The book of the prophet **Jeremiah** **chapter three, verse six,** reading through to the end of chapter four. We're studying the book of Jeremiah these Sunday mornings. Chapter three, verse six to the end of chapter four...rather long reading, but it all hangs together, right?

*The Lord said to me in the days of Josiah, King Josiah, "Have you seen what she did, that faithless one Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the harlot? And I thought after she has done all this, she will return to me; but she did not return to me. And her false sister, Judah saw it. She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her false sister, Judah, did not fear; but she too went and played the harlot because harlotry was so light to her. She polluted the land committing adultery with stone and tree. Yet for all this, her false sister, Judah, did not return to me with her whole heart but in pretense," says the Lord.*

*And the Lord said to me, "Faithless Israel has shown herself less guilty than false Judah. Go and proclaim these words toward the north and say, 'Return faithless Israel,' says the Lord, 'I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful,' says the Lord. 'I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your guilt that you rebelled against the Lord your God and scattered your favors among strangers under every green tree, and that you have not obeyed my voice,' says the Lord. 'Return, O faithless children,' says the Lord. 'For I am your master; I will take you one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion; and I will give you shepherds after my own heart who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. And when you have multiplied and increased in the land in those days,' says the Lord, 'They shall no more say, "The ark of the covenant of the Lord." It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed. It shall not be made again at that time. Jerusalem shall be called "the throne of the Lord", and all nations shall gather to it to the presence of the Lord in Jerusalem; and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart. In those days the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel, and together they shall come from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers for a heritage. I thought how I would set you among my sons and give you a pleasant land--- a heritage most beauteous of all nations---and I thought you would call me "My Father" and would not turn from following me. Surely as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so have you been faithless to me? Oh, house of Israel,"' says the Lord.*

*"A voice on the bear heights is heard, the weeping and pleading of Israel's sons because they have perverted their way. They have forgotten the Lord their God. Return O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness."*

*"Behold we come to the Father, our Lord our God. Truly the hills are a delusion, the orgies on the mountains. Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel. But from our youth, the shameful singers devoured all for which our fathers labored---their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. Let us lie down in our shame, and let our dishonor cover us; for we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers---from our youth even to this day---and we have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God."*

*"If you return, oh, Israel," says the Lord to me, "You should return. If you remove your abominations from my presence and do not waiver, and if you swear, 'As the Lord lives,' in truth, in justice and in righteousness---uprightness---then nations shall bless themselves in Him; and in him shall they glory.*

*"For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, 'Break up your fellow ground and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord. Remove the foreskin of your hearts, oh men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, less my wrath go forth like fire and burn, with none to quench it, because of the evil of your doings.'"*

*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. Raise a standard towards Zion. Flee for safety. Stay not, for I bring evil from the north and great destruction. A lion has gone up from his ticket. A destroyer of nations has set out, he has gone forth from his place to make your land a waste. Your cities will be ruins without inhabitant. For this, gird you with sackcloth; lament and wail, for the fierce anger of the Lord has not turned back from us."*

*"In that day," says the Lord, "Courage shall fail both king and princes. The priest shall be appalled and the prophets astounded."*

*Then I said, "Ah, Lord God, surely thou hast utterly deceived this people and Jerusalem saying, 'It shall be well with you.' Whereas the sword has reached their very life."*

*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...a wind too full for this comes from me. Now, it is I who speak in judgment upon them.*

*"Behold he comes up like clouds, his chariots like the whirlwind. His horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us for we are ruined. Oh Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you? For a voice declares from Dan and proclaims from Mount Ephraim, 'Warn the nations that he is coming. Announce to Jerusalem, "Besiegers come from a distant land; they shout against the cities of Judah. Like keepers of a field are they against her round about because she has rebelled against me," says the Lord. "Your ways and your doings have brought this upon you. This is your doom, and it is bitter. It has reached your very heart."'"*

