

Shall we turn now to the word of God, the book of the prophet Jeremiah; and we have reached chapter 12, verse seven; and we're reading the rest of chapter 12 and chapter 13 this morning. Jeremiah chapter 12, verse seven,

*I have* ***FORSAKEN*** *my house. I have* ***ABANDONED*** *my heritage. I have* ***GIVEN*** *the beloved of my soul into the hands of her enemies. My heritage has become to me like a lion in the forest. She has lifted up her voice against me; therefore, I hate her. Is my heritage to me like a speckled bird of prey? Are the birds of prey against her round about? Go, assemble all the wild beasts; bring them to devour.*

 *Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard. They have trampled down my portion. They have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. They have made it a desolation. Desolate, it mourns to me---the whole land is made desolate; but no man lays it to heart. Upon all the bare heights in the desert, destroyers have come, for the sword of the Lord devours from one end of the land to the other****. NO FLESH HAS PEACE****. They have sown wheat, and have reaped thorns. They've tired themselves out but profit nothing. They shall be ashamed of their harvests because of the fierce anger of the Lord.*

*Thus says the Lord concerning all my evil neighbors who touch the heritage which I have given my people Israel to inherit. "Behold, I will pluck them up from their land and I will pluck up the house of Judah from among them. And after I have plucked them up, I will again have compassion on them; and I will bring them again each to his heritage and each to his land. And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people to swear by my name, 'As the Lord lives,' even as they taught my people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up in the midst of my people. But if any nation will not listen, then I will utterly pluck it up and destroy it." says the Lord.*

(Could you just put up the swell pedal please? It's very distracting---behind, on the organ. Thank you.)

Chapter 13: *Thus said the Lord to me. "Go and buy a linen waist cloth and put it on your loins, and do not dip it in water." So I bought a waist cloth, according to the word of the Lord, and put it on my loins. And the word of the Lord came to me a second time. "Take the waist cloth which you have bought, which is upon your loins, and arise, go to the Euphrates, and hide it there in a cleft of the rock." So, I went and hid it by the Euphrates as the Lord commanded me. And after many days the Lord said to me, "Arise, go to the Euphrates, and take from there the waist cloth which I commanded you to hide there." Then I went to the Euphrates and dug; and I took the waist cloth from the place where I had hidden it; and behold the waist cloth was* ***SPOILED****---it was good for nothing. Then the word of the Lord came to me, "Thus says the Lord. 'Even so will I spoil the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own heart and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this waist cloth...which is good for nothing. For, as the waist cloth clings to the loins of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me,' says the Lord, 'that they might be for me, a people, a name, a praise and a glory;* ***BUT THEY WOULD NOT LISTEN****.' "*

*You shall speak to them this word, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Every jar shall be filled with wine,' " and they will say to you, "Do we not indeed know that every jar will be filled with wine?"*

*Then you shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord. 'Behold, I will fill with drunkenness all the inhabitants of this land, the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will dash them one against another---fathers and sons together,' says the Lord. 'I will not pity or spare or have compassion that I should not destroy them.' "*

 *Hear and give ear. Do not be proud for the Lord has spoken. Give glory to the Lord, your God,* ***BEFORE*** *he brings darkness,* ***BEFORE*** *your feet stumble on the twilight mountains; and while you look for light, he turns it into gloom and makes it deep darkness. But if you will not listen, my soul shall weep in secret for your pride. My eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock has been taken captive.*

*Say to the king and to the queen mother, "Take a lowly seat, for your beautiful crown has come down from your head. The cities of the Negev are shut up with none to open them. All Judah is taken into* ***EXILE****---wholly taken into exile. Lift up your eyes and see those who come from the north. Where is the flock that was given you---your beautiful flock? What will you say, when they set as head over you those whom you yourself have thought to be friends to you? Will not pangs take hold of you like those of a woman in travail? And if you say in your heart, 'Why have these things come upon me?' It is for the* ***GREATNESS******OF YOUR INIQUITY*** *that your skirts are lifted up and you suffer violence. Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to doing evil. I will scatter you like chaff driven by the wind from the desert. This is your lot, the portion I have measured out to you," says the Lord, "because you have forgotten me, and trusted in* ***LIES*** *(****IDOLS****). I myself will lift up your skirts over your face, and your* ***SHAME*** *will be seen. I have seen your abominations, your adulteries and neighings...your lewd harlotries on the hills in the field. Woe to you, O Jerusalem. How long will it be before you are made clean?"*

I told you when we started this series of studies in Jeremiah that not everybody finds it the easiest book to read. One of the reasons is that we've got a lot of different prophecies from about 40 years just strung together, not always in the right order---sometimes by subject matter and sometimes in an order that no scholar's ever been able to fathom yet. So, we have a bit of a jumble; and we've got to one of the parts of the book where we are right into the **JUMBLE**. In fact, one book on Jeremiah---I notice, that is on our book stall by Dr. Campbell Morgan---jumped straight from chapter 11 to chapter 14 and ignores the two chapters that we're taking this morning. And certainly, they're not the easiest to preach-on or to understand. And so, I had to pray very hard this week that God would give me something very relevant and clear to say from these two chapters, which I believe must yield **TRUTH** because they're the word of God.

There is, at any rate, one lovely gem in them. *"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard's spots?"* So, at least we've got that little nugget of gold to come to towards the end of the study. But frankly, I dare say that's about the only verse from these two chapters that you have ever thought about or quoted. Now tell me afterwards if I'm wrong. If I make that kind of statement from the pulpit, there's always someone who can tell me at the door, "My favorite text is one of the other verses in these two chapters." Well, if it is, you tell me, but no, tell me now. How many of you regularly quote any other verse, except the one about the Ethiopian. Put your hand up if you do. There's **ONE**! Anybody else? Well, bless you, **TWO**! Two of you. Well, you tell me afterwards which verse it was.

