

Jeremiah chapter 16 and 17. I want you to be praying very hard as we read this word of God and as we talk about it together. Do you know, I believe that Satan wants to stop us studying this book if he possibly can. He's throwing everything in the book at us at the moment; and so, I want you to be aware that while we read these words and really apply them---to ourselves, to our nation---that there is a spiritual battle going on. For if there's one thing Satan hates, it is the truth...and THIS is the truth. So, will you please be praying as we read, that he may not be able to distract us or to divide us or to spoil in any way, God's word coming through to us.

Chapter 16 and chapter 17. *On yet another occasion, God spoke to me and said, "You must not marry and have children here, for the children born in this city and their mothers and fathers shall die from terrible diseases. No one shall mourn for them or bury them, but their bodies shall lie on the ground to rot and fertilize the soil. They shall die from war and famine; and their bodies shall be picked apart by vultures and wild animals. Do not mourn or weep for them, for I have removed my protection and my peace from them; taken away my lovingkindness and my mercies. Both great and small shall die in this land un-buried and un-mourned; and their friends shall not cut themselves nor shave their heads as signs of sorrow, as is their heath and custom. No one shall comfort the mourners with a meal or send them a cup of wine expressing grief for their parents' death. As a sign to them of these sad days ahead, don't you join them any more in their feasts and parties Don't even eat a meal with them. For the Lord of Heaven's armies, the God of Israel says, 'In your own lifetime, before your very eyes, I will end all laughter in this land---the happy songs, the marriage feasts, the songs of bridegrooms and of brides.'*

*"When you tell the people all these things and they ask, 'Why has the Lord decreed such terrible things against us? What have we done to merit such treatment? What is our sin against the Lord our God?' Tell them, 'The Lord's reply is this, "Because your fathers* ***FORSOOK*** *me---they worshiped other gods and served them. They did not keep my laws; and you have been worse than your fathers were. You follow evil to your heart's content and refuse to listen to me; therefore, I will throw you out of this land and chase you into a foreign land where neither you nor your fathers have been before. And there you can go ahead and worship your idols all you like and I will grant you no favors. But there will come a glorious day," says the Lord, "when the whole topic of conversation will be that God is bringing his people home from the countries of the north where he had sent them as slaves for punishment. You will look back no longer to the time I brought you out from slavery in Egypt. That mighty miracle will scarcely be mentioned anymore. Yes, I will bring you back again," says the Lord, "to this same land I gave your fathers. Now I am sending for many* ***FISHERMEN*** *to fish you from the deeps where you are hiding from my wrath. I'm sending for* ***HUNTERS*** *to chase you down like deer in the forests or mountain goats or inaccessible crags. Wherever you run to escape my judgment, I will find you and punish you. For I am closely watching you and I see* ***EVERY*** *sin; you cannot hope to hide from me. And I will punish you* ***DOUBLY*** *for all your sins, because you've defiled my land with your detestable idols and filled it up with all your evil deeds." ' "*

*Oh Lord, my strength and fortress---my refuge in the day of trouble--- nations from around the world will come to you saying, "Our fathers have been foolish, for they've worshiped worthless idols. Can men make God?? The gods they made and not real gods at all? And when they come in that spirit, I will show them my power and might, and make them understand at last, that* ***I ALONE AM GOD****.*

*"My people sin as though commanded to...as though their evil were laws chiseled with an iron pen or diamond point upon their stony hearts, or on the corners of their altars. Their youths do not forget to sin,* ***WORSHIPPING IDOLS*** *beneath each tree high in the mountains or in the open country down below. And so, I will give all your treasures to your enemies as the price that you must pay for all your sins. And the wonderful heritage I reserved for you will slip out of your hand. And I will send you away as slaves to your enemies in distant lands, for you have kindled the* ***FIRE OF MY ANGER*** *that shall burn forever."*

*The Lord says, "****CURSED*** *is the man who puts his trust in mortal man and turns his heart away from God. He is like a stunted shrub in the desert with no hope for the future. He lives on the salt encrusted plains in the barren wilderness. Good times pass him by forever; but* ***BLESSED*** *is the man who trusts in the Lord and has made the* ***LORD*** *his hope and confidence. He is like a tree planted by a riverbank with its roots reaching deep into the water---a tree not bothered by the heat nor worried by long months of drought. Its leaves stay green, and it goes right on producing all its luscious fruit."*

*"The* ***HEART*** *is the most* ***DECEITFUL*** *thing there is and desperately* ***WICKED****. No one can really know how bad it is; only the Lord knows. He searches all hearts and examines deepest motives so that he can give to each person his right reward according to his deeds...how he has lived. Like a bird that fills her nest with young she has not hatched, and which will soon desert her and fly away, so is the man who gets his wealth by unjust means. Sooner or later he will lose his riches, and at the end of his life become a poor old* ***FOOL****. But our refuge is your throne, eternal, high and glorious. Oh Lord, the hope of Israel, all who turn away from you shall be disgraced and shamed. They are registered for earth and not for glory, for they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters. Lord, you* ***ALONE*** *can heal me. You* ***ALONE*** *can save, and my praises are for you* ***ALONE****.*

*"Men scoff at me and say, 'What is this word of the Lord you keep talking about? If these threats of yours are really from God, why don't they come true?'*

*"Lord, I don't want the people crushed by terrible calamity. The plan is* ***YOURS****, not mine. It is* ***YOUR*** *message I've given them, not my own. I don't want them to be doomed. Lord, don't desert me now; you alone are my hope. Bring confusion and trouble on all who persecute me; but give me peace. Yes, bring double destruction upon them."*

