

The book of Jeremiah. For those of you who are visiting us, we are going through this prophet because we feel this is the most relevant part of God's word to our situation today. There are many parallels between our day and Jeremiah’s. Chapter 10 through to verse six of chapter 12.

*Hear the Word of the Lord, oh Israel, "Don't act like the people who make horoscopes and try to read their fate and future in the stars. Don't be frightened by predictions such as theirs, for it is all a pack of lies---their ways are futile and foolish. They cut down a tree and carve an idol and decorate it with gold and silver and fasten it securely in place with hammer and nails so that it won't fall over. And there stands their God like a scarecrow in a garden of cucumbers. It cannot speak and it must be carried, for it cannot walk. Don't be afraid of such a God, for it can neither harm, nor help, nor do you any good."*

*Oh, Lord, there is no other God like you, for you are great and your name is full of power. Who would not fear you, O King of Nations--- and that title belongs to you alone. Among all the wise men of the earth and in all the kingdoms of the world there isn't anyone like you. The wisest of men who worship idols are altogether stupid and foolish. They bring beaten sheets of silver from Tarshish and gold from Uphaz and give them to skillful goldsmiths who make their idols. Then they clothe these gods in kingly, purple robes that expert tailors have made. But the Lord is the ONLY true God...the living God...the everlasting king; the whole earth shall tremble at his anger. The world shall hide before his displeasure.*

*Say this to those who worship other gods, "Your so-called gods--- who have not made the heavens and the earth---shall vanish from the earth; but our God formed the earth by his power and wisdom, and by his intelligence he hung the stars in space and stretched out the heavens. It is his voice that echoes in the thunder of the storm- clouds. He causes mist to rise upon the earth. He sends the lightning and brings the rain; and from his treasures, he brings the wind. But foolish men without knowledge of God bow down before their idols. It is a shameful business that these men are in, for what they make are frauds---gods without life or power in them. All are worthless, silly. They will be crushed when their makers perish. But the God of Jacob is not like these foolish idols. He is the creator of all, and Israel is his chosen nation...'The Lord of Hosts' is his name. Pack your bags.: He says, "get ready now to leave. The siege will soon begin, for* ***SUDDENLY*** *I'll flinging you from this land and pour great troubles down. At last, you shall feel my wrath."*

*Desperate is my wound. My grief is great. My sickness is incurable; but I must bear it. My home is gone. My children have been taken away, and I will never see them again. There is no one left to help me rebuild my home. The shepherds of my people have lost their senses. They no longer follow God nor ask his will. Therefore, they perish, and their flocks are scattered. Listen! Hear the terrible sound of great armies coming from the north. The cities of Judah shall become dens of jackals. Oh Lord, I know it is not within the power of man to map his life and plan his course, so* ***YOU*** *correct me Lord, but please be gentle. Don't do it in your anger for I would die. Pour out your fury on the nations who don't obey the Lord, for they have destroyed Israel and made a wasteland of this entire country.*

*Then the Lord spoke to Jeremiah once again and said, "Remind the men of Judah and all the people of Jerusalem that I made a contract with their fathers; and cursed is the man who does not heed it; for I told them at the time I brought them out of slavery in Egypt that if they would obey me and do whatever I commanded them, then they and all their children would be mine and I would be their God. And now Israel, obey me," says the Lord, "so that I can do for you the wonderful things I swore I would if you obeyed. I want to give you a land that flows with milk and honey, as it is today."*

*Then I replied, "So be it, Lord." Then the Lord said, "Broadcast this message in Jerusalem's streets; go from city to city throughout the land and say, 'Remember this agreement that your father's made with God, and do all the things they promised him they would for. I solemnly said to your fathers when I brought them out of Egypt---and have kept on saying it over and over again until this day, "Obey my every command." But your fathers didn't do it. They wouldn't even listen. Each followed his own stubborn will and his proud heart. Because they refused to obey, I did to them all the evils stated in the contract.' "*

*Again, the Lord spoke to me and said, "I have discovered a conspiracy against me among the men of Judah and Jerusalem. They have returned to the sins of their fathers, refusing to listen to me and worshiping idols. The agreement I made with their fathers is* ***BROKEN*** *and* ***CANCELED****. Therefore," the Lord says, "I'm going to bring calamity down upon them and they shall not escape. Though they cry for mercy, I will not listen to their pleas. Then they will pray to their idols and burn incense before them; but that cannot save them from the time of anguish and despair. Oh, my people. You have as many gods as there are cities; and your altars of shame, your altars to burn incense to Baal are along every street in Jerusalem. Therefore, Jeremiah* ***PRAY NO LONGER FOR THIS PEOPLE****---neither weep nor plead for them---for I will not listen to them when they are finally desperate enough to beg me for help. What right do my beloved people have to come any more to my Temple. You have been unfaithful and worshiped other gods; can promises and sacrifices now avert your doom, and give you life and joy again. The Lord used to call you his 'green olive tree'---beautiful to see and full of good fruit; but now he has sent the fury of your enemies to burn you up and leave you broken and charred. It is because of the wickedness of Israel and Judah in offering incense to Baal that the Lord of the armies of heaven, who* ***PLANTED*** *the tree, has ordered it to be* ***DESTROYED****."*

*Then the Lord told me about all their plans and showed me their evil plots. I had been as unsuspecting as a lamb or ox on the way to slaughter. I didn't know that they were planning to kill me. "Let's destroy this man and all his messages;" they said, "let's kill him so that his name will be forever forgotten."*

*"Oh Lord of heaven's armies, you are just. See the hearts and motives of these men; repay them for all that they have planned. I look to you for justice." And the Lord replied, "The men of the city of Anathoth shall be punished for planning to kill you. They will tell you not to prophesy in God's name on pain of death. And so, their young men shall die in battle, and their boys and girls shall starve. Not one of these plotters of Anathoth shall survive, for I will bring a great disaster upon them. Their time has come."*