But, you see the problem. Here is a section of God's word which doesn't strike us. Indeed, I noticed as I read it to you, that nothing was really just clicking or having a burst of response---even a laugh from you. So, let's get down to God's word and let's pray that the Holy Spirit will really tell us.

***This Section Alternates Between Prose to Poetry***

Now, the ***FIRST*** thing I want you to notice about these two chapters is that they alternate from ***PROSE*** to ***POETRY***. If you've got the Revised Standard Version of the Bible in your hands, then you will spot that straight away. If you haven't, then I'm afraid you must accept my word for it---that in the Hebrew it does change from poetry to prose. And I've indicated on the outline on the bulletin when it does so, so that you know when this happens. Awfully difficult to put Hebrew poetry into English, so that it's simply put in as broken lines with plenty of space on the paper in-between the lines, so that you know that's ***POETRY***.

***Poetic Voice Reveals the Heart; Prose Reveals the Mind***

What does that indicate? ***FIRST*** it indicates that when he is writing in ***POETRY***, speaking in poetic form, he's speaking from the ***HEART***. And the primary thing you need to ask is, "What is he feeling at this point? What's the emotion of the passage?" Though there will be ***MENTAL*** content, he bursts into poetry when his ***HEART*** is being deeply touched. That's one of the reasons for having poetry; and God is a poet. He must be...just to look at nature. God is full of poetry. But when God speaks (and he is speaking here), he can speak in ***POETRY***...when something is coming right from his ***HEART***. That's when we tend to burst into song and to write poems---when we're deeply moved in heart, either by great joy and love, or by great sorrow. On the other hand, PROSE is literally more prosaic, it's more ***ORDINARY***, it's more down to earth.

And therefore, when the word of God changes to ***PROSE***, we have to ask, "What is the ***HEAD*** saying; and how does my head respond to what is being said?" So that when we read the ***POETIC*** parts of prophecy, feel it in your heart. Get the guts-feel of what Jeremiah's saying. Ask the Lord to give you the right emotional response to his word. But when we turn to ***PROSE***, then---just as it were---turn your head on and think hard, and ask, "What's he saying?" He's not there appealing to your ***HEART*** but to your ***HEAD***; he wants you to think more clearly about something. Now that's a little clue that might help us to unlock the meaning---a little key to these two chapters.

***First, The Word 'Desolation' Emphasized***

 Now there are two subjects---two key words if you like---and that's the ***FIRST*** thing I do when I'm trying to get into a passage. I read it and read it until one word hits me, and really comes out of the passage. Now, I don't know if when I read it to you just now you got the ***KEY WORD***. In fact, in the first passage there were ***TWO*** key words. One I'm sure came through to you because I kept emphasizing it and repeating it. Listen again: *"They have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. They have made it a desolation...desolate. It mourns to me. The whole land is made desolate; but no man lays it to heart."* Do you get the key word in that little verse? Right!! Well now, if you write in your Bible, take a pen, and write...put a line under that word. You've got one of the themes that's coming out. The ***DESOLATION*** is coming through; he's feeling it...he's writing a poem about it. There's nothing so heart rendering as to see a place ***DESOLATE*** that once was alive and prospering and full of people.

Have you been back to a house where you lived as a child and seen it pulled down, and just a rubbish dump where it was...and it gets you, doesn't it...it gets you. If you walked along Commercial Road and seen just the bits of blue paint on the walls of the carpark, which once were the inside of the place where we had a house of prayer...do you ***FEEL*** it? Well now, what would you think if a whole land that had prospered---that had been flowing with milk and honey, full of kids playing in the streets---and you saw it empty, deserted, people gone, houses ruined; what would you ***FEEL***? You'd write a poem about it. The desolation would get into your heart.

***Second, the Word 'Heritage' Emphasized***

 You're beginning to get the feel of this by studying the words; but there's ***ANOTHER WORD*** that is, in fact, ***MORE*** important even than the word 'desolate', because it goes all the way through that section. Chapter 12 verses 7 to 17. Listen, if I just read the verses in which it occurs, you'll get it. *"I have forsaken my house. I have abandoned my heritage. My heritage has become to me like a lion in the forest. Is my heritage to me like a speckled bird of prey. Thus says the Lord concerning all my evil neighbors who touch the heritage which I have given to my people Israel to inherit, 'I will bring them again each to his heritage and each to his land.' "* You got the word? I'm trying to help you to tackle a difficult passage this morning. Go through and through it until words begin to make an ***IMPACT***. ***'HERITAGE'***, it's a beautiful word. Here it's applied to a plot of land. You may or may not be in the position to understand it. If you've had a plot of land in the family for years and years, and it's been passed down from father to son to grandson to great grandson---it may be only a little plot of land, but it's your heritage, and you've lived on it all your life, and you've farmed it...you've dug it...you've loved it...you've looked after it; and as far back as you can trace, it's been in your family. It's your ***HERITAGE***. It belongs to you. And yet here it's being ***TAKEN AWAY***. It's dreadful being the generation that loses a heritage of land. Of course, most of us don't have that experience; so, we don't get the ***FEEL*** of it. Oh, but I've met farmers who've had this experience, small holders maybe, with 30 acres somewhere, and they inherited it way down from the family. And now they've got to let it go---they can't keep it going. They've got to say goodbye to their ***HERITAGE***; and it's, it's been their land. It's been their little part of this blessed plot this 'Sceptered Isle'; and now it's gonna go...and this generation is losing it. Are you beginning to get the feel of this? Because this is in ***POETRY***---not only because Jeremiah is feeling it, but because God himself is feeling it.