*"My anguish. My anguish. I rise in pain. Oh, the walls of my heart. My heart is beating wildly, for I cannot keep silent, for I hear the sound of trumpet---the alarm of war. Disaster follows hard on disaster. The whole land is laid waste. Suddenly my tents are destroyed---my curtains in a moment. How long must I see the standard and hear the sound of the trumpet. 'For My people are foolish---they know Me not. They are stupid children. They have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; but how to do good they know not.' I looked on the earth and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens and they had no light. I looked on the mountains and lo, they were quaking; and all the hills move to and fro. I looked and lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the air had fled. I looked and lo, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the Lord---before his fierce anger, for thus says the Lord, 'The whole land shall be a desolation, yet I will not make a full end for this. The earth shall mourn and the heavens above be black. For I have spoken, I have purposed, I have not relented, nor will I turn back 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. And you O desolate one. What do you mean that you dress in scarlet, that you deck 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. For I heard your cry as of a woman in travail---anguishes of one bringing forth 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."'"*

***A Parable Comparing England/Scotland with Judah/Israel***

**I want you now to use your imagination with me.** It is the year 1985. The United Kingdom has a king again, King Charles III, a young man. But the United Kingdom is much smaller than it was 10 years ago in 1975. It is now only composed of the city of London and the surrounding countryside in the Southeast---southeast of a line drawn from the wash to the Isle of Wight. What has happened to the rest of the land? Well, it's almost deserted, it's almost empty. Birmingham lies in ruins as does Manchester and Glasgow. And if you climb the Chosen Hill, you can look out over the plain of Aylesbury---the vale of Aylesbury---and you can see in the distance that ruined town; you can see in imagination further. What happened? What went wrong? Well, for one thing they got very affluent, and by the late 1970s oil was flowing freely into Scotland. And so, Scotland made a bid to become independent. And by 1980 there was such resentment against the government at Westminster and what it was trying to do that Wales joined with Scotland, as did Northern Ireland. And finally northern England joined in and the Midlands; and there was a revolt. London was left with the Southeast only faithful to the capital and the royal family, when King Charles came to the throne of that tiny United Kingdom---or rather, Disunited Kingdom. But other things had happened in the north. Affluence from the oil brought indulgence; and in almost every major city in the north you could see a huge pleasure palace, which had been erected by the counselor at public expense. Marvelous places---casinos, brothels, clinics offering abortion on demand. And every large city of any repute had such a place; they still had churches and people went to them and the preachers said many things, but the pleasure palaces were the main centers of population. That's where everybody went on Sunday. Violence increased in the streets---the police could do nothing. More and more bombs were thrown around.

Security became almost a word of the past; and then came the greatest catastrophe. In1984 the Russians marched and they conquered Finland, then Sweden, then Norway; then they cast their eyes on the oil wells of the North Sea. And finally they invaded Scotland, pressed down through Scotland to northern England, took Wales, took the midlands, took the Southwest and stopped at the Chilton Hills and deported most of the population north of that line to Siberia, leaving only a few poor people to till the fields and a few to scratch in the ruins of the towns. And King Charles in, the King's speech which opened parliament in the year 1985, said that he was going to try and remove the corruption of the civic officials, to put this southeast corner of England, right. And the people gave him their support and the Archbishop of Canterbury gave him his support.

But there was a young man living in Hemmel Hempstead, a teenage boy who saw that even though the people were giving their support to these reforms, that in fact, their heart was with the pleasure palaces of the north…and that it was a superficial support, it wasn't real. And so, this young man climbing around the Chosen Hill would look out over the desolate north, and then look south to London; and he realized that London was more guilty than Birmingham had ever been, than Manchester had ever been, than Glasgow had ever been. And so, he began to preach. He went to Trafalgar Square and he told them that God would have mercy on the *north* but not on the *southeast*.

His name was 'Jerry'. And the year was not 1985; the year was around ***620 BC***. And the events I've described to you to try and give you the feel of the situation actually occurred. And you can see the evidence---the proof that they occurred---in the British Museum in London. It was not the Russians who invaded, it was the ***ASSYRIANS***. And they came in that same direction in a huge curve and down into Israel, and they conquered 10 out of the 12 tribes. And God not only let them do it and stood by watching it, **God had actually brought them**, and he'd done it because all the things I've described were going on in the cities of the north. And Jeremiah living as he did in Anathoth (which was around where Hemmel Hempstead is in relation to the picture I've drawn)... Jeremiah looked to the ***NORTH***, and he saw that God still yearned for the people of the north and that he wanted to bring them back from exile---back from those labor camps, back to their own land---and have again a family for himself.