*"Oh Lord, you always give me justice when I bring a case before you to decide. Now let me bring you this complaint: why are the wicked so prosperous? Why are evil men so happy? You plant them? They take root and their business grows. Their profits multiply, and they are rich. They say, 'Thank God,' but in their hearts they give no credit to you. But as for me, Lord, you know my heart. You know how much it longs for you; and I am poor, oh Lord. Lord, drag them off like helpless sheep to the slaughter. Judge them, oh God. How long must this land of yours put up with all their goings-on? Even the grass of the field groans and weeps over their wicked deeds. The wild animals and birds have moved away, leaving the land deserted. Yet the people say, 'God won't bring judgment on us. We're perfectly safe.' "*

*And the Lord replied to me, "If racing with mere MEN---these men of Anathoth---has wearied you, how will you race against HORSES--- against the king, his court, and all the priests? If you stumble and fall on* ***OPEN GROUND****, what will you do in* ***JORDAN'S JUNGLE****?? Even your own brothers---your own family---have turned against you. They have plotted to call for a mob to lynch you. Don't trust them no matter how pleasantly they speak; don't believe them."*

***Jeremiah: A Difference in His 'Public' and 'Private' Faces***

This morning we're going to be looking much more at the ***MAN*** than his ***MESSAGE***. It's going to be a rather **DIFFERENT** study to those we've had so far in Jeremiah, for he is one of those who was willing to let us see inside his own heart; and in that way to become ***VULNERABLE*** and to be ***MISUNDERSTOOD***....For the reading I've just read to you is composed of **FOUR SECTIONS** quite distinct from each other, and they alternate. The ***FIRST*** and the ***THIRD*** sections were Jeremiah as a ***PREACHER*** in public and the ***SECOND*** and the ***FOURTH*** sections were Jeremiah in private, ***PRAYING***. And there is such a ***CONTRAST*** between Jeremiah in ***PUBLIC*** and Jeremiah in ***PRIVATE*** that we are going to have to ask a very big question. "Was he a ***hypocrite***? Was he an actor? Was he two-faced?" In ***PUBLIC,*** when he was preaching, he was dogmatic---very sure of himself. In ***PRIVATE***, when he prayed, he was full of doubts and very unsure of himself. In PUBLIC, he was very forthright. In ***PRIVATE***, he was very fearful. In ***PUBLIC***, he was a tough man. In ***PRIVATE***, he was a very tender man. In ***PUBLIC***, he was victorious, but in ***PRIVATE***, he was vulnerable.

Now was he living a ***DOUBLE*** life? Were these ***TWO*** Jeremiahs? How do they tie together? I think we shall understand this a little better if we put together sections **ONE** and **THREE** of our reading, and study his ***public preaching***, and then study sections ***TWO*** and ***FOUR*** together, and look at his ***private praying*** and try and understand the man who lay behind the message. For as I've said, the contrast is so stark that people have raised this question about him. But when you get to know other preachers, you'll find that this same thing applies. And if you listen to their private prayers, you would get a very different impression from that gained from listening to public preaching. Why is there this ***DUALITY***? Can we understand it? Can we understand why a man is just so different?

***Preaching: Jeremiah's 'Public' Face***

Well, let's look ***FIRST*** then at the **TWO PUBLIC SERMONS** which he preached in this section recorded for us in chapters 10 and 11. The ***THEME*** of both public sermons is the same: ***JEHOVAH’S SOVEREIGNTY***---the power, the glory, the might, the majesty of God in heaven, creator of the universe. That's his theme. But there's another (a ***SECOND***) theme comes through. This God who is the creator, has made a contract---a ***COVENANT***---with a particular nation on earth. And it is because they have gone against this double relationship with God that the Jews---more than any other nation---have suffered so deeply. Other nations have denied the creator, but Israel denied the covenant God as well as the God who created them. There was a ***DOUBLE*** relationship which they (***ISRAEL***) denied. The ***NATIONS*** of the world deny a ***SINGLE*** relationship that ***ISRAEL*** denies the ***DOUBLE*** relationship.

And so, Jeremiah preached ***TWO*** sermons on two different occasions. ***ONE***: you are denying God as ***CREATOR*** when you make these idols; and the ***OTHER*** (the ***SECOND***) sermon: you are denying the God who entered into a ***COVENANT*** with you---a marriage with you. You are his special people; and to deny your creator as a human being is one sin---and a terrible thing to do. It's even ***WORSE*** to deny the creator who became your own special God and married himself to you in a covenant.

***Israel's Denial of God as Creator***

Let's look ***FIRST*** then at this **DENIAL OF GOD AS CREATOR**. Last Tuesday midday, I was in the royal grammar school speaking to the boys there, and they were asking questions. I was trying to answer them; and the second question was intriguing. It was this, "Did God make man, or does man make God?” That's a profound question and my answer was ***BOTH***...both.

God made man; but as soon as man rejects the God who made him, then he must make a god for himself. You see, there's what Huxley called 'a God-shaped blank' in the human soul, and you've got to fill it, or you feel so empty and so hollow. And this God-shaped blank you can fill with many things. Everything that you try to fill it with is an **IDOL**, in the biblical definition of idolatry. You see, when we think of this word 'idol', we tend to think of ugly little lumps of stone and wood. That's not the only idol that you can make. Your idol is anything that fills the God-shaped blank in yourself. We'll talk in a moment of the kind of idols that people use today to fill that blank, but the fact is God made us so like himself that if we don't accept that and relate to him, we feel **HOLLOW**. Empty life is **MEANINGLESS** and **PURPOSELESS**, and we've got to fill it in with something; and so, we make gods; and we make the gods that we like.