Do you realize that God---who made the universe, flung the stars in space, put this earth in orbit,---said of all that world, there's a little bit of it, that's mine...especially my holy land. And he set his heart on that little bit of land. He made the whole---but once you've been to the land of ***ISRAEL***, you understand why God regards that as something ***SPECIAL***. It's the most amazing little bit of land. It's about the size of Wales; and it's got everything in it---from flat desert to snowcap mountains, from deep valleys to high hills, from lush green pastures to deep ravines. It's got everything within about 50 miles. It's the most perfect little gem of land. It's got the lowest point on the earth's surface. It's a beautiful land, apart from its history, apart from its people. It's special; and it's there at the junction of three continents. It's a key little land. And this was God's ***HERITAGE***---this was his special land, this was his holy land---and it was the land in which the worst things happened on the face of the earth. If you want to know why God ordered the Israelites to destroy the cities in that land, you read about what we have discovered regarding the social life of a place like ***JERICHO***. It was a ***FOUL*** city---riddled with disease, riddled with sin, vison crime, absolutely riddled. It was not even safe to marry any of its children. No wonder God said, *"Go in and get rid of those cities. They've got to be cauterized; they've got to be blotted out. I want that land for me."* It's the land in which ***SODOM*** and ***GOMMORAH*** was situated. It's the land of the Canaanite ***PAGANISM***, which lies behind all this prophecy. And God said, *"I want that land. It's mine. It's my* ***HERITAGE****. I made it and I made it for me. So, Israel, go in and get it for me. Go in and get it back. It's mine; and I want you to be stewards of it. I want you to look after it for me FOREVER. I want to give you that land* ***FOREVER****."*

And so he started by calling a man called ***ABRAHAM*** when he was 80 years of age living in a very civilized city with central heating and running water in the bedrooms, ***UR OF THE CHALDEES***. And he said, *"Get out there and live in a tent and get to a land. It's mine; and when you get there, keep it for me."* But alas, as you know, they drifted down to ***EGYPT*** to try and find food. So God said to the Jews in Egypt, *"Look, I'll take you back to that land. Will you look after it for me? Will you make it mine? It's my* ***HERITAGE****."* And he brought them 40 years through the wilderness; and he brought them in, and he said, *"Wipe out Jericho, wipe out these cities and have nothing to do with them. Don't marry them. They're diseased, they're dirty; get rid of them...get my land clean. It's to be a holy land."* And he brought them in. He gave them kings; and he protected them against the Philistines and the Midianites and all the others who would take them from that land.

And there, God had his land, his ***HERITAGE***. It was to remain in the family now forever. That was God's desire. That's my land, and it's to stay in my family. And then, of course, we know that from the story of the Old Testament, that the very things the people had been doing in that land before God brought the Jews in, began to permeate back in. They did ***NOT*** blot them all out. They did ***NOT*** keep away from them in marriage. And bit by bit it all filtered back in, until the very people of God, whom he brought in to keep this land in the family, had taken it out of God's hands again.

***When God's Love Turns to Hate***

And so, now comes this heart-cry from God's ***HEART***. Listen again to it. *"I have forsaken my house. I have abandoned my* ***HERITAGE****. I have given the beloved of my soul into the hands of her enemies. I've had to do it. I've had to let go this land again; and my heritage has gone out of the family yet again. And I've had to let my people go, and I* ***LOVE*** *my people; but now I* ***HATE*** *them."*

 You know, there's no relationship so terrible as when love has turned to hate. And you know, love and hate are very close together. I've sometimes found myself wondering if you can hate someone you haven't loved. It seems as if hate is ‘love gone sour’, isn't it? Hate Is love gone wrong? Sometimes psychologists say about a man and a wife, or two friends, or even two children, they have a ***LOVE-HATE*** relationship. Do you know what that means? Love and hate are the opposites, and yet they're the two sides of the same deep commitment to people. And somehow when love is refused and love is abused, that's when ***LOVE*** quickly turns to ***HATE***; and only those who've loved deeply can know what it is to hate.

And God says, *"My beloved...I* ***HATE*** *her!"* No wonder Jeremiah puts this into ***POETRY***. I'm not exaggerating the language there. Verse seven, *"The beloved of my soul,"* end of verse eight, *"I hate her!"* And ***LOVE*** has turned to ***HATE***. He gave the Jews this land to keep in the family, to keep holy; and he hates them for what they've done with it...for what they've done.

So, it's a very profound poem. It's full of picture language. God says, *"You've become like a lion in the forest to me. I don't want to come near you."* God says, *"You're like a bird with beautiful colored plumage being attacked by birds of prey."* Vivid pictures. Another one is he said*, "I see shepherds coming and pulling up your vines."* Now I don't know if you get the feel of that. Let me try and give you the emotion of that. A vine takes ***TIME*** to grow. It's a long, slow business. If you go to Hampton Court, you'll see a vine that's been growing there for about 300 years. A vine takes a long time to grow... and a lot of care. And when you've got a vine trained and growing and bearing grapes it's the fruit of years of building up.