Now, I hope that has given you the feel of the passage we're going to study this morning for **in the first half of our reading there was a note of OPTIMISM**. Did you notice that? A note of hope: *"I will bring them back, and they'll live in this land in unity with me and with shepherds after my own heart. I'll bring them back."* That was the optimism of the first half. But then, did you notice **suddenly the atmosphere changed and there was only doom and DISASTER**; and it finished with a terrible murder? Did you notice that some people have asked of this passage, "Which is the real Jeremiah, which is the true word of God, **HOPE** or **DISASTER**?" And the answer is if you study your Bible very carefully (this only struck me when I really looked at it carefully; and I hope you read your Bible with a pencil) I suddenly realized that in the **FIRST HALF** of this reading he was speaking to the North: **ISRAEL**, which was the name for the 10 tribes who'd been taken away. And in the **SECOND HALF** he's speaking to **JUDAH**. And the theme this morning is in verse 11 of chapter three, "Faithless Israel has shown herself less guilty than false Judah." In other words, the faithless north is less guilty than the false south. And we've got to ask, "Why?" And when we ask why we shall get the message for today.

Now there are **TWO KEY WORDS** throughout this **FIRST HALF on ISRAEL**. And again, when you underline, they seem to jump out at you. FIRST of all, there is a word that occurs seven times, ***'FAITHLESS'***, faithless. And then there is a word that occurs eight times, ***'RETURN'***. And this is the summary of the message to the north: "You've been faithless, but return. Come back. All is forgiven." That's the message to the north. You have suffered enough, you have been punished enough, you've lost enough. My anger is abated. I am no more angry with you. Come home. Come home.

But to the **SOUTH**, the message (the **SECOND HALF of the reading**) is worse. To the **SOUTH** the message is: *"You are not only* ***FAITHLESS*** *like your sister in the north, you have been* ***FALSE****, and therefore you must go."* And that too came true in history.

***THE FIRST HALF OF THE MESSAGE: ISRAEL***

Well now, we'll look at **the first half of the reading**, from verse six of chapter three to verse two of chapter four. Once again, whoever put the chapter numbers in (well it was Archbishop Buscher of Ireland actually) ... but when he put that in, he put the figure four, just two verses too early, and the division came wrong. The division comes, he finishes speaking to Israel at the end of verse two of chapter four, and then he speaks to Judah thereafter.

So, let's look at what he says to Israel (and again, chapter three could have come at the beginning of verse six and would've had the right division). Here is the word for the people in the **north**. And all through this section there are **family terms** used---sisters, spouse, sons, father, husband. And in the use of these terms, you've got the heart of God's purpose for men. When God created the world and when he chose Israel as one of those nations, why did he do it? The answer is very, very simple. God wanted a **FAMILY**. That's all he wanted: a family. And you misunderstand the whole Bible unless you start with this single thought: that it's all about God trying to have a family. God had one son and loved him so much that he wanted more sons, many sons. So, he made a planet and he put people on it, and he wanted a family who would be sisters, sons, a faithful wife to God as her husband; but he didn't get it.

And so having not got it from the nations of the world, he chose **ONE LITTLE NATION**, and he said, "Look, the rest won't be my family. You'll be my family, and then you can teach them how to become sons and daughters. I'll put you in a lovely land and you can call me, 'My Father,' and I'll be a father to you. I'll be a husband to you. I'll be everything to you; but let's just be a family." And I'm afraid it went wrong even with the Jews.

So, we look now at the **FAMILY** from **THREE** points of view. ***FIRST*** as a sister--two ***SISTERS***, **SECONDLY** as a ***WIFE***, and **THIRDLY** as ***SONS***. I know it's all getting mixed up, but the Bible doesn't mind mixing metaphors; but it's all **FAMILY**. The **FIRST** viewpoint is asking Judah to look at her sister Israel---as sisters---seeing what her **sister** did. The **SECOND** viewpoint is God looking at the whole of them---Israel and Judah as a **wife**. And the **THIRD** is the viewpoint looking up from the point of view of Israel having been punished, coming back as prodigal ***sons*** to a father and saying, *"I've sinned in your sight."*

***THE FIRST FAMILY RELATIONSHIP: SISTERS***

So, we look at the **FIRST**. Now Luke 15 is a parable of two brothers. Here we have two **SISTERS**, the parable of the prodigal sister and the elder sister...only there's something different. There's something rather twisted. Once upon a time there were two sisters, their names were **JUDAH** and **ISRAEL**. And Israel went off into a far country and devoured her substance with riotous living and played the harlot on every high place and under every green tree. And the elder sister stayed home. And the elder sister (Judah) looked at the younger sister who was in the far country, and the elder sister said, "I'm going too." And the father said to the elder sister, "Are you going to the far country also?" And the elder sister said, "Oh no, I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing." But her heart had already gone.

