to remind God of His name. But when they say, do not disgrace the throne of your glory, you try to find anywhere else in Scripture a legitimate prophet, a Moses or an Elijah or a Samuel or an apostle in the New Testament praying to the Lord and say, well, Lord, don't disgrace your own throne.

It's unthinkable. That's no argument. Moses says, Lord, don't let your name be abused among the nations.

But he doesn't say, Lord, if you destroy these people, you're disgracing your own throne. You're disgraced in heaven. You're disgraced in your own throne room.

You know who malfunctioned in the throne room, right? So you begin to trace back the source of this kind of thinking. Well, I can do a better job than God. God's disgracing His own throne by the way He's treating my fellow angels up here, says Lucifer, right before He gets launched out with a giant size 12 divine boot.

I assume the Lord wears size 12 because I wear size 12 and there's just a happy hope there. But the judgment with which you judge others is the one you're going to get. So I'll probably find that launching me in the near future.

But you look at this. There is an illegitimacy in the grounds that are offered in this prayer for God's action. You can claim God's mercy.

You can claim God's compassion. You can make claims on God's clemency in a number of ways, but you don't go to God and say, Lord, you better do this or you're disgracing your own throne. But people are blind to this and that blindness, inability to see what a blasphemy this is, how presumptuous it is.

You see this kind of blindness in political movements in our current time. People who are insensible, conscience seared with a hot iron to their own entitlement mentality, their victimhood, their claims made on others and demands that they're, I gave Elizabeth an article just a day or two ago and I think I mentioned it within the past week, a good article about dignity and about how people are making claims for the respect of their dignity that differ dramatically from what this concept has been in the past and they're blind to it. Blindness, seeing they see and do not perceive, hearing they hear and do not understand.

Their heart is calloused over. Conscience is a burn scar, no sensitivity. So in verse 17 when God said, let my eyes flow with tears night and day and let them not cease for the virgin daughter of my people has been broken with a mighty stroke with a very severe blow.

It is sad, it's tragic, but that recognition is shared by God Himself. God thinks it's equally tragic. It grieves the heart of God.

When the Bible says it repented God that He made man, God was sorry, it grieves Him. It doesn't mean that He wishes He hadn't done what He did, but when He views this sort of departure it grieves Him. When He looks at us and sees us distracted, deflected, interested in other things, more concerned with the momentary and the material than with the eternal and the divine.

And isn't that our constant challenge to keep our priorities and our values and our goals established on eternal truth instead of the slings and arrows of this life? So for chapter 15, that's all background. Then the Lord said to me, this is in response to the drying up of the heavens so that there is no rain and the response of the people. God looks at the response.

What kind of a response is it? What kind of turn and change of mind is God hoping for when He shuts up the heavens and says there will be no rain? What is He hoping for? It's a wake up call.

You hope people will wake up and they will say, what was I thinking? I'm chasing after material things. I'm greedy.

I'm selfish. I'm engaged in idolatry. I'm offering incense to the Queen of Heaven.

What am I thinking? I belong to the covenant people of God. I look at the history of God in preserving and protecting and providing and keeping up His end of the covenant in multiple ways. Here I am on a completely bad path.

I need to change. I need to lay aside every weight and the sin that is besetting me and run with patience the race that was set before me when I entered into this covenant with God individually or as a nation. That's what He's looking for.

Genuine change of mind. Genuine confession. Genuine repentance.

Turn at my reproof. Why will you die, O house of Israel? Turn ye at my reproof. Turn, turn.

Well, instead you get this sycophantic, superficial claim the name and remind God that He might disgrace Himself if He doesn't do right by me prayer. God's response, the Lord said to me, 15-1, even if Moses and Samuel stood before me, arguably the symbol of the law and the symbol of the prophets, the first great prophet Samuel, the one who anointed King David, even if Moses and Samuel stood before me, my mind would not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of my sight and let them go forth.

What is this saying? Even if the faithful remnant were like Moses and like Samuel, the people are going out under judgment. It doesn't mean Moses and Samuel are going with them, but Moses and Samuel cannot turn the tide of judgment that is coming on this disobedient and stiff-necked people. Don't even pray for them.

Moses and Samuel could stand here and pray and I would not change my mind. And you remember God did change His mind at the prayer of Moses. Remember God did change His mind at the prayer of Samuel for Saul.

Remember when Samuel pleaded for Saul and God gave him sort of an extension? God says, you get your most eloquent guy pleading your case, I am not changing my mind. It shall be if they say to you, where should we go? You shall tell them, thus says the Lord. Now what we're going to get to here in this chapter in the few minutes that remain to us is the difference.

There are two messages. There's a message for those who pray this useless prayer. If Jeremiah can't pray for them, if Moses and Samuel couldn't pray for them, their prayer certainly is going to have no traction.

God doesn't even bother to answer. He doesn't even acknowledge that prayer. You notice? God doesn't say, I've heard your prayer.