But a ***SHEPHERD*** isn't interested in vines. He just wants some grass. And so, he comes and he pulls up the work of years, and he rips up the vineyard, and he just lets goats loose in the place; and sheep wander where those vines grow. Now, if you were a vineyard keeper---if that was your vineyard---and you saw those beautiful trees that you'd trained for so long uprooted...I felt like that when they put the Box Grove traffic lights in. Those beautiful trees that have taken years and years---50 feet high, some of them...beaches, beautiful trees---and ripped in five minutes...just chopped down and you just can't replace the years of growth and beauty that went into that. Replaced by hard tarmac, because these days demand such things. Well, this is how he's feeling here. *"Shepherds are pulling down my vineyard,"*... just interested in what they can get out quickly...quick returns. And so, years of work go in a moment.

***Losing a National Heritage***

Oh, you could apply many illustrations to this---beautiful old houses knocked down to make way for an ugly block of flats, and things that have taken years and years...just destroyed in a moment. That's the ***FEEL*** here. And God says, *"This is how I feel, but it's gotta be done. I* ***HATE*** *these people. The whole land is being destroyed. It's desolate. It's empty; and it was meant to be a land with milk and honey...beautiful land.”* It's a very poignant ***POEM***. And what it's saying is this: that ***NATIONAL HERITAGE CAN BE LOST VERY QUICKLY!!*** That's the message for this morning. All of us have a HERITAGE but it can be lost so ***QUICKLY***. It may have taken centuries to build up and develop, but it can go like that. It can go so ***QUICKLY***. That's the tragedy of it. And it happened to Israel; and it can happen to any other nation. You see, we've got a precious heritage---if those of you from overseas will forgive me being, not nationalistic, but at least being patriotic, which I think is warranted by the Bible.

We have a great national heritage in Britain, great national heritage. It's been built up over many, many centuries. We haven't been invaded and occupied in this land for over 900 years. And during that time, we've been able to build up a parliamentary system, a legal system and many things which are the envy of other nations. We have had Christianity pervading our society for now on 2000 years. And the 'salt of the earth' has been preventing us from going crazy in all kinds of directions. This is a great national heritage, but it can be ***LOST*** in a moment. It can go in a decade or two; and that is precisely what is happening at the moment. Prince Charles went away...or, goes away frequently; but he went away recently, and he came back; and some of you may have heard him say this. He said, "You know, while I'm away I hear such dreadful news about Britain, and I think it's finished." And he said, "Then I come back and find so many things as they were." And he said, "I'm always so glad to be home." But, how much longer does he think they're gonna be there? How much longer? There is a great national heritage. There is a deep tradition. There is a lot that we inherit that we didn't deserve to inherit. We have inherited this little land---small though it may be. It's a green and ***PLEASANT*** land. It's a ***BEAUTIFUL*** land and it was meant to be a ***HOLY*** land too, as every land was meant to be. But a ***NATIONAL HERITAGE*** can be ***LOST***; and ***LOVE*** can turn to ***HATE***. And the God who gives us these heritages can take them away again so quickly. And once he's decided to take them away, nothing we can do can stop it. The only thing we need do is 'for good men to do nothing', as someone has said.

Now, before anybody jumps to the conclusion that I'm trying to force the Bible onto Britain---that I'm trying to force what happened to Israel into our situation---let me ask, "What right have I to do this? This is about Israel---this is about God's people. It's about ***THEIR*** heritage, not ours. Well, let me just give you one thing that St. Paul himself said on the hill in Athens, when he was preaching at the center of the greatest civilization the world had then seen... preaching at the heart of Greek culture. This is what Paul said in the open air on Mars Hill. He said, *"God made from ONE, every nation on the earth."* Now that's a revolutionary statement. That means there can never be a superior or an inferior race. *"God made from one, every nation to live on the face of the earth, having determined allotted* ***PERIODS*** *and the* ***BOUNDARIES*** *of their habitation, that they should* ***SEEK*** *God, in the hope that they might feel after him and* ***FIND*** *him."* Now, there's a whole philosophy of history in one sentence. Let's look at it. *"God made from one, every nation and gave that nation an allotted period of time within history, and boundaries of their habitation within space."* ***WHY*** did he do this? ***WHY*** does he give a nation time and space in his universe? The answer is: *"That they might seek after him and find him.*” And if they do not, then the allotted period comes to an end and the allotted space is given up.

That's the biblical philosophy of history. And therefore, God has given Britain ***HER*** space in history, and HER allotted period, that Britain might ***SEEK*** after God and ***FIND*** him. He's given America her place in history, and her time and her space, that she might ***SEEK*** after God and ***FIND*** him. He has given Russia and China their allotted span, and their space, that they might ***SEEK*** after and ***FIND*** him. But, the one thing that hits me when I buy an atlas is that it's ***OUT OF DATE*** as soon as I've bought it. Do you get that feeling? I think I'll go into the atlas business. There's gonna be a constant demand for maps---political maps---because every map has to be re-drawn as soon as it's done...every world political map. We've got a globe at home which lights up from the inside. When you keep the light off, you see the ***PHYSICAL*** map of the world and the mountains and the rivers; and you know that will always be in date because God made it that way, and that's the way it is. Switch on the light and then it changes; instead of brown and green, you see pinks and blues, and you see sharp, straight lines instead of nice natural ones. And you look at that then, and you realize it's out of date---this line is now here, and this country's now divided into three or two...and so it goes on. Now, it's God who does this. It isn't chance and it isn't man...it's God who does this; and he gives each nation the chance to ***SEEK*** him and ***FIND*** him. And what he did to Israel, he does to every other nation. And so, instead of being 'Great' Britain (with all that that phrase implied), we still dare to put it on our cars when we drive elsewhere: 'GB'. Instead of being Great Britain, we called ourselves 'the United Kingdom'---wasn't quite so pretentious, and we felt it was true. But believe me, it won't be long before that title is also out of date. Northern Ireland is now part of the 'United' Kingdom---it's part of the 'Disunited' Kingdom. Wales and Scotland, I don't know how they'll react to the Queen's speech this week, but I dare say there'll be trouble. We're not even a 'United' Kingdom now; and this is what God does to nations. *"I give you the chance to* ***SEEK*** *after me, if happily you might* ***FIND*** *me. But if you don't, the heritage goes."* Those of you who saw that startling *'Fact and Faith'* film the other Sunday evening *'Unseen Cities'*, or *'Hidden Cities'*, which was it...*'Unseen Cities'*, showed you the incredible culture, architecture, science, wealth of culture after culture after culture. And now, all you can find of those nations are degraded, dissipated, dirty little people. That's all that's left. Why? Because they didn't ***SEEK*** after God ***FIND*** him. So, their allotted time and space disappeared!