Now do you get the parable? That's the parable of the two sisters here. *"Faithless Israel went...faithless Israel went; and you, Judah, you pretended to stay at home, and you came to the Temple, but your heart had already gone with them; and therefore you are* ***MORE GUILTY*** *than your sister. She was quite open and honest about it. She went and she played the fool; and she was faithless, my wife, and she went,"* says, God, *"But you...you pretended not to go but your heart had gone. And worse than that, your sister went without any warning before her, but you have seen what happened to her: I divorced her. I cut her out of the relationship and now she doesn't belong to me. You've seen that and therefore you are* ***MORE*** *guilty than your sister."* Do you understand the greater guilt now? God counts those who are as **much greater in guilt**, who have **wanted** to do things that others have actually done, and who have also had a **warning** when they've seen what has happened to others who've done them, and ***still do it***. That is the guilt of **JUDAH**. And so, the two sisters are **BOTH GUILTY**, but of the two, the one who stayed at home is ***MORE GUILTY*** than the one who's gone now.

***THE SECOND FAMILY RELATIONSHIP: HUSBAND AND WIFE***

The **SECOND** family relationship is of a **HUSBAND** and **WIFE**. We now look at Israel, not as a sister of Judah, but as a wife of Jehovah. And Jehovah pleads with her. *"Come home, all is forgiven. Only acknowledge your guilt---only admit you've been faithless---and you can come home, and you can live with me. My anger's abated---I've ceased to be angry with you. You've been punished enough: you've lost your land; you've gone into a labor camp in distant Assyria---you've been punished enough. Come home. Come home. Just admit it. I ask for nothing else than that you admit it."* Now here's the father and the prodigal again: *"I've sinned against heaven." "Bring the fatted calf."*

*"Come home."* Look what God will do for them when they come home. It's as if, *"You come home. I'll give you good leaders--- shepherds after my own heart. I'll be so real to you that you won't need any symbol of my presence. You won't need an ark of the covenant. Nobody will even ask for an ark of the covenant."* Isn't it wonderful when God is so real to you that you don't need a church building to remind you of his presence? You don't need any symbols. You've got ***HIM*** and you'll have that, and nobody will even want a sacred ark. It will never be built again. And you know, it never was when they came back there. There is no ark of the covenant ever again. Not only that, he said, *"I will make you a nation that will influence the world. Not only that, I will bring you back to live with your sister and Judah and Israel will come together again. Not only that, but I will give you your land back again. Only come home! The fatted calf, the ring, the shoes are waiting. A land, leaders, everything you need...just come home, Israel."* It's as if Jerry stood on the hills above Hemmel Hempstead and shouted over the North Sea. "Come back from Siberia. I'll give you a government that will really be a good government. I'll give you your land of Scotland and the Pennines back again. I'll unite you with the south of England again and you'll live together as my family---as sisters." Well, that's the cry.

And then comes this very poignant passage, verse 19. Is there anything that could touch your heart so deeply? God is bearing his thoughts. He says, *"I thought how I would set you among my sons and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beauteous of all nations. And I thought you would call me 'My Father,' and would not turn from following me. That's what I thought."* Do you know when God looked down on earth and had made men and said*, "Let us make man in our own image,"* he looked down, there was Adam; and God said, *"That's good. That's very good."* He thought Adam would call him, "My father." Do you get that feel of God's heart---the frustration of God in this passage, *"But surely as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so you have been faithless to me."*

***THE THIRD FAMILY RELATIONSHIP: FATHER AND SONS***

The **THIRD** picture in this section on Israel I have called remorseful **SONS**. We've looked at a renegade sister Israel, we've looked at a rebellious spouse, Israel. But now the prophet even tries to help them to come home by giving them the words to say! Do you know one of the most difficult things after you've fallen out with someone and become estranged from them, you want to get back to them, but you don't know what to say.