*Then the Lord said to me, "Go and stand in the gates of Jerusalem... first at the gate where the king goes out, and then at each of the other gates, and say to all the people, 'Hear the word of the Lord, kings of Judah and all the people of this nation and all you citizens of Jerusalem. The Lord says, "Take warning and live. Do no unnecessary work on the Sabbath day but make it a holy day. I gave this commandment to your fathers but they didn't listen or obey. They stubbornly refused to pay attention and be taught. But if you obey me,” says the Lord, “and refuse to work on the sabbath day and keep it separate, special, and holy, then this nation shall continue* ***FOREVER****. There shall always be descendants of David sitting on the throne here in Jerusalem. There shall always be kings and princes riding in pomp and splendor among the people, and this city shall remain forever. And from all around Jerusalem, and from the cities of Judah and Benjamin, and from the Negev and from the lowlands west of Judah, the people shall come with their burnt offerings and grain offerings and incense, bringing their sacrifices to praise the Lord in his Temple. But if you will not listen to me, if you refuse to keep the Sabbath holy, if on the Sabbath you bring in loads of merchandise through these gates of Jerusalem just as on other days, then I will set* ***FIRE*** *to these gates. The fire shall spread to the palaces and utterly destroy them and no one shall be able to put out the raging flames." ' "*

Very often, you know, the prophets in the Old Testament not only brought a new word from the Lord but used old words, and especially the prophets that had been brought up in a pious background. And Jeremiah, if you remember, had been brought up in a Godly home, and therefore, he knew his Bible. And time and again, what he says comes adapted from previous scriptures and in particular, in these chapters from the Psalms. Psalm number one is almost word-for-word that little bit about the **BLESSED** man and the **CURSED** man: the blessed man, *"Like a tree planted by the water," the cursed man, "Stunted and soon destroyed."*

Dr. Coggan, the Archbishop of Canterbury, has asked us two questions, and the FIRST is, "What kind of a society do we want?" I hope and pray that that question will make some people sit up and think again. I hope also that the archbishop will go on to tell us what kind of a society ***GOD*** wants, because that is the real question---especially for God's people to ask. You see, I have the feeling that we've got the society we want, but we don't like ***PAYING*** for it. That's the real problem. We have got the society we want, and all through the swinging sixties, we were getting the society we wanted. And now we're paying for it. It's the ***PRICE*** we don't want.

***God Allows Us to Choose: as a Nation, as a Person, as a Society***

And this is exactly the situation in the kingdom of Israel in those days. They had got the society they ***WANTED***, but they didn't like the price they had to ***PAY*** for it. And so, God spoke to them. Of course, when the BILL began to come in and when they had to begin to pay for that society, then they wanted something ***DIFFERENT***. But God said, *"I'm not listening to what you want, because I know what you want. You want what you had. You don't want me to present you with the bill after you've had it."* And that is the stark ***TRUTH*** which Jeremiah had to face. However, in a sense, Jeremiah posed this question in his preaching: *"What kind of a society did you want?"* He was always presenting them with ***ALTERNATIVES***. And that's the way the Bible presents the big questions of life to us. That's why Jesus presents us with the ***BROAD WAY*** that leads to ***DESTRUCTION***, and the ***NARROW WAY*** that leads to LIFE: The house built on sand/the house built on rock, the wise virgins/the foolish virgins, the wheat/the tares. Almost ***EVERY*** part of our lord's teaching presented people with alternatives and said, "***CHOOSE***."

And the great prophets of the Old Testament did the same. Moses would say, *"I've set before, your* ***LIFE*** *and* ***DEATH****.* ***CHOOSE****! Which way do you really want?"* And in the passage we've just read, chapter 16 and 17, Jeremiah presents us with alternatives: good news/bad news, and says, ***"Choose."*** And he presents these alternatives at ***THREE LEVELS***. Level number ***ONE***: the ***NATONAL*** level. *"What kind of a future do you want your* ***nation*** *to have?"* Level number ***TWO***: the ***INDIVIDUAL*** level. *"What kind of a* ***person*** *do you really want to be, a* ***STUNTED SHRUB*** *in a desert or a* ***FRUITFUL TREE*** *by a river?*" And then the ***THIRD*** alternative, he says, he applies to the ***SOCIETAL*** level and says, *"What kind of a* ***society*** *do you want? A society that spends seven days a week in commerce trying to make money, or a society that can switch off and give time to God?"*

***First Alternative: The National Level***

Now these are the ***THREE ALTERNATIVES*** that he's going to present to us, and we'll go through them. Let's look ***FIRST*** at the ***NATIONAL*** level, and the alternatives he presents. Most of it is bad news; and then suddenly the good news gets shot through the bad news and presents the possibilities for the future to those who look to God. Now the ***KEY WORD*** in this first section---the whole of chapter 16, and the first four verses of chapter 17---is the word ***'LAND***.' It occurs 16 times. Again, I hope you're listening, when I read the word of God, for the ***KEY WORD***---the word that keeps coming. And that word came 16 times: 'land', 'land', 'land'. And the reason is that a nation must have ***LAND***. This is in the very nature of things, that if we are to have national ***IDENTITY*** and ***INDEPENDENCE***, we need land. We need a little plot of land that we can say, "That is our national heritage. This 'septa dialogue… this blessed our'...what is it? I forget. No, I've lost that bit of poetry, but ***YOU MUST HAVE LAND***. And this is what half the problems in the world are about at the moment: nationalism seeking ***LAND***. That's what's happening in Angola---and I'll see that firsthand in a few weeks’ time. But that's what's happening there. There are three groups saying we want the land so that we can be ourselves. And, so, Frederick Catherwood would have said that the religion of today is ***NATIONALISM***. And, therefore, the religion of today is going to demand ***LAND***. And the problems in Northern Ireland are basically, 'whose land is it' The problems in Angola are, 'whose land is it'? The problem of Rhodesia is, 'whose land is it'? The problems in the Middle East, are 'whose land is it'? Because to be ourselves, to have identity, to have independence we need **TERRITORY**; we need a place to call our own. That's how some of you have found your identity in private life. You've got a little house; you've got a garden. You've got a piece of land and it's yours, and it gives you your identity, your security. And so right through this first section, the key question is: "Will the nation have ***LAND***?'