Now, in those days it was almost pathetic what they used to fill that blank. One of the things they used was **ASTROLOGY**---horoscopes. You don't think that's very old fashioned, do you? You know, this is nearly 3000 years ago, and yet today---I've told you of that day I walked down the Champs Elysees and saw a queue of well-dressed French men and women standing outside a shop in which there was an IBM computer with about four big bank boxes wired together. And the last one was a typewriter that could type a foolscap sheet in about that long. And French men and women were queuing up to pay three pounds---the equivalent of three pounds sterling---for a horoscope for just 31 days. And the brilliance of modern technology was being used to promote this idolatry; and they were paying that because they were looking to that to fill the God-shaped blank. Now, I'm not boasting here, but I honestly do not know what sign of the zodiac I was born under. I just don't know if you asked me. How many of you can say that? Put your hand up if you can say you don't know what sign of the zodiac you were born under. Rght. Put your hands down quickly, or others will think you are proud too. But isn't that significant? 90% of you have had the curiosity to find out...90% of you. That's how it's permeated. 3000 years ago, Jeremiah says, "Don't try to read your fate and future in the stars. Don't get interested in that. Don't be curious about it." He said, "It's just a pack of lies. Don't be frightened by its predictions. They can't do you any harm. They can't do you any good. It's FRAUD. And yet there are more people in Britain who read their **HORORSCOPES**, than read their BIBLE every day...many, many more.

***Jeremiah's Scathing Satire on Idols***

And so, idols are not out of date, you see, it's a God-shaped blank---you've got to fill it with something. Now at this point, Jeremiah has a scathing...a scathing **SATIRE** **ON IDOLS**. He particularly thinks of the wooden ones they made. He almost makes them laugh at it to see how silly it is. He says, *"You cut a tree down, and then you try and dress it up so it doesn't look like a tree; and you have to nail it in place or else it might fall down. This is the god who's gonna help you, you know? And you've got to nail him up there in case falls over. And he's supposed to keep YOU up, and you dress him up; and you have to carry him around because he can't walk. And this is the God who's supposed to be carrying you."*

And the fact is that whatever other thing you put in that God- shaped blank---whatever idol you look to see you through---that idol is something you will have to carry. It is not something that can carry you, because you made it and therefore it is LESS than yourself. Anything I make is less than I am; and therefore, to look to something I have made to help me is RIDICULOUS. It's ILLOGICAL. It's UNREASONABLE, yet we do it. And a man builds up his business, and he looks through that business to see him through. but he made the business---it's LESS than he is---and he's looking to this business as if it were GREATER than he is...and it isn't. When you make money or make love or make...whatever, it's something you make, and therefore it's not something that can make you.

***Four Contrasts Between God and Idols***

Well, let's get back to what Jeremiah says. He has FOUR CONTRASTS between the IDOLS of his day and the TRUE GOD. And these are four questions we can ask about our modern idols too.

***1. Is Your God Weak, or Strong?***

***FIRST*** question: is your god **WEAK** or **STRONG**...is your god weak or strong? An idol is weak. You have to nail it up. It can't walk, it doesn't breathe, it can't move, it can't talk, it can't communicate with you, it can't respond to you, it can't relate to you. It's ***WEAK***.

In fact, in a beautiful phrase he says, *"Your God stands there like a helpless scarecrow in a garden of cucumbers."* Can you imagine anything more laughable than that---than looking at a scarecrow in a garden of cucumbers and saying, "This is my God, may I introduce you? Fall down and worship. Take your shoes off. Get down before it; it's *GREAT*." A scarecrow in a garden of cucumbers--- what bitter ***IRONY***, what ***SATIRE***. Jeremiah is laughing it out of court.

But **GOD**, God is **GREAT**. He is the king of the nations. That's his title. He's great. He's not weak, he's STRONG. Is your God weak or strong? You know, even the idol of churchianity, you will have to carry; it will not carry you. Religion---unless it's the religion of the living God---will always be something you carry. And as I've traveled around the world and looked at other religions and studied them, I've noticed that in **EVERY** case people are having to ***CARRY* THEIR RELIGION**. It doesn't carry them. They have to carry it. It's one of the things that gives the whole show away. Even religion is an idol. Millmead (Church) can be an idol. It can be a great big lump of reinforced concrete that you look to for help. And I tell you, if you do, you'll have to carry...it will not carry you. Only the living great God is strong enough to walk and to talk and to carry YOU, and to be other than a scarecrow in a cucumber field.

***2. Is Your God Dead, or Alive?***

***SECOND*** question: is your God ***DEAD*** or ***ALIVE***? That's a relevant question. Is your God dead or alive? Here is a young man, and his god is his motorbike; and every Sunday he worships it and polishes it and bows down before it and does obeisance to it and looks at it and stands back and adores it. Is it dead or alive? **DEAD**. It's a lump of dead metal; and yet it can have the place in that young man's heart that only the ***LORD*** should have. He's filling the God-shaped blank with *speed* and *power* instead of with God...but it's a ***DEAD*** god. And, *"You cut a tree down,"* says Jeremiah, *"you may cover it with gold and silver, and you may get your best tailor to make a suit of clothes to it, but it's dead. It's dead, it doesn't breathe."* And in that phrase, you've almost got the death of all idols. It doesn't ***BREATHE***...it doesn't breathe. And so, as one commentator said, "When you lean your weary head against its breast, there is no heaving response. It's ***DEAD***." But ours is the ***LIVING GOD***, before whom the world ***TREMBLES***---a God who's so alive that he can be angry; and when he is angry, you ***FEAR*** and you ***TREMBLE***.

The whole world will tremble before our God because he's ***ALIVE***. He's not a dead thing up there, he's ***ALIVE***; and therefore, he's responding to the situation. And he can respond with ***LOVE*** and ***COMPASSION***; he can respond with ***ANGER***; but he's ***ALIVE***. He's not dead.