Have you had this problem? You don't know what words to use. And you say, "Well, I'd like to go back and make it up, but I just don't know how to put it. I don't know if they'll take it the right way. What do I say?" And God in his mercy, through Jeremiah, tells them ***EXACTLY*** the words to use. Isn't that lovely? Some people say, "You've got to use your own words to mean anything." That's not true. You can mean something using someone else's words. Otherwise, every hymn and every time we say the Lord's Prayer would be sheer hypocrisy. It can be hypocrisy; but we **NEED** the words to help us to know what to say. And that's why we're so glad that people have written hymns. It helps us to say what we want to say to God this morning, and to mean it. And so God gives (through Jeremiah) the words to say, just come back and say this: *"Behold we come to you, for you are the Lord our God. Truly the hills are a delusion---the orgies on the mountains. From our youth, the shameful thing has devoured all for which our father's labored."* There are the words; and the words which God may be giving us today is to come back and say, "We're losing all that our fathers labored for in this country, and it's our fault. And the things we've run after have been a delusion. We thought that more and more money would bring us the things we needed and the happiness. And they're delusion. They've let us down. They've simply fritted away the qualities of life in this land." And here are the very words to say, *"Rebellious sons. Remorseful sons. Come back. Just use these words."* But God says at the beginning of chapter four, *"Now if you return O Israel---if---you've got to mean business."* But God says at the beginning of chapter four, *"Now if you return O Israel---if--- you've got to mean business...no pretend, no half-heartedness like your sister Judah Israel. If you come back, three things have got to happen. ONE, it's to ME you return, not just to your land but to ME---you've got to get back to ME."* You know, going back to church isn't returning; it's going back to Christ that is returning. Going back to religious observance wouldn't do anything for this land. The prime minister might call a national day of prayer and we might all be found in churches during the war. Do you remember those days? Every church in Britain packed with people praying for the war to end. That's not returning. That's not returning, because as soon as the war was over, the churches emptied again. *"If you return," says the Lord, "You've got to come back to ME. You've got to leave the far country behind. You've got to leave the abominations behind, and you have to swear, 'As the Lord lives,' in truth, in justice in uprightness."* In other words, that's what you're coming back to---lives of truth, lives of justice, lives of uprightness. If you really want to come back, that's what you're coming back to. And that's the cry to Israel. *"Come home. Come home. Here is what to say. Here is what is waiting for you. You've been faithless but my anger is over*.

***THE SECOND HALF of the MESSAGE: JUDAH/JERUSALEM***

But now we turn in the **SECOND HALF** *(of the message)*...to the **SOUTH**, the little south that's left: Jerusalem, the tribe of Judah around it, and the little tribe of Benjamin---just the capital and the immediately surrounding countryside...London and the Southeast, if you like. Now, those who have a sentimental view of God won't be able to take this next bit. By 'sentimental view of God' I mean a view of God like an old grandfather sitting up on a cloud, smiling down, only wanting to help us, never getting crossed with his children, indulging us, patting us on the head and saying, "Well, boys will be boys. My, you're just like all the others," but never getting cross. Great advantage in being grandparents, you know. We have some grandparents here I think this morning for the dedications later. And great advantage in being a grandparent. You never have to discipline the children. You can indulge them. That's why some children love to go and stay with grandparents...because they have such a good time. And, when ours were little, we used to reckon it took about three weeks to get them back into shape after they'd been indulged and spoiled by grandparents.

***THE COMING of GOD’S WRATH to JUDAH***

No, God is not a grandfather. He is a **FATHER** who can be angry. And if you think God can never be angry, then frankly you will never fear God. You'll never be afraid of his anger. But now, to Judah the message is Jehovah's **ANGER**: it is hot, it is burning. If you are afraid of human beings that get angry, what do you think it's like to face an angry God---the wrath of God? Some people have never realized this. They never realized that God is like a raging fire, as Jeremiah says here, *"Let my wrath go forth like fire and burn with none to quench it."*