And we need to remember that every bit of land in the whole of this planet earth is only held ***LEASEHOLD***...leasehold. And that the lease can be canceled at any time. There's nothing binding about any leasehold on land, because we play around with freehold and leasehold documents. But they are not the real situation. The real situation, as I've said before, is engraved above the Royal Exchange in London: ‘***THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S AND THE FULLNESS THEREOF’***. And Paul on Mars Hill said, *"It is God who allots land to nations. It is God who draws the atlas."* We may think we're drawing it but it's GOD who draws it. And he allots a nation its own identity in time and space and says, *"You can have this land for you, provided...provided you do not forget* ***ME****...and* ***HISTORY****.”* If you look at the atlas ... I've got a fascinating atlas at home. It's called 'An Historical Atlas of World History'. And you can just turn the pages. You don't turn from ***DIFFERENT*** countries to different countries, but from the ***SAME*** countries, but from age to age. And you see the borders move and the colors change...constantly changing. And you're reading the story of God's allocation of land. And any nation that honors the ***LIGHT*** they have received from him will have its land in ***SECURITY***. And any nation that does ***NOT*** honor the light received from him, its land will shrink and ultimately go. That's the lesson of history. And it's fascinating that you can get great historians like Toynbee, who can draw profound lessons from studying history but who can't see this simple lesson---and it's written large. You will find that as soon as a nation's ***MORALS*** began to go ***DOWN***, their ***TERRITORY*** began to ***SHRINK***. You'll find it written right through history. And God gave it to another who may at first sight have seemed unworthy of that land; but God was giving another people the chance to look after that land for him. And if they did not, theirs too will shrink.

This is supremely true about ***ISRAEL***...supremely true. Because of all the territory on earth, God settled on that little area, the size of Wales, which includes such variety within it: from snow-capped mountain to desert, from plain---lush plain---flowing with milk and honey, through valleys to hills. It's got everything, that little land... even including the deepest point on the earth's surface. And to that little land, God says, *"Now I want that land to be* ***HOLY****. That's my special plot."* And he said, *"To whom shall I give that plot to look after? I'll give it to those slaves in Egypt who haven't got any land of their own. And surely, out of gratitude for their freedom, they'll look after this little plot of land."* And he gave it to them, and he said, *"I give it to you to look after for me. The day you forget* ***ME****, that day that land will* ***SHRINK****."*

And you study the atlas of the Old Testament and see, how under King David---a man after God's own heart---that land was ***MORE*** ***EXTENSIVE*** than it had ever been and was filled with ***PEACE*** and ***PROSPERITY***. And its borders were further out than at any other time. But as soon as David died, those borders began to ***SHRINK***. Soon there was civil war...and Scotland and Wales were wanting independence. Sorry---the northern 10 tribes were wanting independence. And it shrank and shrank until there was just a little bit left. And now God, through Jeremiah says, *"I'm going to take that little bit from you too. You're just not fit to have the territory you've had."*

I looked at that atlas. And I looked...not many years ago...I looked just a generation back. And you know, the map of the world---the color that was most predominant right through was the color red. And it was the color of the British empire. And God gave us, in trust, a great deal of territory. And it stretched from Canada to Australia, to New Zealand, to many parts of Africa, to the Middle East. Everywhere you looked the map was red! Who would've believed that within 30 years, God would not only have taken that territory from us, but would also have produced within our own little island, people who wanted to get their little bit of land away from Westminster? And believe me, that's going to come. It's going to be one of the major headaches of the government over the next 12 months. Who would've thought it would've happened? But God says, *"If you're not fit to look after what I give you, I'll take it back."* He said it to Israel through Jeremiah. And Jeremiah was living in a very ***SHRUNKEN*** Israel. It was just composed of two little tribes in the south, just the environs of Jerusalem and stretching down to the Negev in the south. That's all they had left of the great kingdom of Israel under King David. That's all that was left. And so, Jeremiah presents them with the ***ALTERNATIVES FOR THE FUTURE.***

***Jeremiah Must Not Marry, Have Children, or Engage in Society***

But first, I must begin with a very personal thing which God said to Jeremiah. He said, *"Jeremiah, the time has come when I advise you---indeed I command you---to live without a family."* Jeremiah, by this time, was in his late twenties. It would've been natural and normal for him to be married by that time. It may even be reading between the lines, that Jeremiah had fallen in love. And with the lonely ministry that God had given him, how much comfort he could have received from the right wife to whom he could go back and share the frustrations and burdens of his ministry. But God said, *"Jeremiah, it's not to be for you.* ***NO WIFE****.* ***NO CHILDREN****. I don't want you to get involved in this society. The time has come when it is so far gone, that you must keep out of it. You must be in it to* ***PREACH****, but don't get involved emotionally. Don't fall in love. Don't have kids. Because, Jeremiah, the women and children are going to* ***DIE*** *in this land, and I don't want you to go through that. I don't want you to have that, and to see your kids lying in the streets dead, unburied. And Jeremiah, I want you to keep out of their* ***SOCIAL******LIFE*** *now. Don't go to* ***FUNERAL WAKES****, because in fact, there is coming a day when even a funeral wake will not be held. There won't be a meal and a comforting drink after the funeral. And keep out of their* ***FEASTS AND MERRY MAKING****, because laughter is going to stop. Jeremiah, keep out of social life. I don't want you to get involved socially at all."*

And there come periods and times when the situation is so serious that people think twice about bringing children into the world...even about marriage. Jesus said something like this. He talked about those who were ***EUNUCHS*** because they couldn't help it, and those who were ***EUNUCHS*** because they chose to be for the kingdom's sake. And Paul says something about...in 1 Corinthians 7, you'll find it...Paul talks about, when real pressures come on a Christian society, it will be easier for the **UNMARRIED** than the married. Because if there's one thing harder than suffering yourself, it's seeing your wife and kids suffer. And there are situations in our world now...not yet here in Britain I believe...but there are situations in the world right now where it is advisable for Christians not to become socially involved, where the pressures are too great. Stern language.