That's this ***POEM***. *"They've sown wheat and have reaped thorns; they've tired themselves out, but profit nothing."* You can't fight against God. And when God has said the time has come for this nation to ***END*** its allotted period---it's time span, its claim to territorial space---then ***NOTHING*** you can do can stop it. Nothing you can do, because it's God. It's a tragic and poignant situation.

***Focusing on Other Nations: A Shift From Poetry to Prose***

 But now comes a more startling thing under this title of ***‘HERITAGE’***. In the last three, four verses of the chapter, we turn from ***POETRY*** to ***PROSE***; and Jeremiah speaks about other nations than his own. Now, we tend to ***TALK*** of other nations and ***SING*** of our own. Have you noticed that we tend to speak of other nations in ***PROSE*** and our own in ***POETRY***? I don't know that any Englishman ever wrote poems about anybody else's green and pleasant land---only our own.

But, we talk about their 'green land', or whatever. And, in fact, Jeremiah is just true to himself. He turns from poetry to prose because he's gonna speak about ***OTHER*** nations and ***THEIR*** heritage. Well, that's very human and very understandable. But what he's saying is this: not only may a national heritage be removed from those who have it, God can ***GIVE IT TO OTHERS***, if they learn the lesson from the one from whom it's been taken. And now he thinks of other nations roundabout: Syria, Moab, Ammon. And all these nations had taken their share in grabbing what they could from Israel's weakness (just as people are taking their share and grabbing what they can from Britain's weakness at the moment). And so, these nations roundabout were doing precisely this. They were grabbing what they could from Israel as she went downhill; and God says through Jeremiah, *"Let these nations roundabout remember this. I can pluck* ***THEM*** *up as easily as I plucked* ***ISRAEL*** *up. And let them remember this: that if they will* **LEARN** *from Israel's downfall, and* ***TURN*** *to Israel's God, then I will plant them and give* ***THEM*** *their heritage*.” You see, Jeremiah, when he was called at the age of 17, was told, *"You are to be my prophet to the nations of the world---my ambassador at large."* He was not just called to be a prophet to Israel. And he is now fulfilling this wider task---even if he does it in ***PROSE***. And his ***HEART*** is not in it...and it isn't. Nevertheless, he's saying to the nations around, *"Look at fallen Israel, learn the lesson. It was YOU who taught Israel these* ***PAGAN*** *customs. Would you learn* ***GODLY*** *customs from her downfall? Then you can be planted where she was plucked up."* Must have been very hard for Jeremiah to say this. And you know, we shall come in a few chapters to the point where Jeremiah was thrown into prison as a traitor, because he said things like this.

You see, if I were going to do exactly the same thing, I would say, "Friends learn from Britain; and if you become godly you can have Britain," God says. Now how does that sound in British ears? No wonder they didn't like Jeremiah and popped him in prison. But if France would learn from Britain's downfall and put herself right with God, then God would give ***OUR*** heritage to France, or to Belgium, or Holland. He can pluck nations up and he can plant them. And we can learn from the downfall of nations and ***GET RIGHT WITH GOD. PROSE***...yes; but we need to ***THINK*** that one through. Let that go into your ***HEAD*** as the ***POEM*** went into your ***HEART***. Let that really go in. God rearranges the map; and God can give his land---and it ***ALL*** is his. Britain is not ours...it's not our land. That's national pride. It is our national heritage...we ***INHERITED*** it. It is not ours. And if you go to the Royal Exchange in London, look at what is engraved above the Royal Exchange where so much money and property has changed hands in that square mile around the Royal Exchange. There it is, *"The earth is the* ***LORD'S*** *and the fullness thereof."* But do we really believe that now? The people who put it there believed it. They wanted everybody in the city to know that it all belongs to God and it's only ours by ***INHERITANCE***. It belongs absolutely to God. And I'll be saying more about this tonight when I preach on capitalism. Well now, there it is. As far as national heritage goes, first it can be ***TAKEN AWAY*** from us, (which we would feel in our hearts). It can be ***GIVEN*** to others, which we ought to ponder in our heads.