I haven't seen the film 'The Towering Inferno'. The film of a skyscraper burning and the terror that it causes is nothing compared to facing an angry God. Your reaction to your house being on fire would begin to give you the feeling that people would have faced an angry God. And Jeremiah says, "*You must do something quickly or that's what you're going to face."* And he says **TWO THINGS** in two vivid pictures. Number **ONE**, ***"PLOW UP YOUR FALLOW GROUND."*** What does that mean? It means, you see, that God can't get into your life because it's choked with so many things. It's choked with thorns. It's choked (as Jesus said) with the thorns of riches. It's choked with the business of getting a living. It's choked with too many interests. But there is a little bit in your life that's lying fallow---there's part of your life that's not being plowed or used. It's hardened because people have trodden over and over it, and it's not being used. But break it up. Get the plow in. Get that bare bit of ground---that part of your life that's not being cultivated because you're too choked with other interests---plow up your fellow ground. That's a marvelous text. *"Break up your fellow ground."* Get that part of your life that's got out of exercise. If you stop exercising, part of your body will begin to atrophy. It'll begin to lose its powers. And if you neglect part of your soul, then the same thing happens. Get that fallow ground broken up, that God's word may enter in and be received as seed. The **OTHER PICTURE** is even more direct. ***"CIRCUMCISE YOUR HEART,"*** a word that Jews would understand---particularly, stop cutting off bits of your body, but start cutting out those things in your heart that are symbols of an unregenerate nature. *"Cut it out, cut it out. Break up the fallow ground, cut things out, get back to the Lord. Let his anger come."* Now, we know from the rest of this chapter that, I'm afraid, it didn't work. They didn't listen. The fallow ground remained fallow, their hearts remained uncircumcised. Nothing was cut out, and the result was **GOD'S ANGER CAME.**

The rest of this chapter I hardly need to take in detail---I read it. It's a dreadful picture of a **LION coming and devouring the land**. If you want to see that lion, go to the British museum, you can see it there. You can see the bas relief stones of **ASSYRIA**, the great lion coming. There it is. That was the **LION**. It was not the Russian; it was the Assyrian; and the lion was their symbol. And the lion came, and it gobbled up little Judah and Jerusalem. And Jerusalem was besieged and princes and were amazed, and prophets were appalled. It was so unexpected...so unexpected...much as in the 1930s. We didn't think there was going to be another war. We didn't really expect it. People like **Churchill** were voices crying in a wilderness. Only in the last few months did we really feverishly try and get ready; and suddenly we were in it---in a major second world war within a lifetime. We were appalled. We were astonished at the speed of the events that drew us into that world war. And this last week in Jersey we've been so conscious as we've seen the reminders of the (German) occupation there---how we were plunged into something almost without realizing. That's the feel of this chapter. And Jeremiah can't understand it either. He's perplexed. He starts arguing with God. He said, *"God, I don't understand it. You were promising a good future for us, and now you've let this happen. Have you deceived it?"* Even Jeremiah was thrown off balance as he saw what was going to happen. He saw it in a series of **PICTURES**. He saw the **LION** coming out of its lair. He saw the hot Scirocco ***WIND*** from the desert, which would neither winnow nor refresh, but the hot burning wind that drives dust before it and burns the grass up until there is none.

And so, we get this dreadful picture of **the anger of God showing**. And the most important verse is verse 18 of chapter four: *"Your ways and your doing have brought this upon you. This is your doom, and it is bitter. It has reached your very heart."*

I have told you before that Winston Churchill not only warned us in the 1930s the war was on its way and was proved right. He not only led us through that war, but at the end of the war he wrote the history of the war. And volume five is entitled, thus...it's a long title... but volume five, the final volume of the war, is this, **"How the Great Democracies Triumphed and Were Thus Able to Resume the Follies Which Had So Nearly Cost Them Their Lives".** What an indictment. And looking back over the last 25 years, was he not right? "How the Great Democracies Triumphed and Were Thus Able to Resume the Follies Which Had So Nearly Cost Them Their Lives". No wonder Canadians said to me, "Why is it that the British will **FIGHT** for their country and die for their country, but not WORK for it?" That's what they said. And I had no answer....no answer to that.

***JEREMIAH’S ANGUISH***

And so, the **FINAL SECTION** versus 19 to 31 **JEREMIAH'S ANGUISH**. We've looked at Jehovah's anger. We've seen the threat of Judah’s annihilation. Now we look at Jeremiah's anguish, a vivid description of his feelings. *"My anguish, my anguish. I writhe in pain. The walls of my heart...my heart is beating wildly."* You've got the sense he is a man who's so involved in his country that his emotions, everything is caught up, *"For I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war: disaster upon disaster."* And then he says something about his people in Judah in the southeast. He says, *"They are skilled in doing evil; but how to do good they know not. In bad things they're professionals; in good things they're amateurs."* Now, do you think that has anything to say to us? *"In evil, professionals; in good amateurs."* It is a tragic fact that every child has to be taught to tell the **TRUTH** but has never to be taught to tell **LIES**! It is the fact that **a child has to be *TAUGHT* to be *OBEDIENT***. It never has to be taught to be disobedient. It is a fact that we have to teach every child to consider other people. You never have to teach a child to look after itself. And this is our human nature. To do **EVIL**, we're *professionals*; to do **GOOD**, we're *amateurs*.