***'Generations' Are Affected---for Good or For Bad***

*"Now Jeremiah, go and tell them this, 'I'm going to take this land from you, and if you say, "Why?" ' tell them - 'It's because your fathers left me, and you are worse than your fathers.' "* That's interesting, because it implies that it's something that's happened ***OVER A FEW*** ***GENERATIONS***. The word *'fathers'* implies, perhaps, two or three generations. There is something very profound about the third and fourth generation. ***MORAL FACTORS*** take that time to work out - both ***NEGATIVELY*** and ***POSITIVELY***. A good man can influence his great-grandchildren, but not much more than that. And a bad man can influence his great-grandchildren, but not much more. Yes, the SINS of the fathers are visited on the children to the ***THIRD AND FOURTH GENERATION***. I've seen that happen again and again. We can't live to ourselves. The life I live is going to affect, up to and including, my great-grandchildren. Moral influence goes ***DOWN*** through the generations, and not just ***OUT*** to our contemporaries.

And so, God says, *"Your fathers left me, and* ***YOU*** *are* ***WORSE****. So, the land is going."* And that is precisely what happened. If you study the figures of churchgoing in this country, do you know when the ***FIRST*** great slump came? Just before the first world war - that's when the first great slump came. And many men who went to the war with an ***INADEQUATE UNDERSTANDING*** of God, which alas, had been given to them by liberal preachers during the first 20 years of this century...or the first 10 years of this century. They went with an inadequate view of God. And they came back without ***ANY*** view of God, and said, "We've seen and done things in the trenches that just don't line up with what we heard in church." And the result was a great ***DIVE*** in church going. And if you look at any church's memorial tablet for those who died during the war, you'll find a great list in ***FIRST*** world war and hardly any in ***SECOND*** world war---for the men from the first world war did not come back to God---I mean those who lived, not those who died.

And we have now had three generations away from God. And church-going sliding down, and every denomination in this country reporting declining figures ever since the first world war. Slight bump-up during the wars, when we panic. But as soon as the war is over, back down to the minority. And so, God says, *"Your fathers left me, and you are* ***WORSE****."* One of the amazing facts of our situation is that there are young people coming to Christ today, for whom Christianity is a totally new experience. They're coming ***FRESH***. If they go back in their family history, they'll find their grandfather and great-grandfather was a Christian. But they've been so long without, now they're coming back to it new and fresh. And that's why the young people are sometimes so much keener than some of us older ones, who were brought up in that minority that doggedly kept the church doors open. They've come to it fresh, like a new generation...a new discovery. And praise God that's going to affect their great-grandchildren. Hallelujah for that!

But we've been through this ice-age spiritually in this land. And God says, *"You don't deserve to have territory when you are like this."* And the last 20 years' loss of territory, I believe, is primarily due to the fact that for the previous 20, ***WE LOST GOD, AS A NATION***. Oh, we still crown the Queen in Westminster Abbey; but that's not keeping God, that's putting the religious face on it. We lost ***GOD***, and so we lost ***LAND***. I'm not an imperialist, and I'm not justifying, now, imperialism. Let me make that quite clear. I am saying that we had that land and, therefore, we must have had it by God's permission. But we forfeited it, and we lost it.

Now that's the ***BAD NEWS***. And so, Jeremiah threatens them, not only with ***DEATH***, but with ***DEPORTATION***. And I believe the day may well come when our young people will have to leave England to try and find work in Germany, in France, in Italy. And they will not be able to live in the land of their fathers, because there will not be work here for them. They will have to live far from home. It's happened in ***DEPRESSION*** before, has it not? And it will happen again. So, God says, *"I'll take you to another land. You can worship the idols all you like there, because that's what they do in that land. I'll take you, but you lose this one."*

It's a very sad part, this. I just sum it up with a little bit of a poem that I found in that book on Jeremiah. Listen to this. *"I have no wife; I have no kids. I do not even sing and dance with any of my people. For I am living out, each day, the fact that God is now alone---a loving God,* ***DESERTED*** *by his own,* ***REJECTED*** *by his sons,* ***UNWANTED*** *and* ***UNKNOWN****."*

And I believe that poem has got to the ***HEART*** of why Jeremiah was not to have a family. Listen to the key words: *"For I am living out, each day, the fact that God is now alone,"....* the fact that God is now alone; that the God who wanted Israel to be his family is now ***WITHOUT*** a family. And if Jeremiah is to demonstrate that God to his people, he must be without one too.

***Good News: Two Remarkable Predictions***

But now for the ***GOOD*** news, there are ***TWO REMARKABLE PREDICTIONS*** in this section which burst through like a ray of light, like a stream of sunlight through a thunder cloud. And suddenly they burst through and light up the whole situation with ***ANOTHER POSSIBILITY FOR THE FUTURE***. Possibility number ***ONE***, that the nation can be ***RE-BUILT*** and that, one day God could ***BRING BACK THE PEOPLE*** to their homeland. Did you notice when we came to that, the whole topic of conversation will be that God is bringing his people ***HOME***. Now this is peculiarly true of Israel. They were 70 years away, actually that time; and God brought them ***BACK*** after 70 years, and he brought them ***HOME***. Alas, it is true that they had still not learned their lesson. And when God gave them his greatest gift of his only Son, his Son wept because they'd lose the land again for many centuries, until the time of the Gentiles was fulfilled. And the result was, they've been away for it for another 2000 years.

That's a long time to be away from home. A very long time. But they never forgot it. And every year the Jew away from home would greet his fellow Jew at Passover time with, "Next year in Jerusalem, Next year." The hope was kept alive for 2000 years that God would bring his people back and reestablish them in the land and build them up again. And he did it after 70 years, and he's doing it again after 2000 years. But this is the HOPE in God that you can have: that God can ***RESTORE*** a people, can ***REVIVE*** a people, can bring them back home, and build them up again.