***3. Is Your God Perishable, or Enduring?***

Question number ***THREE***, is your God ***PRISHABLE*** or ***ENDURING***? *"How long will it last?"* says Jeremiah. And any God you've made for yourself will perish when ***YOU*** perish, or when the ***EARTH*** perishes, or even ***BEFORE*** you perish. But he says, *"Your gods are perishable, and I care not what other thing or person a man puts in the God-shaped blank of his soul. What has been put there---if it is not God---will* ***PERISH****."* One of the biggest questions you can ask yourself is this, "This thing or this person to whom I've looked, to whom my life is dedicated---this, this god of mine--- will this god be ***WITH ME AFTER I DIE***...after I die? Or will it ***PERISH*** when I do? Will it cease to help me when I die... when I go?

Is your god ***PERISHABLE*** or ***ENDURING***? Listen, God was ***ALWAYS*** there. He flung the stars into space. He stretched the heavens like a great curtain, and he was always there: and he made everything that is. The question, "Who made God?" is a nonsensical question, but I still get asked it. It's as silly as asking, "Can you make a square circle?" Because the very word *'God'* by implication---by definition---means *'the one who was always there* ***BEFORE*** *everything else was, and who* ***MADE IT ALL****'*. Which is the god of yours. Is it a god who's ***BEEN MADE***, or is it the God who ***MAKES***? And you know, the funny thing is, that if man will not accept the God who makes him, then he does make god.

But this God ***ALWAYS WAS*** there and ***ALWAYS*** ***WILL BE***. He flung those stars into space. And now that we've seen pictures of the surface of Venus, doesn't it give you a sense of, "God has been looking at those rocks on the surface of Venus from the day he flung Venus into orbit." And we get so excited because we've got two photographs, two little patches that size. I'm not belittling the scientific achievement, but isn't it pathetic when you think of God looking at every part of Venus all the time, because he shaped those rocks---he knows what the surface of EVERY planet looks like. And so, this is the God who doesn't perish.

***4. Is Your God Worthless, or Precious?***

And, ***FINAL*** question: *"Is your God* ***WORTHLESS*** *or* ***PRECIOUS***," says Jeremiah. *"Our God is our INHERITANCE, our portion."* he says, "How much is your God worth?" The very word *'inheritance'* means that *'when I die, I get all of God'*. I've got so much to look forward to. He is my ***PORTION***, He's my ***SHARE***, He's what I ***WANT***, He's my ***INHERITANCE***---He's what I'm looking forward to. Oh, how ***PRECIOUS*** he is.

*"But* ***YOUR*** *God,"* says Jeremiah, *"how* ***WORTHLESS****...How worthless. How much is your God worth?"* Do you know the meaning of the word ‘***WORSHIP’***? Originally it had two more letters in it, **T-H**; and originally the word was *'worthship'*...*worthship*. And to *worth-ship* is to **GIVE** **YOURSELF** to the person or thing that is worth ***MOST*** to you. That's what worth-ship is. And when we come to church on a Sunday morning, if anybody comes in and join us, let us say to them clearly, "We are here because God is worth ***MORE*** to us than anything or anyone else, and we're declaring His ***WORTH-SHIP***. But now, what are your ***OTHER*** gods ***WORTH***? What are they ***REALLY*** worth? I tell you, they've all been devalued. They've all come to **NOTHING**. 'The God of Israel is my **PORTION** and my **INHERITANCE**. "

Well now, let's come to those **MODERN** gods---those idols. Do you know the extraordinary thing is, that in Britain today, the cycle of sin is so reversing that in fact, the very idols of Jeremiah's day are now appearing in Britain. I've mentioned **ASTROLOGY**; and it's rife through our society.

Britain's future is increasingly dependent on the Arabs. Who do the ***ARABS*** look to? Why some of the most powerful Arab oil magnates in the Middle East read their ***HOROSCOPE*** every morning before they make a decision of the price of our petrol? Did you know that? So, we're being trapped into a world that is governed economically by the stars. None of us can escape from that vortex of astrology, which is now influencing some of the most powerful men in the world, and through them the entire economic situation. But there are other things too. The worship of **BAAL** was deified sex, and the idols referred to were huge ugly phallic symbols---exactly the sort of thing that appeared on the stage of the Evan Arnot Theater a few months ago; not made of wood or stone, but of **FIBERGLASS**. That shows you how modern we are. But a nine foot high phallic symbol was the scenery in the Evan Arnot Theater for a Shakespeare play.

These are the very things---the name given to them in the Hebrew is not given today, but it's the same thing. So, we're not so modern as we thought. We're not so far-removed from ***IDOLATRY***. We're not so far from Canan. We're not so far from Jeremiah's situation. But Jeremiah says, *"Your gods are as* ***MANY*** *as your* ***CITIES****."* And the fact is that we have added many other gods. There are many other ***IDOLS***. A man may have as his idol, his own ***FAMILY***; and that may come absolutely first. He may go to church, he may worship God, but that's what's first. And his own family: he will do anything for his family. He will do anything to **PROTECT** them. He will be hurt ***MORE*** if anything happens to ***THEM***, than anything else that could happen to him. That's his god.

Another man, it's his ***HOUSE***. You can tell just by looking at his house, that's what his god is. That's what he looks to provide him with ***PEACE*** and ***SECURITY*** and ***COMFORT*** in everything that he wants. That's his god. And another man, it's his ***CAR***. You can see by looking at his car. Another man, it's his ***BUSINESS***. You can see by the way he reads the Financial Times. You can see that there are ***IDOLS*** that fill this God-shaped blank---things that a man lives for and looks to see him through. It's very sad, because many of these things may be quite legitimate in their place, but it's never to be *first* place.