***A DARK VISION***

And now Jeremiah has a **VISION**. It's a horrible picture. He looks on his beloved land and it has returned to the state in which it was before the creative hand of God got on it. Verse 23 is exactly the same phrase as occurs in verse two of Genesis one. *"And the whole earth was* ***WASTE*** *and* ***VOID****...waste and void."* And he looks at the land and God, as it were, has taken his beloved land of Judah and he's wiped out everything that's happened since creation. He's put it back in its original state as if the potter has taken the clay and just put it back as a lump because the vase has not been shaped rightly; and it's gone right back to waste and void, as if God says, *"I'm fed up. I haven't got anything out of my creation. All the love and care---making the dry land, making the hills and the clouds, and separating the waters---all that has been WASTED; I've got no family. Back to waste and void...and it was dark. "Darkness was upon the face of the waters."* And so, the sky has gone black, and Jeremiah sees in the vision, the land of Judah has gone all the way back to the beginning...all the way back to that dark, empty mess that it was before God shaped his lovely land.

What a vision: the **mountains** are shaking, the **men** have gone, the **birds** have flown, the **fields** are bare, the **cities** are ruined, the **sky** is black! **Judah has not repented, so *neither has God***. And in verse 28, God says, *"I have not relented, nor will I turn back."* There's one last thing in the picture. What about **JERUSALEM**? The land of Judah's gone back. What is Jerusalem doing? And Jeremiah has an extraordinary vision of his city, Jerusalem, as a lady painting herself up, putting on a a nice dress and jewelry, and putting eyeshadow on to make her eyes look big and beautiful; and she's simpering (being coy) before her enemies. She's trying to give them love and trying and save her life, as other women have done during invasion. And in this...in this Jeremiah sees that the city---instead of looking to guard in her extremity---is going to try and make love to the invader; but it won't work. It won't work. The final bit of the picture, this woman painted up is writhing in **AGONY**. She's having a miscarriage. All her **plans** are miscarrying and she's dying. "Did you not realize this," says Jeremiah, *"Your lovers despise you. They seek your life, not your love."* And Jerusalem dies shouting, *"Woe is me. I am fainting before my murderers."*

So, there's **HOPE** for the **north**: *"Come home* ***ISRAEL****, my anger is over for you. Come back and I'll give you the leaders and the land you want, and you need."* But ***JUDAH***: *"I wish you had just been faithless. I could have you home; but you've been worse than faithless. You've been* ***FALSE****. You've been false. And that is something I cannot accept. You've pretended to put things right and you haven't; and* ***I can't have you home."***

I'm going to read two things to close. I'm going to read **FIRST** of all a **POEM** and then (**SECOND**) I'm going to read part of a **PROPHECY**.

The **FIRST** is the next little **POEM** from the book, which was used by our young people a few Sundays ago. Here is just part of the next poem (about Jeremiah). *"As soon as I became a prophet, things began to pop and jerk and swing in all directions from my rooftop. So, God was getting through to me in almost everything I saw in sticks and stones, in cokes and cones, and even in a drunkard on the street about to snore. I could hear God talking in the plain and old and mundane things I knew; wild and unbelievable I guess, but true. Have you ever had your ears cleaned out and had the muck removed so that you can hear as you've never heard before; and every little whisper is a sonic booming cry; and scratching at a pimple is like scraping tin on tin; and combing through your hair is like coming through the rye. Well, that's the way it was with me when I was made alive to the meaning of the things I saw---that I had never seen before. Yes, even when I heard a drunkard snore, at first there was a strong kick of victor's thrill, a crazy happening that overwhelmed my will. I would wander down the road kicking at the gravel in disgust; when suddenly from at my feet, the word of God would come to me in lines that sounded like a childhood song I knew, and rather foolish too.*