And the other half of the hope is even more wonderful. Jeremiah says, *"Lord, my refuge, not only can you bring this nation back to its own land and reestablish it as an identity and an independent nation---not only can you do that---but also, I see in vision* ***OTHER NATIONS*** *dropping their religions and gathering around us to learn that* ***YOU ALONE ARE GOD****."* In other words, Jeremiah has the vision and hope for his nation, not only that they will ***GET BACK HOME***, but that they will become again an international ***INFLUENCE FOR GOOD***.

That's what Britain was...make no mistake about it. Yes, there were abuses, yes there was the gunboat diplomacy; but wherever the colonizers went, ***MISSIONARIES*** went. The great era of our exporting the gospel was during that imperial era. And though there were businessmen who went to grab and who went to exploit, there went missionaries to ***GIVE*** and to ***DIE***; and they took the ***FAITH***. And they were an international influence in this country and until recently, did more than any other to give the gospel to the world, and to send men and money and medicines wherever people would receive them.

And so, Jeremiah sees again Israel back in its land and the nation's gathering. Instead of seeing the Jews scattered among the Gentiles, he sees the Gentiles gathered around the Jews. And he can see a future for his nation influencing people for ***GOD*,** and not just for good. And it's a ray of ***HOPE***. And he's saying, *"Now, which is to be our future, a* ***SHRINKING*** *territory that will someday disappear until, no longer is the name Israel on the map. Or do you want a future where you're* ***ESTABLISHED*** *in your land and where other nations will come and say, 'Our gods are not gods; our religions are not religions.* ***YOU*** *have the truth.* ***YOUR*** *God is the God of power and might.* ***YOUR*** *God is God alone. Will you tell us about him?' "*

Which do we want to be? Because I believe that's the choice facing Britain today. A choice of a ***SHRINKING*** territory that will someday cease to be even the United Kingdom (and it's certainly ceased to be *'Great'* Britain), or a nation ***SECURE*** in its own territory, however small, and influencing, for ***GOOD*** and for ***GOD***, the other nations, the world. That's the choice. And Jeremiah presents the alternative. *"Which do you want?"*

I must move on. I'm spending too much time this morning on this. Let me move on. But it's deep, isn't it? And it's important.

***Second Alternative: The Individual Level***

Let's move on now to the ***INDIVIDUAL LEVEL***. Jeremiah, like most prophets, has a zoom lens fitted to his mouth and he zooms in from the nation to the ***INDIVIDUAL MAN***. Because a ***NATION*** is made up of ***INDIVIDUALS***; it's made up of this man and that man, and this woman and that woman. A nation is made up of ***YOU***! And so, now he presents ***YOU*** with the alternatives. *“What kind of life do* ***YOU*** *really want to live?"* And this section changes to ***POETRY***. If you've got the Revised Standard Version, you notice the changes to poetry...beautiful poetry. And it is very close to Psalm number one. It's full of ***POETRY***; it's full of ***PICTURES***. And when Jeremiah gets poetic and picturesque, I find I enjoy him even more. The truth comes in a way that touches the ***HEART***. So, let's look at this. He presents ***TWO*** pictures: the ***CURSE*** ***of*** ***HUMAN WEAKNESS*** and the ***BLESSING of DIVINE STRENGTH***.

***The Life of Stunted Existence***

And you can live ***TWO KINDS OF LIVES***. And in vivid pictures---you've got to go to the Middle East to understand these pictures. But he pictures a ***STUNTED SHRUB***---probably the Tamarisk, a little dwarf juniper that struggles to survive in the desert...a little stunted dry shrub in the middle of a desert. And he particularly says, *"Salt- encrusted desert."* And you need to go to the shores of the Dead Sea to see that. And there, where it's so barren and dead, you just get little stunted shrubs struggling to survive...and in a bad season, they're gone. Now, he says that's the life of the man ***WHO TRUSTS IN MAN***. Whether he's putting his trust in ***HIMSELF,*** or ***OTHER PEOPLE…***that's the life stunted, dwarfed. He does not say he's 'nothing'. He doesn't say he 'achieves nothing'. He does. He grows up quite a bit. But in God's sight it's so ***STUNTED***. And when drought comes---when the bad dry period comes---it ***SHRIVELS***. It doesn't produce any fruit. It's there, it's grown a little, it's grown crooked. There's nothing much about it. It's no use to anybody. You never pick those shrubs for anything.

***The Life of Fruitful Existence***

Then he pictures ***ANOTHER KIND OF THING***. He pictures a ***BEAUTIFUL GREEN BAY TREE***---that's the tree in the Hebrew: a bay tree standing by a river; rather like the willows down at the River Wey here. Roots deep down into the water, so that even in ***DROUGHT*** they stay green and the fruit comes. A bay tree---so luxuriant in its foliage, that in the drought people say, "Have you been down to the river? Look at those trees." The hot scorching sirocco wind from the desert won't touch that tree. It's got ***DEEP ROOTS***; it's drawing from the water; it's refreshed.

Now these two pictures are the pictures of the man who trusts in ***MAN***, and the man who trusts in ***GOD***. The man who trusts in man--- when the crisis comes, he just ***WITHERS***, can't cope with it. The man who trusts in God---simply ***CARRIES ON***. It's got deep roots; he's refreshed; he's got a source of life deep down, and he just goes on. And believe me, when recession comes, when crises come, this sorts out the men from the boys very quickly--this sorts out those who ***CARRY ON***.