Oh, how God wants our ***HEARTS*** and our ***HEADS*** to be with Him, to be ***FEELING*** and ***THINKING*** as He does. That's why there is one little phrase at the end of verse 11 there that just gets Jeremiah deeply: *"No man lays it to heart. No man lays it to heart."* And as you talk to people today, you just have this same frustration...and so many men of power and influence, tell me, "Oh it's just a little temporary lull. We've been through little cycles before. The markets will pick up. Give it a couple of years, we'll be back where we were." I tell you in the name of the Lord, Britain will never get back to where she was. ***NEVER***! I thank God for Christian men of great influences who are saying that. Very big businessman in this church, (formerly in this church), said to me just a week ago, he said, "David, we will not get back. We will not get back. We are now planning our business (which is one of the very biggest in the country) ...we are now planning our business to operate on a reduced scale permanently and adjusting to a situation that will not recover." Those who have the combined business acumen and Christian insight are saying this, "We will NOT get back. So, let's ***PREPARE***. Let's be ready." National heritage can be taken away and given away. And it's God who does it, and it's God who has the last word. But let not anybody think that God does it without hurting Himself. It's God's heart that's bleeding here.

***Pride: The Root Problem with Nationalism***

 Now we come to the ***SECOND*** part of our study this morning, the ROOT problem with nationalism...the root problem. Now the key word in chapter 13, (did you get that word as I read it)? Let me read one or two verses that will give you the word that begins to stand out; *"Thus says the Lord, 'Even so will I spoil the* ***PRIDE*** *of Judah and the great* ***PRIDE*** *of Jerusalem.' "* A few verses later, *"Here in Gibea, be not* ***PROUD****, for the Lord has spoken."* Few verses later, *"But if you will not listen, my soul will weep in secret for your* ***PRIDE***." Did you get that word while we read it? ***PRIDE***, ***PRIDE***, ***PRIDE***. You see, this is where national heritages go wrong. This is where the picture goes sour. It's when we become proud of our national heritage in the ***WRONG*** way. As if ***WE*** had done it; as if ***WE*** had the right to it. As if God hadn't done it. "***WE'VE*** built up Britain. ***WE*** are proud. ***WE*** are British." And that's when the whole thing goes rotten. Instead of being so grateful to God for the national heritage, we become ***PROUD*** of it. And God is a jealous God, and He will not share His glory with another. And if there is one sin more deadly than any other, it's the sin of ***PRIDE***, whether it be pride in an individual or in a church or in a community or in a nation. But human pride is an offensive thing to God. And it stinks! It's rotten to God. And a beautiful national heritage begins to go wrong when human pride takes over. A natural pride---a natural haughtiness---is linked with a national heritage.

Now let's look at this. Jeremiah was told to do a rather odd thing at this point. If one put it in strictly modern language, he was told to take a pair of underpants, and wear them, and not wash them for a very long period. And then---when they were long past needing washing---he was not to wash them; but he was to take them to a muddy wadi and dip them in the muddy water and bury them under a stone, leave them for some further months, go back and dig them up, and bring them back and show them publicly. Strange thing to do. It's in ***PROSE***. You can't get very poetic about this. It's in prose. It's an appeal to the ***HEAD***, not the ***HEART***. It's trying to bring home truth with a visual aid---and even more than a visual aid---because when the prophets did this kind of thing, it wasn't just to illustrate what they said, it was to ***ACCOMPLISH*** what they said. It is an acted parable. It is ***MORE*** than a parable, it is an acted word of God; and God's word ***ACHIEVES*** what it states. So that, in fact, he was actually ***ACCOMPLISHING*** what was happening through doing this.

 I think the best thing I can do is to read this in ***POETIC*** form, funny enough. Because it does convey, very clearly from the book I've read previously called *"Are You Joking, Jeremiah"*? And I think I'll read it in a poetic form even though it's prose. Here it is.

*"I've just been down to the local square to buy down there a long white linen undershirt, free from dirt. A normal thing to do, I guess. Well, that was 'in' for us to wear shirts last underneath our hairy robes. I wore the thing for weeks and weeks until the cloth was dirty, absolutely filthy. And that was 'in' for God, (which you may think is odd), but I didn't take it off until He gave the word. And when I did, it stank. The thing was rank and God, who couldn't stand it anymore, shouted through my door, 'Take that putrid rag, and bury it 400 miles from here beside a rumbling river in the land of Babylon, where all my dying people soon must go, shackled, hand to hand; a sloppy band of exiled slaves and whores.'*

*"I anchored down my moldy shirt, behind an old wet rock, and staggered home relieved (or so, I thought), until my mind was caught by God's relentless pitch, 'Return,' He said. 'Oh* ***NO****!' said I. 'Oh* ***YES,'*** *He said. "Oh* ***WELL****." said I,” and traveled back again 400 heavy miles.*

*"I found that cloth like flesh decayed and damp, smelling like the meat that ravenous dogs will drag along the street. I held that shirt aloft, as though it were an umpire's checkered flag. And the latest word of God came through like the smell that reached the naked nostrils of all who wandered by. 'Look at yourselves,' says God, 'And see yourselves as I do. Your putrid yellow pride will bring you black corruption, for I will let you rot in a damp and dirty land, until you're good for nothing...nothing but the garbage dump. That's quite a slump. Long ago, I made you cling to Me, like a fragrant linen undershirt, close and fresh and clean. With a covenant I bound you to My loins---a dancing bride too shy to show her shining face. But now you have a* ***HARLOT'S*** *brow. Every day you wear a* ***MASK****, a* ***MASK*** *for kissing wooden calves. A* ***MASK*** *for petting pagan kings. A* ***MASK*** *for spitting on the poor. A* ***MASK*** *for praying on the floor of My temple.*