Remember I told Solomon, if people will come and seek my face and pray, I will turn and heal

the world. God doesn't even say He heard this. It's like it bounced off the lower atmosphere.

Cast them out of my sight, let them go forth. It shall be if they say, where should we go? You shall tell them, thus says the Lord, such as for death to death, such as for the sword to the sword, such as are for famine to the famine, and such as for captivity to the captivity. Four destinations, four categories, and you get the idea here that this is graded.

This is like that unrighteousness that is poured out. It is to the extent that. And so for some, death is going to happen immediately.

This is essentially the sin unto death. These are the people of God. They represent to us the pattern for believers.

And such as are for death. These are the ones that come to mind first. The worst cases, they're going to be killed in this impending judgment.

Such as are for the sword to the sword. Now, I recently made an argument in another place that the sword, when Paul talks about it in Romans, the government does not bear the sword in vain. This is a picture of capital punishment.

And it's not God turning it sideways and spanking you with it, or just waving it as a threat. The sword means death. That's what swords are for.

The Romans didn't march out and say, just nick them. Just maim them. Discourage them a little bit.

Poke them a few times. They'll turn and run. Swords are for killing.

They're long and pointy. They have sharp edges. And the purpose is to end the life of your opponent.

That's what swords are for. They're not a disciplinary instrument. They're a death instrument.

Just like pistols and rifles and artillery pieces, howitzers. We're not trying to just produce shock and awe at a safe distance. These things are designed to slay, to kill.

So how are these two different fates? If death is the purpose, such as are for death to death, such as are for the sword to the sword. Death can come in a lot of different forms, right? Death is happening in all kinds of ways. People have heart attacks.

People starve. People are killed. They can be victims of crime.

They can take their own lives. In capital punishment, there's all kinds of ways. Accidents, accidents happen and people die.

But God has designated and tagged. You get the idea that there are angels, marking angels, who are going out and after having identified the faithful who sigh and cry over Jerusalem,

now, okay, this one for death, this one for the sword, this one for famine, and this one for captivity. And they've been sorted.

They've been graded here in terms of their judgment. So death is obviously the worst. Your life is over.

Such as are for the sword to the sword. What happens when the sword enters a family and the breadwinner is lost or the son is lost? The idea of the sword here, remember Jesus said, I have come not to bring peace but a sword, and that sword is going to divide families. The idea of the sword here is not that these people also all die.

They are going to be the victims of death in their family. They're going to lose their husband, their father, their sons, and that is going to define the rest of their lives. The incursion, this invasion is going to leave them homeless, leave them orphaned, leave them widowed and so on.

This is the, those who suffer the consequences of military invasion and conquest. The sword. And, and it, it, the aspect of it is the loss of your men folk.

The loss of the soldiers in that family. This speaks to the, the widows and orphans. Such as are for the famine to the famine.

This is those who survive the initial onslaught but don't survive the devastation or, or suffer horribly in the devastation that follows. After the invasion, after the conquest, after the bloodshed has stopped, the land is so ravaged that, that people have great difficulty. They may die or they may slowly starve or they may lose part of their family to starvation.

But it is the deprivation and the judgment of that starvation. And such as are for the captivity to the captivity. Now you remember that Jeremiah tells them don't fight the captivity.

When Nebuchadnezzar comes, you who are obedient, you who are listening to the sound of my divine voice, go. Don't resist. Don't try to flee to Egypt.

You will be protected. You will be preserved. You will be provided for in the captivity.

Captivity seems like a bad thing but I have a purpose in it. What if Daniel had refused to go into captivity? What if Hananiah or Mishaël or Azariah had said you'll have to kill me. I'm not going to go.

Not going to emasculate me. Not going to press me into the service of the king. No way.

I'll resist unto blood. God said no, you comply. This is my judgment.

I will provide for you. I will preserve you. I will use you for my own glory in this judgment.

So those who are designated for captivity, these are ones who are going to be preserved and

provided for in an event that looks like a disaster. And if you think about it, for the faithful, life in Babylon was less threatening and less of a spiritual hardship than it was in their own land, surrounded by malignant evil and malignant God-rejecting, Baal-worshipping, cult-following fellow citizens of Judah. They were better off in the heart of the enemy's empire than they were in their own land.

God improved their situation. These families grow and thrive during the 70 years in Babylon, and they return to rebuild. Doesn't look like a blessing, but God tells them ahead of time, if I designate you for captivity, you go and go quietly.

This is my hand at work. Reconcile yourself to it. Well, the next day, right after that, he says in verse 3, I will appoint over them four forms.

Notice of destruction is in italics. These are four things. The sword to slay, the dogs to drag, the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy.

Now, these don't match the previous four things. You can't say, oh, I see, well, the sword matches death and the dogs match the sword, the birds match the famine, the beasts of the earth to captivate, and you can't mirror it and say, well, let's reverse them and get them to match. It's talking about two different things.

First of all, therefore, God has sorted people into four layers, four categories of judgment. Secondly, what is going to accomplish this judgment is going to come from four directions, four sources, and there is a pattern to this. Notice, the first one is the sword to slay.