I'm old enough to have seen that depression in Jero. And I saw what happened to men's self-respect--out of work and marching to London in cloth caps. But I knew some Christians among those men, and they were like trees planted by the river. They didn't lose their self-respect. They didn't come to despair, even though times were tough. They were planted by the river. Which kind of person do you want to be in the years that come? For, believe me, all that doom I'm muttering about this nation...believe me it's gonna come. You know at first the economics experts were saying it's just a ‘***TEMPORARY’*** recession. They were saying it's a ***CYCLE***. They were saying economically the world can't go back to the twenties and thirties. And this week, the director general of **N.E.D.C.** (the National Economic Development Council), Sir Frederick Catherwood's successor, has said publicly, it'll be 12 to 15 years before we get back on course economically. And it's grown from a sort of cycle, to two, three years, five years. Now he says 10 to 12 to 15 years. Now, he's an absolute fool to make that statement if he doesn't believe it, because that could really damage the confidence of our money. But when it comes from that source, then I take it seriously--- 12 to 15 years. What kind of a man do you want to be? Do you want to be a ***STUNTED SHRUB*** that withers when the hot wind blows and the resources dry up? Or do you want to be a ***TREE PLANTED BY THE WATERS***?

The stunted shrub, you see, will have ***TWO PROBLEMS***. He'll have problems with his ***MOTIVES*** and with his ***MONEY***. And Jeremiah speaks about both. The Hebrew is *'the* ***reins*** *of the heart'*. That's a very clever word. *'The reins'*...you know the reins that turn the horse...the reins of the heart.

***The Stunted Shrub: Problems with Motives and Money***

In modern language we use the word ***MOTIVES***, that which steers us. And Jeremiah says, *"Look, the man who trusts in man, is a man who will have* ***MIXED MOTIVES****. The* ***HEART*** *is* ***DECEITFUL****. We don't even* ***KNOW*** *why we do certain things. The man who understands his own motives is a brilliant man. We do things, and we don't know* ***WHY*** *we're doing them, because our motives are mixed up. The heart is* ***DECEIVED****; it is* ***CORRUPT****. It deceives us. And when God judges us, he searches the* ***HEART****, and he looks at the* ***MOTIVES****. He doesn't look at* ***WHAT*** *we did, He looks at* ***WHY*** *we did it."*

Now, how mixed up your motives can get in a crisis. "Why are you doing this?" You say, "Well I'm doing it for the good of my family. I'm doing it for this; I'm doing it for that." And you don't really know ***WHY*** you're doing it. You may be doing it in desperate ***PANIC*** to save yourself; out of ***GREED***, to make sure that you don't go down while others do. It's awfully difficult. Your motives get mixed up. And God says, *"I'll search the heart, and I'll search your motives."*

And the ***OTHER THING*** that is the problem, ***MONEY***. There's a vivid picture here. Jeremiah says, *"A rich man is like a partridge"*. And there's a proverb about the partridge in the Middle East, that the partridge, when it finds some eggs, sits on them and hatches ***OTHER*** bird's eggs. I don't know if that's a true characteristic of it or not, but they used to believe it in the Old Testament. And Jeremiah says, *"A* ***RICH MAN*** *is like a partridge that has found some eggs and is sitting on them. But as soon as they hatch, they're off; and he's* ***LOST IT****"*. We would say it's like a swallow with a cuckoo egg or a sparrow with a cuckoo egg, and the sparrow's happily sitting on this great egg and saying, "Look what a ***BIG*** egg I've got." And then the cuckoo grows up and ***PUSHES HIM OUT OF THE NEST***. That should be the kind of picture that Jeremiah would use today. Jeremiah says, *"The rich man will be left a* ***POOR FOOL*** *without anything"*. A fool in the Bible is not someone who's ***MENTALLY*** deficient, but someone who's ***MORALLY*** deficient. It's very important. Jesus said, *"You must never call anybody, 'Mentally deficient fool.' "But* ***MORALLY*** *deficient...oh, he was constantly calling people fools---a rich man who built up his business and said, "Look, I've got enough for my retirement. I've really hedged myself against inflation." "You* ***FOOL****...you* ***FOOL****."*

*"Blessed is the man who puts his* ***TRUST IN GOD****, for He's got a* ***SANCTUARY****, and His sanctuary is His throne set in the heavens from the beginning."* A sanctuary is a place you can run to when you're in ***TROUBLE***. A sanctuary is a place you can hide. Durham Cathedral has a great big knocker---a great big ring knocker---on the west door. And any criminal who was in trouble could run to Durham Cathedral, and could hold onto that knocker, and he'd got sanctuary. Westminster Abbey used to be the same. Most churches in this country were the same. And there was a phrase in old English called *'taking Westminster'*, which meant *'getting into the sanctuary'.* And it was a real *'cave of Adullam'* of criminals and cutthroats. And I don't know what else Westminster Abbey once was, but isn't it interesting that *'sanctuary'*, which means *'holy place'*, means also *'hiding place'*. Do you find that interesting? Surely that would be the very ***LAST*** place to hide if you were a sinner. And yet the churches of this land were sanctuaries for the criminal.

And the ***LAST*** place you would run to hide if you were doing wrong would be the ***THRONE***...from which judgment comes...the representative of ***JUSTICE***. In every court of law, there are the royal coat of arms, representing the ***THRONE*** of England, which is the place of ***JUSTICE***. And yet, here is Jeremiah saying, *"The man who puts his* ***TRUST*** *in God, he's got a* ***SANCTUARY****. It's a* ***THRONE*** *set on high; he's got a place to* ***HIDE****. It's a* ***HOLY PLACE*** *that he can go. He's got a* ***REFUGE****. He can* ***HIDE*** *in that. Which kind of man do you want to be? The man who's hedged himself against inflation---who's a stunted shrub in a desert who'll finish up a poor old fool; or the man whose tree is planted by the water, who's got a river of living water underneath...who's got a* ***SANCTUARY*** *to run to and a place to hide."*

And Jeremiah says, *"Lord, I'm coming to* ***YOU****. You're my* ***REFUGE****. You're my* ***HOPE****."* That's one of Jeremiah's favorite titles of God: ***'THE HOPE OF ISRAEL'***. *"Oh Lord, hope of Israel. I'm coming to You.* ***HEAL*** *me, save me,* ***PROTECT*** *me,* ***DELIVER*** *me...and even* ***AVENGE*** *me".* See, Jeremiah was having a pretty tough time. People were saying all kinds of things about him. They were laughing at him. They were saying, *"He's such a* ***DOOM PREACHER****, but it's not happening. Where is the word of the Lord? Why doesn't it happen Jeremiah? You're threatening us with all these things, but actually it's not too bad. We're surviving. It's all right."* And Jeremiah had to run to his ***SANCTUARY***, had to run to the ***THRONE*** and say, *"God... God, will you deal with them? Will you deal with them?"*