*"Hey there Jerry, what do you see?" "I see a springy arm and rod, Lord." "No, that's not what it is at all. That's my strong word springing into action. You see?" So, it's more than just a springy arm and rod to me. That word kept haunting me...just like some maddening melody that will not let you free.*

*"Hey there, Jerry, what do you see?" "I see a pot that's smoking southward." "No, that's not what it is at all. That's an evil coming from the Northland. You see?" So, it's more than a pot that's smoking southward to me. I learned to read the signs---written, veiled, forgotten---that God was going into action to hurl a vile catastrophe like a missile from the north to devastate his nation and execute his sputtering wrath along a bloody path of sin. I... I could see it coming, gleaming like a black and green tornado swelling from the eye of God. It seemed as though I saw God drinking down his own wrath instead of pouring anger forth from his smoking crimson cup. Now, that fuming cup had filled itself again, and God had had enough. He summoned me before his court, cringing. All his council knew this wasn't any bluff. "Take this cup of wine," he said, "This is my cup of wrath, which every evil nation on the earth must gulp in gallon measure until it staggers stupidly before the quiver of my face, burning with disgrace. The cup of wrath was red...so the cup of wrath meant BLOOD. A rumble at the hand of God according to his word---a bitter, choking word of death. That evil was an enemy racing from the north, speeding madly forth like some hoodlum on a hot-rod to zero-in on Israel, who was slated for disaster by an angry master. That deadly ill kept coming, penetrating deeper until I saw within my mind JERUSALEM besieged and heard listening heart exposed to quiver and shiver in the ash, sucking lifeless air, until she died before what seemed the heartless view of God on-high. The doom that shattered Israel burst into my brain and tore the minute membrane of my mind until I felt insane.*

*My God, my God, the pain in my guts is the pain of a twisting sword. My God, my God, the pang in my breast is the pang of a scorching acid. I too have tested in advance what God has long endured: the wrath that burns when sin abounds and binds the hands of men. At last, I saw the wrath descend...I saw the end. I gazed upon the earth, and all the withered world was chaos---a swirling putrid chaos, a putrid purple chaos---just as it had been before the world began. I saw no man of clay, no bird of prey, no pillars for the sky, no left or right, no pristine light---nothing, but anger from on-high, black anger from on-high, black anger...black on black on deep purple, harboring a cold, primeval moan all alone. The end was ugly, the end was endless. How I wish that I had never seen a thing, and never will again.*

That conveys the poetry of Jeremiah. For the prophecy all came in poetry to him in Hebrew poetry.

Here is a **PROPHECY**, part of a prophecy: "Whereas, once my hands were around your country in protection, now are my hands changed...changed...and they are above and pointing in judgment, for I am opening the way for the workers of iniquity to come, and I give them liberty to damage and harass your land because you have rejected my protection. There are among the peoples of your country, those who with skillful words and with the patch from the pit, are bringing about those things that shall cause chaos and bloodshed; for the blood of your own countrymen and countrywomen shall stay in your streets---even these streets---when you are given over to these tyrants who shall then come fully into view. My beloved people, I tell you of things that are to come, that you might hear my voice and that you might respond. I wanted to make your land a demonstration to the world of that which is good, that which came from a country that owned and honored my law. But, alas, it has become a demonstration for the enemy of that which comes when every polluted thing is not only **PERMITTED** but made **LEGAL** by the leaders of your country. I will judge them, and I will judge them heavily. I will cast them down, and I will put such rulers that shall bring this country to the very edge of complete destruction; yet my ears are still open to hear any cry that might arise to me from my people." And that prophecy was delivered in this country on the **9th of July 1975**. That is what God is saying.

**Let us pray.** *"Oh God, as we listen to your word, there's only one prayer that we feel able to pray, and that is, 'Lord, will you help us to be honest, not to say things we don't mean.' Lord, we realize that you count falsehood as much worse than faithlessness; and therefore we pray that your word may find an entrance into our hearts and that you will help us to break up the fallow ground to receive it. We ask this for our own sake and for the sake of our nation. Lord, we have just been playing with our imagination this morning; but we realize that it is for real and that you are speaking--- not just over 2000 years ago, but today---to your people in this place. So, Lord, have mercy on us. May we hear your promises and your word to us:' Come home. Come home.' For your name's sake. Amen."*