Now, you know the old thing, guns don't kill people, bullets kill people. No, guns don't kill people, people kill people, right? It's not the hardware, it's the humans. It's not cars that kill people, it's the drivers behind the wheel that are responsible for deaths on the highway.

Well, here, the sword speaks of the human agents that are going to bring the sword. The sword doesn't just fall out of the sky and stick into the top of your skull. Somebody is wielding it.

Somebody is operating it, right? So, these judgments are going to come in four ways. One of them is human intervention. These are the Babylonians swinging their swords.

This is national judgment through military conquest. Secondly, the dogs to drag. Notice this is not bears, this is not hyenas, this is not wolves, this is not lions, it's dogs.

What's the thing about a dog? What's the most famous saying about dogs? A dog is what? Man's best friend. Why? They're domesticated. They're a part of our household.

They're from within. But the dogs that are a part of normal life, that normally run in the street, you throw them scraps and they help you protect the sheep and they alert you, sound the alarm if there's a threat or whatever, they're going to turn on you. So, this is an internal, and of course, the dogs are despicable when you apply it to people.

When you call people, remember Goliath, am I a dog? By the way, Matt Bauhaus sent me a great link to find. Have you heard that they found a whole cemetery in Ashkelon of thousands of Philistines and they're going to dig them up and test their DNA and they're brushing off their bones. It's fantastic.

I really appreciate Matt giving me the heads up on that. But they've excavated a lot of other things about Philistine culture, but now how they treated their dead and what they find in these burials and the amazing technology where now they can actually extract DNA from bones this old. These are from the 12th century through the 8th century.

So it spans the time of the judges and down into the time of the monarchy, the Philistines, the days of David in Ashkelon. So, what are they going to find when they analyze this DNA? Are they going to keep digging up graves and eventually find some long ones? It'll be real interesting, Lamy or the guy with the extra long bed and so on. Dogs to drag.

The dogs that were harmless are going to turn on you. Things that seemed innocuous are going to not be. But they are a part of civilization.

These aren't wild dogs. These are domestic dogs. So it comes from outside.

It's an external judgment. It comes from within. Dogs are going to turn and tear.

Thirdly, the birds of the heavens. What does this universally suggest in scripture? What happens when the seed of the word is scattered but the birds of the air come and take it away? What did Jesus say about that? Satan takes it away. These are the forces of darkness.

We saw this in the tree that has branches and the birds of the air roost in it in the Millennial Kingdom, meaning there's potential building for the Gog Magog rebellion all the way through, the birds of the air. So this is dark forces being allowed in. You've cultivated demonic influence and presence through your idolatry and so on.

You're going to suffer the consequences of that. And finally, the beasts of the earth. This is the uncontrollable forces of nature.

The wild beasts of the earth, they've never been domesticated. They come in by stealth and surprise. These are the lions leaping through the windows and ripping your face off.

Well, I'm thinking of a particular story in Peter Hathaway Capstick's book, Death in the Long Grass, where this literally happened in a village. A lion came through and the person couldn't see to get out because it had ripped, the face was flapped down over the eyes. They couldn't see to get out.

But this is any kind of natural disaster. It's uncontrollable. So four different directions.

None of these can you prevent. You can't stop Nebuchadnezzar. You can't stop internal threat.

Those that smiled in your face and now they're stabbing you in the back. You can't stop the unseen principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this age, nor can you stop natural disasters that are beyond your control. So these are four.

Remember, four is the number of universality. Everyone is going to be judged. That's verse two.

And it's going to come from all directions. That's verse three. But there are instructions in chapter 15 for the faithful.

God tells this to Jeremiah. And Jeremiah is a faithful man and represents the faithful remnant in Judah. And he's going to give him instructions that we'll look at next time.

Here is what you do knowing that this is coming. And there are specific things that God commands. This is what we need to know.

This is what I want to do. This is what you want to do so that we are in the very center of God's will during a time of national judgment, during a time when many of our fellow believers are falling into these four categories and are suffering from these four directions, the judgment of God. It's happening in implicit forms already, and it is going to happen in explicit forms in the not too distant future.

It's not getting better, folks. It's getting worse. And these things are going to be manifest.

They are going to be proliferating. The sun is setting, not rising on our situation. But we have the light of God's word.

We have the presence of God's spirit. And we have specific instructions on what to do. And that's what we're going to look at next time.

But suffice it to say now, God is in His heaven. God knows them that are His. As many as call on the name of the Lord from a genuine heart will be delivered.

And that's us. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the confidence and the comfort that it provides to us. Thank you for your spirit and His ministry of making the truth evident and meaningful to us. We pray that as we reflect on these things and as we look at our own lives and our own opportunities and decision points that all of these provisions will come to bear and light our way so that we can walk the path that you have set for our feet, that we can be sure-footed, we can be confident that you have preserved our way and have worked these things together in our lives for good and ultimately for your own glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus.

We pray these things in His name. Amen.