*'I will tell you what you are, My beloved...what you are: A mutilated MASK, pocked with sin which cannot be erased. Your* ***MASK****, you see, became your skin. And just as leopards cannot change their spots, you cannot change your lives (dark, with evil blots breaking through your flesh). The ugly* ***MASK*** *you wore is precisely what you are:* ***ROTTEN TO THE CORE****!! There are sweeter jobs, I'm sure, than waving rotten rags about and rubbing dirty noses until their nerves are raw. For every act is more than just a symbol. It is the word made visible, working through My actions to bring about the end they must vividly portray---that final day for Israel. Such antics are the word of God.' "*

Does that convey to you what Jeremiah did? It's remarkable, isn't it? And Jeremiah did this, and he said, *"You're as rotten as these underpants."* It's a vivid, vivid thing. *"You were fresh, close, clean, clinging to Me---as* ***CLOSE*** *to Me as you could get. Now look at you, look at you."*

But he goes a little further, after picturing a traveler in the mountains, overtaken by darkness. And through this He's saying, *"****PRIDE*** *goes before a fall. The darkness will come; the twilight will catch you out among the precipices and you'll go over."* He says to the King and the Queen Mother (this will be King Jehoiakim, and the Queen Mother was Nehushta; and the king was only 18 at the time when Jeremiah said it.) And he said, *"King and Queen, you’d better come off that throne. Leave the pomp and pageantry; leave it behind, because there's no people to reign over now.... and it's now only pomp and pageantry, it's no longer real. It's no longer justified."*

How much longer can we afford the royal pomp and pageantry of ***THIS*** land? Have you asked that question? Bless her, the Queen is already realizing that we can't, and is already on certain occasions saying, "Cut down, cut down." And Jeremiah says, *"King and Queen Mother, come down off that throne. It's inappropriate now. The pride of nation has gone...it's* ***ROTTEN****. The people are inebriated, they're drunk. The kings are* ***DRUNK****, the priests are* ***DRUNK****, the prophets are DRUNK, the people are* ***DRUNK****; they're confused, they're attacking each other. They don't quite know what's wrong. They're just not aware of reality. They're bemused, they're* ***DRUNK****. And then he seems almost to get down to the bottom of their pride.”* and he says, *"I will lift your skirts above your face."* We don't know if that's applied to a man or a woman, because both wore skirts, of a kind (and still do in the Middle East). We know this: that the **GREATEST** indignity to which a man could be subject was the exposure of his private parts, and this was the punishment for all those who were unfaithful (this was particularly the punishment for unfaithful wives). I've seen Arabs doing this to an unfaithful wife in the Arabian desert. And here's God saying, *"I will bring you right* ***DOWN*** *until you've no dignity left---until your* ***PRIDE*** *IS* ***GONE****. It's so rotten, this national pride of yours. Get off your throne!! I'll lift your skirts above your face. Let the world see your ravished limbs."* That's literally what it says here in the Hebrew: ***"DOWN, DOWN****".* Why?? You see, so often our pride is in our clothes and that for which our clothes stand---it's the outside, it's the front; we show it. It's hiding the real self from others. And when we want pomp and pageantry, we dress up in ermine and scarlet, and we put it all on the outside. But remember that fairy story, "The Emperor's new clothes."

And God says, *"Look at what you really are. Let's get down to skin-level and deeper."* And then comes this little gem of a verse, *"Forget the clothes. Forget the pomp and pageantry. Let's look at nature as it is. Let's lift the skirt and what do we see? We see* ***SKIN****; we see spots."* That's the ***REAL*** person. And the leopard, it's his ***SKIN***. And the Ethiopian, it's his ***SKIN***---it's what he is. And no matter what you cover that up with, your ***SKIN*** is part of you. And the Ethiopian skin is the kind of golden tone that you and I just long for when we go on holiday.... (we manage to achieve for a week or two.... or if you've got a sunray lamp a little longer), but it's not us...it's not us.

***How to Change the Ethiopian's Skin and the Leopard's Spots***

*"Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Can the leopard change its' spots?"* Then you can get rid of this ***PRIDE***. If they can do that, you can get rid of ***PRIDE***. You who are accustomed to doing evil, you could do good. You could change your life. You could reform yourself. You could become a good man---even though you've done evil all along. But you and I know, and Jeremiah knows, and God knows, that we can no more become good, than the leopard can change his spots or the Ethiopian his skin. And it's not the pomp and pageantry, and the tradition of national heritage!! It's what we are by nature that counts. And by ***NATURE***, we have done evil. You see, I'm not free this morning. I'm not free to say this morning, "From now on I'm gonna be a good man. I'm not gonna do anything wrong. I'm never gonna sin again. I'm, I'm going to change myself." And I tell you, by Tuesday night at the latest, I will be embarrassed to meet you. Why? Well ***FIRST***, because every wrong thing I've done has become part of me---become part of my ***NATURE***. It's become as much me as my skin...as the leopard spots. 'Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.' That's an inevitable process of human nature.

So, I am ***NOT*** free to wipe out the past. I'm not free to live as if it hadn't been done. It's part of me. No matter what clothes I wear, it's part of me. And worse than that, the Bible makes it quite clear that ***I WAS BORN THIS WAY***, and that I was born in sin, and that my very nature is sinful, and that it's always easier for me to say "no" than "yes". It's always easier for me to lie than to speak the truth. It's always easier for me to be dishonest than honest, to protect myself. You never have to teach your child these things. You only have to teach your child to be good. You never have to teach your child to be evil. We're leopards and we can't get rid of the spots. If that were all that could be said, no wonder the chapter finishes with the cry (we're back in poetry here), *"How* ***LONG*** *will it be before you are made clean? How* ***LONG****?"* Well, as long as it takes an Ethiopian to change his skin. As long as it takes a leopard to change its spots! That's how long.