And Jeremiah prayed a ***PRAYER*** that has puzzled many people. But you know, I had a most illuminating remark from one of you last Sunday. And it ties up with something that was danced here last night. Psalm 139. Psalm 139 is a beautiful Psalm. *"Oh Lord, you have searched me and known me. When I stand up, when I sit down, You know. You know every word on my tongue, even before I utter it. If I ascend into heaven, You're there. If I make my bed in Sheol, You're there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, You're there! Oh, how precious are Your thoughts about me, Lord. When I wake up in the morning, You're still thinking about me."* And it's a lovely Psalm. And then suddenly...suddenly, he says, *"Don't I hate those who hate You? Don't I hate them with perfect hatred?"* And here Jeremiah does the same thing; and suddenly he's praying, "***LORD, BRING DOUBLE DESTRUCTION ON THEM!"***

Now, Jeremiah is in a very ***TRICKY POSITION*** here, praying. You see, if I may put it as the person put it to me last week...my sermon last Sunday morning enabled them to understand some 139. They understood that, when you pray on ***GOD'S*** ***SIDE*** rather than men's, ***YOU CAN HATE GOD'S ENEMIES WITH PERFECT HATRED***. It's not vengeance. You're on God's side praying. And the so-called imprecatory Psalms (which have been a puzzle to many young Christians) ---the Psalms that pray for vengeance on the enemies--- they are very godly psalms. They're saying, ***FIRST***, *"God, I'M not gonna take vengeance. Vengeance belongs to YOU. You take it."* That's the right thing to say. And ***SECONDLY***, they are recognizing that God has enemies who hate Him; and it's taking ***GOD'S*** side rather than ***MAN'S*** side in that situation. But the danger is that if you pray this kind of prayer, *"Lord really deal with* ***MY*** *enemies, because they are* ***YOUR*** *enemies."*...The danger is that vengeance can come in, and you can really get your own back through the prayer. And so, Jeremiah says this...listen, *"Lord, I don't want the people crushed by terrible calamity. The plan was* ***YOURS****, not mine. It is* ***YOUR*** *message I've given them not my own. I don't want them doomed".* There's a man who's had to be absolutely honest. Do I preach ***HELL*** because I ***ENJOY*** dangling people over the pit; or do I preach it because ***GOD HAS TOLD ME TO PREACH IT?*** That's a question every preacher has to ask himself. Does he ***ENJOY*** doom? No. But nevertheless he says, *"Destroy them. Lord, You're my sanctuary. They're attacking me, because they're attacking* ***YOU****. It's* ***YOUR*** *word, not mine. I don't enjoy telling them doom is coming, but Lord, they're blaming me. So Lord, I'm running into* ***YOUR*** *sanctuary....You deal with them, You deal with them."* And that's a thoroughly ***MORAL PRAYER*** to pray.

***Third Alternative: The Societal Level***

And now ***FINALLY***, let me rush on to the ***SOCIETAL LEVEL.*** There are certain fundamental features of Jewish social life. One is ***KOSHER FOOD***. And one of the main features of Jewish social life is the ***SABBATH***. Friday night, 6:00 PM to Saturday, 6:00 PM is their Sabbath, their day of rest. And the good Jew should do no unnecessary work for himself on that day. And God gave the Jew the Sabbath, not because God wanted to restrict his activities. As Jesus said*, "The Sabbath was made for* ***MAN****, not man for the Sabbath."* It was a gift of God. And God knows that man is not just an animal. Soon as you believe that man is only an animal, he doesn't need the Sabbath, because no animal ***NEEDS*** a Sabbath. Our dog doesn't need a Sabbath! It gets one and it knows when Sunday comes around. But our dog doesn't ***NEED*** a Sabbath. There isn't a chimpanzee in the world that ***NEEDS*** a Sabbath. And if man is simply a naked ape, he doesn't ***NEED*** a Sabbath---because he's just an ***ANIMAL***. And he could go on looking for his food every day of the week.

But man is made in the ***IMAGE OF GOD***. He has more in common with the angels than with the animals. And therefore, he needs to be lifted ***ABOVE*** his work to get food. He needs to shut off from just staying alive, to remember that "Man shall not live by bread alone." And so, once a week---one day in seven---they stop their work and God says, *"Now you be a* ***MAN****. You're not just an animal scraping around this earth for bread. You're a man, and you live by* ***My WORDS****. It's not just what goes* ***INTO YOUR******MOUTH*** *that makes you live.... it's what comes* ***OUT OF MINE****,"* says God, *"that makes you live."* And so, they turned off for a day every seven days, and God was able to speak and remind them that they were human beings, made in the image of God. And therefore, they needed to behave like ***HE*** did, not like the animals did. And when He'd finished His work of creation, He rested.... so that He was not so tied-up in the work of His hands that that's all He thought about. We are just the same. And a man who works seven days a week in order to get time and a half---or even double time---is a man who will cease to be a human being...will become an ***animal***. So, they had this lovely ***GIFT***.

And now God says, "Jeremiah, do you see what's happened?? Go into the gates! Go to the gate where the king comes in; go to the gate where the citizens come in. See what happens!” And all from Friday night, 6:00 PM to Saturday night, 6:00 PM, they were rushing through with bags and boxes and loads and burdens to the ***MARKETPLACE***.... just to make more ***MONEY***. Now I know that it was a time of inflation. I know they were hard up. There was inflation at that time. Read between the lines, and you can see they had inflation. And they said, *"We need money to live. We've gotta keep our families going so we must do more work: take a second job---moonshine (or whatever it is) ...****MOONLIGHT*** *job, (I forget the term) ...but take another job."* And so, that's what they were doing... just keeping going; desperately trying to provide perhaps for their families. And God said, *"Jeremiah, tell them that if they go on doing this, I will* ***BURN*** *those gates with fire and even the palace, they will lose their royal family; they will lose their security.... because that lies in Me."* And I tell you the solemn truth: Those gates and that palace were ***BURNED DOWN*** just a few years after this was said.