And I remember Abraham, who was tempted to dote on his little boy because he'd got no children---only the one boy really, of his own by Sarah; and he worshiped this little boy, and he just... this little boy could become his god so easily. So, God said*, "Take Isaac, whom you love, and kill him."* When Abraham did that, God said, *"Stop! Stop! Now I know he's NOT your God. He's number two."* See, whatever is number one...and, you see, it doesn't matter whether you go to church or not, isn't there something pretty devastating in this? Jeremiah says, "These businessmen, they take root, and their business grows. You plant them, their profits multiply and they're rich. They say, ‘Thank God,’ (that means they're in church on Sunday) ... They SAY, ‘Thank God,’ but in their HEARTS they give no credit to You. Do you notice that in their ***HEARTS,*** they don't give ***YOU*** the credit; they don't say, ‘God, I'm in church because I know that without you my business would collapse. I know that without you I could never have gotten where I've gotten.’ No, they say, ‘Thank God,’ but in their heart, ‘I'm pretty cute, you know. I've played the markets well.’ “I’ve seen these things: "It's my god."

*The dearest idol that I have known,*

*What e'er that idol be,*

*Help me to tear it from thy throne,*

*And worship only Thee.*

You ***SANG*** it. Do you ***BELIEVE*** it? Do you ***MEAN*** it? You sang it. Well, that's a pretty strong, forthright sermon.

***Sermon Number Two: Israel's Denial of Their Covenant God***

Let's move quickly onto the ***SECOND SERMON***. Jeremiah not only says, *"You've copied other nations and gone after* ***IDOLS****, you've filled the God-shaped blank with other than the living true God---king of the nations, creator of the earth, who flung the stars in space. But you Jews have done something even* ***WORSE****. It's bad enough for godless people to do this. It's bad enough for the nations of the world to behave this way. But what have YOU done? You have had a* ***COVENANT*** *with him. You've been* ***MARRIED*** *to God. You weren't just* ***CREATED*** *by him, you were* ***LOVED*** *by him and you were brought into a* ***COVENANT****.”* He's referring to Mount Sinai.

***Four Steps in Breaking of Covenant Relationship***

And in chapter 11 verses 1 to 17, Jeremiah is recorded as saying ***FOUR*** things---four steps. The ***FIRST*** paragraph: you became ***DISINTERESTED*** in the covenant---you lost interest, you didn't pay heed, you just ignored it. Step number ***TWO***: you became ***DISOBEDIENT***---even when you knew, and had told you what the covenant said, you didn't do it. Step number ***THREE***: you became ***DISSOLUTE***, and you ran after other gods and your moral standards went. Step number ***FOUR***: ***DISOWNED***. When you tried to get back to God, you found ***HE*** wouldn't listen to you. Now that's a very simple four-point sermon and I want to give it to you in the form of an ***ANALOGY***. A covenant is a ***MARRIAGE***. You know, when two young people come to be married, sometimes...not usually in a modern service.... but one of the things they used to say when they put the ring on (or when they made the promise), "As a token of the vow and covenant made betwixt me and thee," ...***COVENANT***...***MARRIAGE***.

***As Seen in Breaking of a ‘Marriage’ Covenant***

So let me trace those ***FOUR STEPS IN A MARRIAGE***. Here they are Step number ***ONE***: when the wife stops paying attention to her husband, that's the ***first*** step of the breaking of the marriage...when she just ***DOESN'T PAY ANY ATTENTION***. I'm using this way around for the ***WIFE***, because Israel to Jehovah was a wife to her husband. And so, step number one, the wife just stopped paying attention to the husband---just didn't listen, just didn't notice what his feelings were.

Step number ***TWO***: when the wife started ***LIVING HER OWN LIFE***, even though she was still under the same roof as her husband---when ***SHE*** went to ***THIS***...to her bridge party, when HE went out to ***THAT***---living her own life; just not doing what he wanted her to do...not going out with him when he wanted to go out together; but just saying, "No, I've planned this for tonight." Living one's own life under the same roof.

The marriage is still not broken but there's a deeper stage of breaking been reached. Stage number ***THREE***: when she finds another man more interesting than her own man and ***BEGINS TO PLAY AROUND WITH OTHER MEN***. At that point the marriage has ***BROKEN***.

Stage number ***FOUR***, she comes back wreaking with perfume and says, "Hello darling," to the husband, and is surprised that he's cool and that ***HE DOESN’T WANT HER BACK***.

Now that's Jeremiah's sermon; and he says, *"Israel, that's what you did to God at* ***FIRST (1)****. You just didn't pay Him much attention---you didn't* ***heed*** *the covenant.* ***THEN (2****) you began to live your own life---you didn't* ***obey*** *the covenant.* ***THEN (3)*** *you* ***went after other gods****.”* And you know, the intriguing thing is that the word *'Baal'* means *'my husband'*...my husband. So, it's a very relevant illustration. Then comes the ***MAIN POINT (4)*** of this sermon; and it's devastating. Jeremiah says this, *"What right has my beloved in* ***MY HOUSE****?"* Because when they felt the national emergency---when they needed God---they poured back into the Temple to pray, and they came back with perfume from Sheba for God, and they offered sacrifices. And God says, *"What right has my beloved in my house?"* Now the bitter...the ***BITTERNESS*** of that comes through in the word *'beloved'*; did you notice that? *"My beloved, she ignored me, she lived her own life, she went after other men, and now she comes back. What* ***RIGHT*** *has my beloved in my house!?"* It's the ***AGONY*** of God's heart coming through in that. *"What* ***RIGHT*** *has she in my house when she's done this?"* And God looks at Israel and says, *"What right has she to come in into my Temple?"* He says, *"Jeremiah, don't* ***WEEP*** *for her. Don't* ***PRAY*** *for her. Don't* ***PLEAD*** *for her. Don't make it worse for me than it is. My beloved comes running back with perfume and wants to love me, and look what she's been. What* ***RIGHT*** *has she to be in my house?"*

It's a powerful ***SERMON***. And I draw from it this ***ONE LESSON***: that God feels even more keenly the agony of someone who has been his, who has had a godly background, who knows him, and who then drifts after other gods, **and then comes back as if they can just walk in and say, "God, here I am again. I'm yours."** You see God judges by those...by the opportunities we have had. That's why he was more severe with ***ISRAEL*** than any other nation. The other ***NATIONS*** hadn't got the covenant, they simply rebelled against the ***CREATOR***. But ***ISRAEL*** rebelled against a ***COVENANT GOD***.