Oh, but listen, I'm not gonna finish on that kind of a note. If I did, then you better not have come this morning. It would just depress you no end. It would leave you in a very sad state. And I'm not here just to depress. I'm here to give you the ***WHOLE*** word of God. But I tell you this, the God who made the leopard can ***REMOVE*** its spots. And the God who made the Ethiopian can **CHANGE** his skin. For the ***CREATOR*** is needed. Not a reformation from within---a man can no more make himself good than a leopard can change his spots. But the God who created that man, can make a ***NEW*** creation of that man...can ***CHANGE*** the leopard, can ***CHANGE*** the Ethiopian. That's the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ: *"That if any man is in Jesus, there's a new creation---a new man, a new heart."* Not a cleanup of the old one, but a new one! A new creation...only God Himself can do that. And that is the ***ONLY HOPE*** for a nation once its heritage has started disappearing and its ***PRIDE*** will not admit the real situation. But there is ***HOPE***, that when pride has been dashed and humbled, and when a nation has come down to the bottom, there is ***HOPE***, then, that men and women will look up into the face of God and say, "God forgive us and remake us. God, I can't cleanse myself. Cleanse me. God, I can't change my spots; but God remove them. You're a God who's ***CREATED*** me. You're a God who can RE-***CREATE*** me." And that that's the gospel. Jeremiah, of course, could not understand fully what I've just told you. He lived the ***WRONG*** side of Jesus. He knew that something would have to happen radically. He knew that God would surely do something someday, to stop this endless round of nations inheriting so much, and then, through ***PRIDE***, wasting it away. He knew that there was something God could do, but he didn't have too clear a picture. We shall see in chapter 31 that he could see God would have to make a New Covenant---that He would have to write his laws, not on tables of ***STONE***, but on the ***HEART***. He could see that there would have to be an almighty big ***FORGIVENESS*** on God's part to get this thing going. He, he could see this in the distance. But you and I live the ***RIGHT*** side of Jesus Christ. And we've seen men and women ***CHANGED***, and new lives ***CHANGED***!! And the skin and the spots, ***CHANGED***! And the nature, ***CHANGED***.!

I found myself just thinking again of just two people I've met. **1*)*** In West Berlin when I shook hands of the Auca Indian---straight from the savage jungle, unable to use a knife and fork, never seen a toilet in his life---shook hands with me. And I looked into the face of a man who used to kill and eat. His teeth were shaped to do so. And I looked into the face of a man I would gladly trust a baby with. And it happened ***NOT*** through a long process of civilization. It happened because a brave woman, whose husband had been killed by that ***VERY*** man, went with the love of God and offered a new life and a change. She said, "The Ethiopian ***CAN*** change his skin, and the leopard ***CAN*** change his spots---but only by God's creative activity. ***2)*** The other man was that man I told you about in New Zealand, worth 30 million by...40 million, sorry... by the age of 30, which achieved his ambition. The ruthless most hard man.... I could see he'd been that way. They said of him, "The softest part of him was his teeth!" And woe betide any man who crossed the path of this ruthless property developer. He had ground people into nothing. He had wrecked his home. His children hated him. He was becoming an alcoholic. His wife was on the point of leaving him. And God just stepped into his life, and he became like a little child. And I walked with him round the deck of his luxury yacht and round the little island in the Pacific Ocean. And he talked to me of ***LOVE***. He pulled a letter out of his pocket from his own son who'd run away from home because he couldn't stand his dad. And when he became a Christian just two, two and a half years ago, this multimillionaire, tough as nails, wrote to his own son, said, "***SORRY***, son." A word he'd never used. And his son wrote back and said, "Dad, I'm SORRY. And I've become a Christian too." And he had the letter and he said, "That's worth more to me than all my millions. No money could buy that." Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Can a hard, ruthless millionaire become a gentle, loving man? Can a savage Indian from the jungle who loves the taste of human blood, can he become a childlike soul? Yes, he can. He can. And until we've swallowed our ***PRIDE*** and admit that we can't be good and that all our national ***PRIDE*** and all our personal ***PRIDE*** is the real problem...until we ***ADMIT*** it, God can't do the miracle.

As soon as you swallow your ***PRIDE***, then God says, *"He is the heritage. He is the inheritance. I make you My son and heir, and you'll inherit the earth."* The ***HERITAGE*** is given back. God takes the heritage from this nation and that and that and that. And he gives it to those who swallow their pride and say, "Lord, change me. Change me."

Let's pray. *"So, God, once again we cry to You for a nation which has had so much heritage...so much that has come to us of value. And we acknowledge before You now that everything that is good in that heritage came from Your good hand. "The earth is the Lord's," and we thank You for granting us this little bit of it. And others in this congregation thank You for the heritage of their land and culture. But Lord, now we can see so clearly that we're losing that heritage---losing it fast. And Lord, it's because we're too* ***PROUD*** *to admit it. Too* ***PROUD*** *to come to You. Lord, if we have to be humbled deeply before we'll lose that* ***PRIDE****, then help us to accept that. But now we would praise You for the power of Jesus to re-make lives. To take the* ***HUMBLE*** *and* ***EXALT*** *them. Lord, we cry with the very virgin Mary herself, "The hungry You feed with good things and the rich you send empty away. You've brought the proud down from their thrones and you've exalted the humble." Oh God, thank You that You can do this, and that You do it according to Your own holy righteousness. The earth is* ***YOURS*** *and You give it to the* ***HUMBLE*** *and the* ***MEEK****.*