But here's the ***CHOICE***: *"Jeremiah tell them,"* (and now there is more ***GOOD*** news than bad news in this final section), *"Jeremiah tell them that IF they give Me the time they should, they will still see people carrying things in through the gates---but they will be* ***BURNT OFFERINGS*** *and* ***SCRIFICES*** *and* ***INCENSE****. And they'll be a* ***GRATEFUL*** *people instead of a* ***GREEDY*** *people. And there'll be people coming full of* ***THANKFULNESS*** *to God. They'll come in with things for God."*

Now here's the question: Which kind of a society do ***WE*** really want? A society that is intent on ***GETTING MORE FROM MEN***, or a society that is intent on ***GIVING MORE TO GOD***? That's the choice, that's the alternative. It’s a very ***CLEAR*** one. Now let me make it quite clear. I do not believe that Christians are under the Sabbath law or that Sunday is a legalistic Sabbath which we must observe. I, therefore, am not in sympathy with the Lord's Day Observance Society in its main thrust, though I believe their motives are right. They have seen what is true: that a nation that has ***NO TIME*** for God will ***SUFFER***. But you don't improve the situation by seeking to impose observance of a Sabbath. You did in Jeremiah's Day, because they were breaking a law under which they lived. But can I put it a different way.... We may not be under the law of the Sabbath. We are ***FREE***. And if one man wants to treat one day ***DIFFERENT*** from the others, let him. If another Christian wants to treat all days ***ALIKE***, as every day being the Lord's day, let him; there's no principle involved here. *"Let no man judge you in respect of Sabbaths,"* said Paul. And the fulfillment of that legal Sabbath is that we should ***EVERY*** day, cease from ***OUR*** ***OWN WORKS***, and rest in ***HIS***.

So, if you want to know when my Sabbath is, my answer should be, "As a believer, on the basis of Hebrews 4, my Sabbath is Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday." That's a good deal better than one (day). But having said that, just as Christians are not under the tithe law to give a 10th of their income, shall people who have ***MORE*** reason to be grateful to God, give ***LESS*** than the Jew? That is the question. And therefore, I think a Christian will gladly give at least one day in seven to shut off the things that can so-make us into animals scratching a living, and turn us again into ***HUMAN BEINGS***---***REFLECTING THE GLORY OG GOD***, as in a mirror, and being ***TRANSFORMED*** day by day into the same glory, and becoming truly ***HUMAN BEINGS***.

So that, though a Christian is ***NOT*** under any law to give one day in seven, I think you will ***AT LEAST*** want to do that...so that he may remain human and live, not by bread alone---not by Sunday joint alone---but by every ***WORD*** that proceeds from the mouth of God. And be willing to spend time ***LISTENING*** to God's word and ***WORSHIPPING*** God. It's when we get to the complex that thinking that an hour is enough; and a couple of hours on Sunday---that really is the ***LIMIT***. Ah, no, we've lost something then...we've lost something. I notice that where God is moving in this country---where the Spirit is really bringing God's people back to life---services of worship are getting ***LONGER AND LONGER***.

You go around the country and see; and then go around the churches where they say, "It shall be such and such." And I know of churches (I've preached in churches) where the order of service says, "Finish so and so." And then I go behind the iron curtain, and I go to Czechoslovakia (I go to other countries, too), and I find elderly people sitting five and a half hours. And I find people worshiping God and just wanting to go on and on.... to be really human---they get so little chance. It makes me embarrassed and ashamed. It's ***NOT***, "Remember 11:00am to 12:00am and 6:30pm to 7:30pm, each Sabbath." *"Remember the Sabbath DAY,"* says Jeremiah***…'THE DAY*** (1 day in 7). And as the Jews were under the law of 1/10 of their ***MONEY***, they were under the law of 1/7 of their ***TIME***.

We are not under ***LAW***; we are under ***GRACE***. We are ***FREE***. But ***IF***, in our freedom, we tear home from the church service to grab the phone and just tie up that bit of business from the previous day, no wonder God says, *"You haven't time for* ***ME****! You haven't time for* ***ME****."*

I hope you go home from morning service, and I hope you take the bulletin, and I hope you take your Bible... and I hope you read through the passage again in private.... with the outline (which I give you to give you the pegs on which I hung things), so that you may be open to God's ***INFLUENCE***. I tell you this: If you only get from me, your Bible study, I'm ***SPOONFEEDING*** you, and it'll spoil you. You need to give God time to read for ***YOURSELF*** as well. And frankly, that's the most rewarding, often, of our ***COMMUNION WITH GOD***.

So, I round up...I round off.....The ***NATIONAL*** choice we presented to you: a country ***LOSING ITS LAND***, or a country becoming an ***INFLUENCE FOR GOOD AND FOR GOD*** among the nations. I've shown you the ***SOCIAL CONTRAST*** in my 3rd point. The social contrast between a nation bent on ***GETTING*** as much as possible out of its fellow men 7 days a week, or a nation bent on ***GIVING*** as much to God as possible---not as little; the ***MAXIMUM***, not the minimum!! But the ***KEY ONE*** was in the middle, as if God put a sandwich together and put the most important thing in the middle of the sandwich. The key one is what kind of a ***PERSON*** you're gonna be. The Archbishop of Canterbury asked two questions. Number ***ONE***: "What kind of a ***SOCIETY*** do you want?" Number ***TWO***: What kind of ***PEOPLE*** must we be to achieve that kind of society?

Let's pray.