No wonder that Jesus said, *"****WOE*** *unto you Capernaum."* Now Capernaum's a beautiful little fishing village on the edge of the Sea of Galilee. It's beautiful. And you know, just 70 miles to the south is the Dead Sea. And in the bottom of that Dead Sea---somewhere under its waves---lies the cities of **SODOM** and **GOMMORAH**. And yet Jesus said, *"****WOE*** *unto, unto you,* ***CAPERNAUM****. It'll be better for* ***SODOM*** *and* ***GOMMORAH*** *in the day of judgment than for you."* Why? *"Because you've had* ***ME*** *in your town. Sodom never had. If the mighty works that have been done in you were done in* ***SODOM*** *and* ***GOMMORAH****, they'd have repented. But you've had the* ***BIGGER*** *chance."* And it's a sobering thought that those of us who've been brought up in a Christian country---who've heard the gospel, who've had it taught to us in day school...those of us who know the truth about God, will be dealt with much more hardly than the **PIGMIES** in Central Africa who never ***HEARD***...much more hardly. The ***COVENANT*** people are judged more severely than those who are simply the ***CREATED*** people.

***Prayer: Jeremiah's Private Face***

Well now so much for Jeremiah's ***PUBLIC*** ministry---it's powerful, it's forthright, it's strong. And yet when you go into his ***PRIVATE PRAYER LIFE***, you find a very different Jeremiah. A Jeremiah full of ***QUESTIONS*** and ***DOUBTS*** and ***FEARS***. A Jeremiah who's ***HESITANT***, and a Jeremiah who's ***BROKEN*** from time to time; for we have come in this section we read to the first of what have been called *'the confessions of Jeremiah'*, in which he showed you how **HE** felt ***INSIDE*** about all this---not nearly so sure of himself; his emotions torn into between his people and his God. And from time to time he found himself on the side of his people and ***AGAINST*** his God...so feeling was he. And from one point of view, I hope that there are times when you feel the same.

I hope there are times when your heart rebels against the fact that some of your physical relatives are going to be in hell. And I hope your heart takes their side against God sometimes, because that will show that you still have a heart. And God was ***PATIENT*** with Jeremiah when he took the same line. Now Jeremiah was torn in emotions by this fact. On the one hand, he had a deep ***EMPATHY*** with his people---he loved them, he wept for them, he prayed for them, he felt for them. And on the other hand, he had such an ***ESTRANGEMENT*** from them that they plotted to kill him. And this was the tension. No human being likes this: to LOVE people so much that you can't bear the thought of their being judged by God, and yet knowing that all the time they judge you. That's hard.

***Jeremiah's Empathy for His Nation***

And so, Jeremiah reveals his ***HEART***. We consider ***FIRST*** his ***EMPATHY*** with his people. In chapter 10 verses 17 to 25, he feels keenly the ***DISASTER*** that's coming---the invasion that's coming. So keenly does he feel it that in the first person singular, he describes a situation that **HE** will never have. He says, *"My children are gone!"* Now, he was forbidden to marry. He never had children because he never had a wife. But so deeply could he feel for his countrymen that he could almost feel the invasion already happening, and he could feel the moment when they picked up their bags to make the long trek to **BABYLON**---when they said goodbye to their children for the last time, when they closed their front door knowing they'd never see their own home again, when they pulled their tent up knowing they would never pitch it again in their own land. He ***FEELS*** that. He says, *"Desperate is my* ***WOUND****. My* ***GRIEF*** *is great, my* ***SICKNESS*** *is incurable. My home is GONE. My children have been taken away...I will never see them again. There's no one left to help me rebuild my home."* It pours out. He's feels it so deeply that already he's living in the ***SORROW*** of it.

And you know, a man can only ***preach*** in a dogmatic and forthright way and denounce people as strongly as he did in ***public***, if in ***private*** he ***FEELS*** as deeply as this for what they are to go through--- if he can ***WEEP*** for them, and if he can really ***FEEL*** the HORROR of it; that's his ***EMPATHY***.

And out of that empathy with his people comes a ***PRAYER***: *"Lord,”* he says, *"I know I'm weak. I know it's not in a man to plan his life. I know it's not in us to live the life you want us to live.*

*"I know we're weak, but Lord, please don't be too angry with us. Don't blot us out altogether. Lord, couldn't You just have some of your anger for the nations that are attacking us? Lord, just don't be too angry with us, please. Don't blot us out. Don't wipe us out all together,"* It (empathy) comes at the end of chapter 10. *"Oh Lord, I know it is not within the power of man to map his life and plan his course. So, correct me Lord, but please don't be angry with me, or I'll die."* He's feeling the judgment of God and pleading that it be not too severe. That's his ***EMPATHY***. And so, he accepts that ***JUDGMENT* *is right***. He says, *"We must bear it."* But somehow, you know, you get a picture of a people picking up their bundles to be taken away.

When I read this phrase, my mind went back to a newsreel film of the Jews being loaded onto trains in Germany. You've seen those newsreel films, you've seen how they passed weeping---just picked up their little feeble bundles, got on the train knowing they'd never see their families again, knowing they'd never see their homes again. But they went. I'm sure that in many of their hearts they were saying, "Lord, couldn't you just be angry with the people who were doing this to us?"

And Jeremiah reveals his ***TORN HEART***: *"Lord, I know the judgment is correct. I know that we've not planned our course right. I know that you have a right to be angry; we must bear our punishment. But Lord, please, don't make it too much."* It's very human. A man, who in ***PUBLIC*** can say, *"The* ***judgment*** *of God will wipe you out;"* in ***PRIVATE***, says, *"Lord,* ***please*** *don't".* Got the tension?

***Jeremiah's Estrangement From His People***

Now finally, let's look at his ***ESTRANGEMENT*** from his people. He felt so close to them, but they did not feel close to him. And it came to him as a frightful shock that the people of his own village, Anathoth, (you can still see the little town, the Arab town of Anita, about three and a half miles northeast of Jerusalem), the people of his own village, of Anita/Anathoth, these people were actually plotting his ***DEATH***. He never realized it. He never dreamt that their looks, their dark looks at him, their whispers when he was around, He never dreamt that this is what they were doing until God told him one day, *"Jeremiah, they hate your guts. Jeremiah, they're gonna kill you, do you know that?"* Jeremiah realized that a man's foe surely are, those of his own household. The incredible thing is the men of Anathoth say, *"Let's kill Jeremiah, and we'll blot out his name. We'll forget his name; he's let us down. We don't, we don't want one of our relatives speaking like this so let's blot out his name."*

You know, isn't it incredible the men of Anathoth, their ***ONLY*** claim to fame is that they tried to kill Jeremiah. Isn't it incredible? But for Jeremiah, they would never be thought of...never be spoken of. Here in the year 1975, I'm talking of the men of Anathoth. Why? Because ***JEREMIAH*** is famous. That's why. Because Jeremiah's name is known throughout the world. It's been known by millions. This young boy is worldwide---of worldwide fame. And the men of Anathoth are only remembered because he is. Hasn't God a sense of humor! He sits in heaven, and he LAUGHS at such goings on. So, Jeremiah says, *"God, deal with them...deal with them. I feel like a lamb before the slaughter; deal with them."* And God says, *"It's all right. I will. Vengeance is mine. I will repay."* You know if you are suffering any persecution at all...and I know that some of you are. I know that some of you have ***FRIENDS*** who don't like you. I know that some of you have ***RELATIVES*** who despise you. Let me remind you, God will put that right. God will deal with them. In fact, if you realize that God will, it'll make you a little ***TENDERER*** towards them. Do you realize that if anyone laughs at a Christian because he's a Christian, ***GOD*** will punish him for that? You don't need to worry. Jeremiah says, *"God, will you deal with them?"* God says, *"Look, I have already decided to deal with them. Their sons and daughters will perish and starve. Don't you worry about that, Jeremiah, leave your enemies to me. You get on with the job."* So, Jeremiah did.

But he not only had to cope with fighting ***WITHOUT***, but he had to cope with fears ***WITHIN***. The ***LAST*** thing we look at this morning is perhaps the ***DEEPEST***. Jeremiah was afflicted with ***INTELLECTUAL DOUBTS***. Even while he preached without any trace of doubt whatever, he had deep doubts in his own mind. And the doubts were these---it's a very, very old problem. *"Lord, you tell me that the wicked will be punished; and look at them. They're making money, their businesses prosper, they're fat, they're sleek. It doesn't tie up! Lord, the facts around me don't fit my faith."* And this is one of the ***BIGGEST*** questions that a man of God has to cope with. And it comes all the way through the Bible. You'll find it in Psalm 73. You'll find it right through the Book of Job. What happens when the facts don't fit in with your faith? And Jeremiah did the right thing. He didn't preach about his ***DOUBTS***. Neither do I. And you'll never catch me preaching about my doubts from this pulpit. You have to come and listen to my ***PRAYERS*** to get those. I love the story of (the ***TRUE*** story) ...of the lady who went to her minister and said, "I wish you'd preach on some of your ***convictions***." She said, "I've got enough ***doubts*** of my own, without coming to church to listen to ***YOURS***." And too many preachers are airing their doubts in the pulpits.

The person to take your doubts to are not the people but God. And every man of God has moments when he is overcome with the fact that the ***FACTS*** and his ***FAITH*** don't fit. And he goes to GOD---as Jeremiah went to God. ‘***FIGHTINGS*** ***WITHOUT’***, Jeremiah coped with that! But ‘***FEARS WITHIN’***, he found that much more difficult. And he said, *"God, why? Why do the wicked prosper? Here I'm preaching this, and you just seem to leave them to get on and make money. They don't. They don't listen, they don't respond. They're comfortable, they're happy, they're secure. Why, God? I don't understand it. Why?"* See, Jeremiah is being shaken by the ***FACTS OF SOCIETY***. And he says, *"How long God, how long? How long is this land to put up with this? How long are you going to delay your punishment? I've said you're gonna punish them; but how long before you come and do it?* *They're just laughing at you because you're not doing anything. How long, Lord? Why? Why?*" And here's a man with terrific ***DOUBT***--- a man whose faith is tottering. I just thank God for an honest Bible, don't you? I thank God for a Bible that says that men of the caliber of Jeremiah struggled with ***DOUBTS*** in private and had to ask God, *"Why? How long?"* Do you know what God's answer was? **God didn't answer *ANY* of his *QUESTIONS***. **He didn't clear up *ANY* of his *DOUBTS*!!**

God said, *"Jeremiah, I'm depending on you. If you're* ***SHAKEN*** *already, how long will you keep going? That's My question. If you're* ***SHAKEN*** *by infantry, what will happen when the cavalry comes. If you're* ***SHAKEN****, fighting in an open field, what will happen when you find yourself in the jungle?"* In other words, *"Jeremiah, there's* ***MUCH WORSE*** *to come. And I had hoped that the little battles you've had so far would prepare you for the* ***BIGGER*** *ones!! Jeremiah, I want you to see that the battles you've got now are nothing compared with what's coming. Jeremiah, I'm depending on you, Jeremiah. How long will you keep going?"* Jeremiah's question was, *"Why do* ***THEY*** *prosper?"* But God's question back was, *"How will* ***YOU*** *preach; if you're* ***SHAKEN*** *by these facts? Look, I told you what to say, Jeremiah; don't be shaken by what you see.* ***BELIEVE IN ME*** *and go on speaking. You've got* ***BIGGER*** *battles ahead; and I gave you these smaller battles so that you were ready for the bigger ones."* Do you know God is being both ***TOUGH*** and ***TENDER***? He's ***LIFTING*** Jeremiah up. He's ***BOOSTING*** his morale. He's saying, *"Jeremiah, now stand on your feet. Be a man. Don't let these things SHAKE you, because there's a* ***BIGGER*** *battle ahead."* God doesn't always answer our doubts. You say, "God, why? Why are you doing this?" God doesn't always say; but He says, "Look, don't let it ***SHAKE*** you...don't let it shake you. Go on fighting."

God says, *"Jeremiah, your own* ***FAMILY*** *are going to attack you. How will you cope with that? I know your villagers have. I know the men of Anathoth have, but Jeremiah, your own brothers and sisters are gonna do it. How will you cope then? O Jeremiah, pull yourself together. You shouldn't be asking* ***ME*** *questions. I should be asking* ***YOU*** *questions."* Do you know that's how Job was dealt with? Job brought his doubts to God and Job said, *"God, why? Why am I suffering? Why are you letting these things happen to me?"* And do you know how God answered those questions? He said, *"Job, were you there when the foundations of the earth were laid? Do you know where the snow comes from? Do you know where the wind comes from? Do you know how nature works?"* And he just battered poor old Job into the ground with ***QUESTIONS*** until Job got the ***ANSWER*** to his questions. And do you know what the answer was? ***'God thinks HE is God, which isn't very odd'***. **THAT'S THE *ANSWER***! It's gotta be sorted out in ***PRAYER***. When you're afflicted with ***DOUBTS***, you can go to a Christian and ask questions, and they can try and answer them. The ***BEST*** thing you can do is to take your ***DOUBTS*** to ***GOD*** and let God ask ***YOU*** questions. For ***'God thinks he is God, which isn't very odd'***. And God is saying, *"Jeremiah, have I told you that I would answer all your questions? Do I have to tell you everything I know before you'll tell the truth that I ask you to pass on? Jeremiah, you'll have to* ***TRUST*** *me why you don't understand. I'm* ***NOT*** *going to answer your questions. I'm going to put you back in the* ***BATTLE****---and a* ***FIERCER*** *battle...a stronger battle...and you* ***FIGHT****!!"*

***Why Jeremiah Was Different in Public and in Private***

So, we've come to the ***ANSWER*** to our question. Why is it that in ***PRIVATE*** Jeremiah was so shaken, so unsure, so full of doubt; yet in ***PUBLIC*** he preached so dogmatically and so strongly? Why, in ***PUBLIC*** could he say, *"God will punish you,"* and in ***PRIVATE*** could he say, *"When are you going to Lord? And why don't you get on with it?"* I'll tell you ***WHY***. The answer is very simply, ***HE'S NOT A HYPOCRITE***! He's not an actor. He's not two-faced. The answer is: In ***PUBLIC***, the words of ***GOD*** were on his lips. In ***PRIVATE***, the words of ***MEN*** were on his lips. In ***PUBLIC***, he spoke from ***GOD TO MEN***; in ***PRIVATE***, he spoke from ***MEN TO GOD.*** And if you think that's weakness, if you think that's a contradiction, let me take you to the very person whose death we remember this morning in broken bread and poured out wine.

There is ***JESUS*** himself, the Son of God. In ***PUBLIC***, listen to his courage. in ***PUBLIC***, listen to him speak! Listen to him call the Pharisees, *"White as sepulchers."* Listen to him defy Herod and say, *"Go and tell that fox."* Listen to him say, *"No man takes my life from me. I lay it down of myself, and I take it up again."* ***BRAVE*** words! ***STRONG*** words! ***COURAGEOUS*** words in public.

But now come with me into ***PRIVATE PRAYER***; into a Garden of Gethsemane, where with drops of blood on his brow He says, *"Father, PLEASE, take this cup away. I can't cope with it. Please take it away. Nevertheless, not My will."* And come with me later, just a few hours, on the cross..... And here He is saying, *"Why? Why? Why?"...* private prayer again, *"My God, My God, WHY have you forsaken me?"* And there's no answer from heaven. No answer at all. God doesn't answer. Even Jesus himself had this strange ***DUAL*** experience. In ***PUBLIC***, He spoke so strongly---gave ***THE WORD OF GOD TO MEN***. But in His ***PRIVATE PRAYER***, He's a ***MAN SPEAKING TO GOD***, saying, *"God, why? Why?"*

And so, we do not regard it as a sign of ***WEAKNESS*** that Jeremiah had this experience. And if you are to be a man or a woman of God, you must be bold in ***PUBLIC***---you must speak the truth, whatever it costs. But in ***PRIVATE***, you can take your questions to God...you can take your doubts to God...you can take the uncertainties, the torn emotions. You can admit to God: "God, there are times when I feel if my relatives are not gonna be in heaven, I don't want to be there either." You be ***HONEST*** with God. That's what Jeremiah was saying. And God will not answer your questions. He won't deal with all the doubts. He'll just say, "David, ***I'M GOD***!! I'm God. Now I know what I'm doing. Now, get back into the ***FRONT LINE***. Face the ***JUNGLE***. Face the ***CAVALRY***; but you go right on speaking for me.”

Let us pray. "Oh God, how we thank You for the ***HONESTY*** of Your word. How we thank you for revealing the ***INSIDE***, as well as the ***OUTSIDE*** of the ministry of Your servant, Jeremiah. How we thank You for disclosing to us those private moments Your own Son had, when in the agony of His ***DOUBT***, in the agony of His human shrinking from the cup that You wanted Him to drink, He prayed so ***HONESTLY***. And Lord, that gives us ***HOPE***. We come to you now; we present to the world---and even to each other---a ***BOLD FACE***. We don't always share our doubts and agonies and burdens with each other. Maybe we should a little more; but Lord, we do share them with You. Lord, if there's someone here this morning who's struggling with an idol that has taken away their love for You and just taken first place, Lord, help them to share that burden with You. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord."