



## Meditation—jeremiah 5

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## Meditation 1—Jeremiah 5.<sup>1-5</sup>

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### *yahweh's invitation*

<sup>1</sup>Roam through Jerusalem's streets.

Please, have a look.

Become familiar with and search its squares.

If you can find any,

if there be one who acts justly;

one who seeks what is real,

I will forgive it.

<sup>2</sup>If they swear, "YHWH lives,"

they are certainly swearing in bad faith.

### *jeremiah's response*

<sup>3</sup>Yahweh, is not your sight set on what really is?

You have beat them, but they have felt no wound.

You have laid them waste, but they refused to take the correction.

They have made their faces rock hard.

They have refused to turn back.

<sup>4</sup>As for me, I thought, "These are the underprivileged.

They are unlearned

such that they do not understand YHWH's principles

or their obligation to their God.

<sup>5</sup>I'll go personally to the privileged

and speak with them.

Surely they understand YHWH's principles,

their obligation to their God."

### *jeremiah's discovery*

But these, as one, have broken the constraints;

shredded bonds that tie (Author's translation).

It is a famous story... the story of Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction. And one much misused. We can't help but think of that story as we read Yahweh's invitation to Jeremiah found in this reading. Do you see the connection? Probably you do. But, just to make sure...

Three angels visited Abraham and, among other things, informed him of God's intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Apparently, this got Abraham to thinking. Would God "destroy the righteous with the wicked?" Thus began Abraham's famous bargaining with the Lord, for which he repeatedly apologized and asked for the Lord's indulgence. What if there were 50 righteous? Would God destroy the city? What if there were 45? How about 40? 30? 20? What if there were but 10? (See Gen. 18.<sup>23-33</sup>). Well, as we all know, though the Lord assured Abraham each time that if the prescribed number of "righteous" could be found in S&G, He would spare the cities, the two cities were, in the end destroyed, thus letting us know that 10 righteous could not be found.

Not unlike Abraham, Jeremiah was assured that if he, Jeremiah, could find just one person in Jerusalem who was interested in justice and truth, then God would forgive the city and let it continue. After a diligent search, Jeremiah came up empty. Rich and poor, uneducated and educated, powerless and influential... all of them, regardless of class, were wicked.

In other words, Jerusalem was *worse* than Sodom and Gomorrah. A hundred years earlier, Isaiah had called Judah's leaders, "rulers of Sodom" and the nation's citizenry, "people of Gomorrah" (Is. 1.<sup>10</sup>). He had complained that Judah was as shamelessly proud of its sins as Sodom had been of its sins (See Is. 3.<sup>8-9</sup>). A younger contemporary of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, went further, suggesting that Sodom, likened to Judah's "younger sister," had not sinned as grievously and consistently as Judah. Indeed, Judah could teach Sodom a thing or two about sin. Judah was, in fact, far the superior whore. (See Ez. 16.<sup>44-50</sup>).

We can assume, nay, more, we can know with certainty that Judah's sins were of the grossest kind and vile beyond those of Sodom. It is a common misconception that Sodom's chief, vilest sin was, well, sodomy. Homosexuality. There is no solid evidence for this. To say that the evidence for it in Genesis 18-19 is scant is an understatement. There is no reason to believe homosexual was even on the author's radar.

Furthermore, I suggest, the prophetic inclination to compare Judah to Sodom is evidence against this understanding of Sodom and its sin. For, I challenge you to read Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Ezekiel, et. al. and find one clear word about homosexuality. It is not among the long, long, long, long list of sins for which the prophets charge either Israel or Judah. Judah, and Israel before it, were guilty of far, far worse and real sins. Indeed, Judah, symbolized by a female prostitute, was very much interested in male clients for whom they parted their legs (See, for example, Jer. 3.<sup>13</sup>).

American "Christianity" has come to define itself almost exclusively by its anti-gay and anti-gay marriage stand (and, of course, its anti-abortion and pro-gun stands). It can hardly conceive of sin outside the narrow parameters of sexuality. We do not bring this up simply out of interest in accurate scripture exegesis or historiography. We bring it up because this false myopia is more than tragic. It is downright dangerous.

There are sins out there—horrible and deadly sins, that are far worse than the alleged sin of homosexuality. There are horrible and deadly sins that were responsible for Judah's destruction. If we cannot recognize those same sins in our society, either because we don't want to or because we have become distracted by questionable sins, we run the risk of repeating those same destructive sins until, like Jewish society, our society disappears in dust clouds of destruction.

If I may, then, I strongly suggest that those of you who are hearing or reading this meditation have a closer look at Jeremiah and all his fellow Hebrew prophets. I suggest that you examine more closely the sins against which these inspired individuals railed. I suggest that you look more honestly and scripturally at the society in which you live and compare it to those of ancient Israel and Judah. I suggest that you do more than avoid yourself the sins of which Judah was guilty. I suggest that you warn, speak out against, and resist society's attempts to call their sins something else—something good—and to distract the gaze from its very real sins. I suggest that you resist society's practiced attempts to divert the gaze from its own sin to the imagined sins of those whom it chooses as scapegoats.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(*edition: april 22, 2024*)

## Meditation 2—Jeremiah 5.<sup>6-9</sup>

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*(Warning: this passage with its accompanying questions and meditation contains strong adult language.)*

<sup>6</sup>Therefore, a lion will attack them out of the thicket.

A jackal out of the wilds will ravage them.

A leopard will stalk their cities.

Anyone who leaves them will be torn to pieces  
because their rebellions are many  
their apostasy massive.

<sup>7</sup>How, given this, can I possibly forgive you?

Your children forsake me

and devote themselves to those who are not gods

Though I fully satisfied their need, they commit adultery,  
and cram whorehouses.

<sup>8</sup>Stallions, aroused, erect,

they are men who moan with other men's wives.

<sup>9</sup>Should I just ignore such things?

An oracle of YHWH:

“With a people such as this,  
should I not be avenged?” (Author's translation)

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of context in the interpretation of scripture. Context is no less important when one attempts to liken scripture to themselves. Today's reading is an excellent example of the importance of context in interpreting and applying scripture.

The greater context for today's reading is, of course, 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Judah. The closer context is the search of Jerusalem that Jeremiah conducted at the behest of Yahweh. Jeremiah was to explore the city, street by street, square by square, in search of individuals who remained faithful to Yahweh and had not engaged in idolatrous love for other gods. His search came up empty. He could find no one faithful to Yahweh: not among the wealthy and educated and not among the poor and uneducated. But the sin that Jeremiah discovered was more than personal and individual. It was not simply that there were lots and lots of sinners. Rather, the sin was societal. It coursed through the entire society and its foundational structure. Society was awash in sin.

One can ask, “How does sin become not simply about individual and personal moments of misjudgment and weakness, but about the deviance of an entire culture, a way of life, an accepted societal modus operandi?” One answer, anyway, is “redefinition.” Sinful attitudes and behaviors are redefined as “not sinful.” Like fish who do not know they are swimming in water for the naturalness of it, everyone is swimming in sin that society tells them is not sin. It cannot be sin, surely, if it is simply part of the natural order and of the foundational societal structure.

One feature of Jeremiah's preaching style is that of quotation. Jeremiah quotes words that his audience throws back at him when he offers critiques of Jewish society.

“I am not polluted,  
I have not gone after Baalim.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 2.<sup>23</sup>

“Because I am innocent,  
surely his anger shall turn from me...  
I have not sinned.”<sup>2</sup>

Such words represent more than individual assertions and private sentiments. They represent the prevailing mood of the entire society. It is such delusion in the face of vile sin that Jeremiah unearthed during his search of Jerusalem’s streets. Today’s reading is Yahweh’s response to Jeremiah’s report concerning the sin and delusion he found everywhere he looked.

In His response to Jeremiah’s report, Yahweh warns that the nation’s sin is so extensive that it would be unjustifiable to forgive. Rather, a terrible and violent national disaster looms in its future. God resorts to violent metaphor to portray the extent of the looming national disaster. It will be like being stalked, hunted, captured, torn to pieces, and eaten by wild, ferocious predators—lion, jackal, and leopard. He also resorts to metaphor to portray both the depth of Judah’s sin and the strong feelings that that sin stirs in Him. The metaphor is sexually graphic with allusions to prostitution, sexual arousal, and the ecstasy of sexual intercourse.

How, then, do we “apply” such a passage to ourselves and how does the historical context control and direct our application?

First, we must note that the critique is societal not personal. The sin is societal. The impending disaster is societal. While individuals are inevitably caught up in any national disaster, the pronouncements of disaster were not directed at any single individual but at society at large. Thus, in applying this passage, individuals must not only or primarily ask questions about their private life but about their public life. Indeed, the interrogation must be that of the entire society. Individuals and society at large must ask questions such as, “Is the culture of society idolatrous?” “If so, how deep is the societal rot?” “Is society such that devastation would be appropriate, not only to individuals here and there, but to the entire culture?”

It would be inappropriate for an individual or society that is imperfectly striving to please God to liken the criticism and threat found in today’s reading to themselves. It would be inappropriate for any individual or society that is imperfectly striving to please God to lash themselves with the idea that they were beyond God’s power or willingness to forgive. It would be inappropriate for an individual who is engaged in willful sin but lives in a society that is striving to please God to liken such criticism and threat to themselves. At the same time, it would be inappropriate for any individual or society immersed in the sort of willful societal sin as Judah is here to apply comforting passages about God’s willingness to overlook sin and forgive. Those striving to follow God should not allow themselves to be discomfited by discomfiting passages. Those who are willfully making no attempt to follow God should not allow themselves to be comforted by comforting passages. Not only must we strive for correct understanding and interpretation of scripture. We must also strive for correct application of scripture.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: april 22, 2024)*

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<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 2.<sup>35</sup>

### Meditation 3—Jeremiah 5.<sup>10-13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Climb up the city's terraced vineyards and lay them waste,  
though not utterly.

Remove their branches,  
for they are not YHWH's.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>11</sup>For they have acted with extreme infidelity to me,  
both Yisrā'ēl and Y'hūdā.

An oracle of YHWH.

<sup>12</sup>They lie about Yahweh, and assert,  
"He wouldn't do this."

Also, "Disaster cannot come to us.  
We will not experience military threat or hunger."

<sup>13</sup>And, "The prophets are hot air.

The truth is not in them.

So, this shall be done to them" (author's translation).

We often read of Laman and Lemuel's rebellion against their father, Lehi, and imagine that we are witnessing some form of teenage rebellion. However, a closer reading of both their reasonings and the responses of Jeremiah's audiences toward him and his message might persuade us that something much more sophisticated is going on between Lehi and his rebellious sons. Laman and Lemuel's rebellion against Lehi is in line with that of the population of Jerusalem and their response to Jeremiah. Laman and Lemuel's response to Lehi and Jerusalem's response to Jeremiah were based on a well-established, though false, theology.

The negative response to Lehi and Jeremiah's warning of an impending destruction of Jerusalem was built upon these theological beliefs, among others.

- Jerusalem was God's city with God's temple in its midst. God could not and would not allow any harm to come to His temple.
- Jews were God's chosen people. They were exceptional. They were indispensable to God's plan.
- The people of Judah were righteous, meticulous in their observance of temple ceremonies and observances.

We hear such theological arguments in Laman and Lemuel's arguments such as the following.

"Neither did they believe that Jerusalem, that great city, could be destroyed according to the words of the prophets."<sup>2</sup>

"And we know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people; for they kept the statutes and judgments of the Lord, and all his commandments, according to the law of Moses; wherefore, we know that they are a righteous people; and our father hath judged them..."<sup>3</sup>

We hear the theological arguments against Jeremiah's warning of destruction in today's reading. "God

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<sup>1</sup> The difference between the author's translation and that of the KJV is found in the text used. I have translated from the Hebrew Masoretic text, whereas the KJV translated the Septuagint.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Nephi 2.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 1 Nephi 17.<sup>22</sup>

wouldn't do this," they testify—and make no mistake, this assertion was pronounced in the spirit of sacred and "true" testimony. God would not allow "disaster" to come upon his people or permit them to "experience military threat or hunger." Elsewhere, we hear them testify, "I do not transgress (2.<sup>20</sup>), "I am not polluted," "I have not gone after Baalim" (2.<sup>23</sup>), "I have not sinned, "I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me" (2.<sup>35</sup>), "We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us" (8.<sup>8</sup>). In addition, the people make appeal to the presence of the temple. "The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these" (7.<sup>4</sup>) as reason to reject the message of impending doom.

In the minds of Judeans, and, likely, Laman and Lemuel, declarations that, "We will not hearken" to Jeremiah or any other pessimists masquerading as prophets are not offered in the spirit of rebellion but in the spirit of faithfulness to an unconquerable God who always stands by his people. However, Jeremiah will have none of it. All such testimonies and declarations amount to nothing but lies. Lies about God.

Today's America regurgitates the same false ideologies of exceptionalism and indispensability and self-righteousness as ancient Judah while it wallows in the same societal ills. These false ideologies have become articles of American faith. They are as much lies about God as they are lies about the nation. Inasmuch as we have history to forewarn us, we might be excused for concluding that the latter-day lie is worse than the ancient one.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: april 22, 2024)*

Meditation 4—Jeremiah 5.<sup>14-19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Therefore, this is what YHWH, 'ēlohê Šēbā'ôt says:

Because you utter such things,  
understand that I am turning your words into fire  
and this people into the wood it consumes.

<sup>15</sup>Understand that I am leading against you a distant nation,  
O nation of Yisrā'ēl.

An oracle of YHWH.

It is a nation of long standing,  
a nation with a long past,  
a nation whose language you do not understand  
so that you cannot comprehend what they say.

<sup>16</sup>Their weapons are like an open grave.  
All of them are valiant.

<sup>17</sup>The force will consume your crops, and devour your food  
meant for your sons and daughters.

It will consume your flocks and herds.

It will devour our vineyards and your fig orchards.  
It will bring impoverishment to your fortified cities—  
the very ones in which you put your trust—violently

<sup>18</sup>Nevertheless, at that time—an oracle of YHWH—  
I will not completely obliterate you.

<sup>19</sup>And when you ask, “For what reason has YHWH, our God, done all this to us?” you are to say to them, “Because you forsook me and served foreign gods in your own land. So, we will serve foreigners in a land not your own (author’s translation).”

We can sometimes struggle to understand the writings of the Hebrew prophets found in the Old Testament. However, Nephi is of the opinion that “the Jews” understood the Hebrew prophets and that, in fact, “there is none other people that understand the things which were spoken unto the Jews like unto them.”<sup>1</sup> He offers several reasons. The Jews were entirely familiar with locations mentioned in the texts, for example. They were aware of historical references. In addition, and importantly, they were familiar with the “manner of prophesying among the Jews.”<sup>2</sup>

There are many features or “manners” to Hebrew prophesy. Its poetic structure is tantamount among them. Central to poetry, is its pervasive use of imagery. If one is to understand the Hebrew prophets, one must first put their imagination to work by taking note of and visualizing the imagery and then consider how the imagery is like the reality it seeks to describe. As Nephi says, there are plainer ways to communicate truths. But there may be none more effective. Imagery, observed and imagined, grabs us intellectually, emotionally, and spiritual. It leads us to deep appreciations of profound truths.

Jeremiah’s use of imagery is pervasive, imaginative, and, often, earthy. So far in this fifth chapter of Jeremiah, the prophet has asked us to consider the impending Babylonian attack on Judah by visualizing the terror and threat represented by a lion, a wild dog, and a leopard that comes charging out of its natural environment to attack and feast upon the ripped flesh of unsuspecting and ill-equipped city dwellers. He has also asked us to consider the utter depravity of Judah’s idolatrous love of false gods by inviting us to

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Nephi 25.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> 2 Nephi 25.<sup>1</sup>



imagine a whorehouse packed with aroused men moaning with the pleasure of erections as large as those of a horse.

In today's reading, Jeremiah thinks of his prophet word as fire and Judah's citizenry as wood. We are invited to imagine a stack of wood crackling, smoking, glowing red, turning to grey ash as the yellow and orange fire consumes its fuel. We are invited to consider the devastating pain Judah is about to endure because of its hasty and thoughtless dismissal of Jeremiah inspired calls to repent. Then too, Jeremiah introduces us to the Babylonian army and its bold and brutal soldiers with their latest in military hardware and invites us to look into the maw of an open grave. We see Judah's citizens die one after another, falling limp and pale into freshly dug graves prepared for the rebellious.

God has given Jeremiah a warning to be faithfully and uncompromisingly delivered. But Jeremiah has the freedom to choose the "manner of prophesying" he thinks best. While Nephi, with his personal preference for what he calls "plainness" in prophesying, might have simply said, "The Babylonians are coming. Their army will defeat you and put an end to your nation and society," Jeremiah chooses the more involved genre of poetry with its powerful and evocative imagery.

Both have their place in the economy of God. Both can get the job done. Nephi's approach has the advantage of easy access and simplicity. The poetic approach of the Hebrew prophets has the advantage of depth. For my tastes, the poetic imagery is a whole lot more fun. It permits me far more agency as my imagination opens up with multiple meanings, lessons, and possibilities. And it encourages an understanding and acceptance that the things of God are not acquired through lazy and inconsistent efforts, but through concentrated and disciplined study, thought, and prayer.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: april 23, 2024)*

Meditation 5—Jeremiah 5.<sup>20-25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Make the following announcement in the nation of Ya<sup>‘a</sup>qōb,  
and proclaim it in Y<sup>‘h</sup>ūdâ:

<sup>21</sup>“Please, pay attention to this, you stupid people,  
who are without feeling,  
who possess eyes, but can’t see  
who possess ears, but won’t hear.

<sup>22</sup>Will you not reverence me?”—an oracle of YHWH.

“Will you not shake uncontrollably before me,  
who placed sand as a boundary for the sea—  
an unalterable decree—that it cannot cross?  
They can hurl themselves back and forth, but they are unable.  
Their waves can crash, but they cannot cross over it.

<sup>23</sup>But as for this people, the will is stubborn.

Rebellious, they turn and walk away.

<sup>24</sup>They don’t think to themselves,

‘We really should reverence YHWH, our God,  
who sends the autumn rains  
and the spring rains in timely fashion.

The weeks appointed as harvest, he watches over for us.’

<sup>25</sup>Your offenses have put a stop to these,

and your sins have denied you of such benefits (author’s translation)

## Meditation 6—Jeremiah 5.<sup>26-29</sup>

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- <sup>26</sup>For there can be found among my people ungodly individuals.  
They keep watch, like bird catchers watching a trap.  
They place traps, they capture human beings.
- <sup>27</sup>Just as a bird cage is full of birds,  
their houses are filled with deceit.  
This is how they have become powerful and wealthy.
- <sup>28</sup>They have grown fat and plump,  
having gone beyond, even, the wicked words they speak.  
They will not hear a legal case—  
such as that of an orphan— and yet they enjoy success.  
Nor will they bring the cases of the impoverished to trial.
- <sup>29</sup>Should I not level a charge against these?—  
an oracle of YHWH—  
Should I not take vengeance on a nation such as this? (author's translation)

Some words seem more “pregnant” with meaning than others. In scripture, words like “redemption” or “justice,” or “wicked,” or “righteousness,” or “temple,” or “miracle” grab all the headlines. We spend time analyzing and defining them. There are other words we hardly notice, as if they were but supporting actors. But sometimes these supporting actors can take on a starring role.

In this reading, the word, “therefore” (“for this reason,” “as a result”), my “this is how,” should be given a leading role. It carries a powerful punch, and contains one of the punch lines of the passage. The “wicked” or “ungodly” we are informed, are loaded. Their wealth allows them to eat well—so well that, unlike most of humanity for most of human history, they take on added weight. As they grow portly, their skin stretches to cover the additional area causing it to take on a certain “shine.” The “therefore” reminds us how they achieved their wealth and the comfort and even extravagance it provided. Their “good fortune” comes through deceit and corruption practiced against the vulnerable—orphans and the impoverished in this case.

As is so often the case in the Old Testament, the wealthy are portrayed here as predators who think of and act toward their prey as if they were something less than human. As a bird catcher captures birds with a trap, the tool the wealthy uses to fill their houses with vanities is deceit and fraud. But, with his imagery of a cage full of birds, Jeremiah reminds us that the materialistic gains the wealthy acquire through fraud are as trifling as their fraud is wicked. For, what, really, is more trivial than a cage full of birds? The wealthy inflict great harm on humans for the frivolous pleasure of the echo of chirps.

The false mythology of American style capitalism would have us believe that wealth comes to the virtuous—the more wealth, the more virtue. That virtue may take many forms, but one of its most common virtues, so the myth goes, is hard work. The fact is, in this world, as Cain discovered at the earliest stages of human existence, wealth is most often accumulated through violence against others. Capitalism's false doctrine cannot silence or undo this Biblical truth, emphasized and illustrated over and over again in the sacred text.

“Therefore,” in today's text, is, therefore, the bearer of a time-honored Biblical truth that has been under assault throughout its long career. Those who profess belief in and claim to honor the Bible must resist the siren song of capitalism's myth of innocence and inevitability. They must not only resist its lies

individually but must agitate in such a way as to make society uncertain of capitalism's false pretensions of virtue.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: april 23, 2024)*

## Meditation 7—Jeremiah 5.<sup>30-31</sup>

<sup>30</sup>An appallingly horrid thing  
has occurred in the land:

<sup>31</sup>The prophets utter oracles with intent to deceive,  
the priests rule as their power allows,  
and my people love it this way.

How do you imagine this will end? (author's translation)

Jeremiah complained a great deal about the numerous prophets that surrounded him and filled the nation. As in this reading, Jeremiah and the Lord are on the same page when it comes to their estimation of the false prophets' character and actions. The prophets, "prophesy lies in my name" and "prophesy unto you a false vision," complained Yahweh, "even though "I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them." All this they did out of "the deceit of their heart"<sup>1</sup> and out of covetous desires.

"For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them  
every one is given to covetousness;  
and from the prophet even unto the priest  
every one dealeth falsely."<sup>2</sup>

We can see from this that the prophets prophesied lies out of more than poor insight and a twisted personal imagination. They also prophesied lies out of a perverted interest in fame and fortune. They wanted to be well liked and well compensated. This suggests, as Jeremiah observes, that their audiences were pleased by what they heard. The false prophets simply put their finger to the wind, determined what the people wanted to hear, and then parroted the peoples' desires. Thus, the lies the prophets told really came out of the minds of the people who listened to them, honored them, and paid them. As culpable as the prophets were, they were no more culpable than their audience.

And what was the audience after? The audience was more interested in being told pleasant lies than unpleasant truths. They wanted to hear what they wanted to hear and they would stand to hear nothing else. And so, the prophets obliged.

"Sword and famine shall not be in this land,"<sup>3</sup> they lied.

"Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon,"<sup>4</sup> they lied.

"Behold, the vessels of the Lord's house shall now shortly be brought again from Babylon."<sup>5</sup> they lied.

"They heal My people's brokenness inadequately, announcing:  
"It's OK! It's OK!"  
But nothing is OK!"<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 14.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 6.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 14.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah 27.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 27.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah 8.<sup>11</sup>

They lied.

The reality is that true prophets arise most often when public opinion is most united behind lies that are reinforced by false prophets. Prophets may or may not be the most personally “spiritual” among their peers. But they are the most clear-eyed about societal realities to which the masses are blinded, and to which the false prophets will not voice.

As Jeremiah observed, it was horrifying to see the citizenry’s lust for false assurances and securities. It was horrifying to watch the false prophets stroke their audiences’ lust for false assurances and securities. And it was horrifying to see the citizenry pleased at being lied to so that they might hear their false assurances and securities parroted back at them.

And where, Jeremiah finally asked, would all this lead? He does not leave us wondering.

“By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed. And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and they shall have none to bury them, them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness upon them.”<sup>7</sup>

“Therefore will I give their wives unto others, and their fields to them that shall inherit them...”<sup>8</sup>

“At that time, saith the LORD, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of his princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves: and they shall spread them before the sun, and the moon, and all the host of heaven, whom they have loved, and whom they have served, and after whom they have walked, and whom they have sought, and whom they have worshipped: they shall not be gathered, nor be buried; they shall be for dung upon the face of the earth. And death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of them that remain of this evil family, which remain in all the places whither I have driven them, saith the LORD of hosts.”<sup>9</sup>

“The lion is come up from his thicket,  
and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way;  
he is gone forth from his place  
to make thy land desolate;  
and thy cities shall be laid waste,  
without an inhabitant.  
For this gird you with sackcloth,  
lament and howl:  
for the fierce anger of the LORD  
is not turned back from us.  
And it shall come to pass at that day, saith the LORD,  
that the heart of the king shall perish,  
and the heart of the princes;  
and the priests shall be astonished,  
and the prophets shall wonder.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah 14.<sup>15-16</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Jeremiah 8.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Jeremiah 8.<sup>1-3</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah 4.<sup>7-9</sup>

“I beheld the earth,  
and, lo, it was without form, and void;  
and the heavens,  
and they had no light.  
I beheld the mountains,  
and, lo, they trembled,  
and all the hills moved lightly.  
I beheld, and, lo, there was no man,  
and all the birds of the heavens were fled.  
I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness,  
and all the cities thereof were broken down  
at the presence of the LORD, and by his fierce anger.”<sup>11</sup>

But the people did not want to hear this truth. “God wouldn’t do this,” they said of Jeremiah’s threats of destruction. “Disaster cannot come to us,” they claimed. “We will not experience military threat or hunger.” With such lies invading their hearts, they finally accused Jeremiah and his ilk of being nothing but windbags.

“The prophets are hot air.  
The truth is not in them.”<sup>12</sup>

All this is more than history, and of more than antiquarian interest. Our society has been plagued by the same horrific phenomena. Many among us want only to hear comfortable lies. Many will not bear criticism of or prophetic warnings against our society and the myriad injustices of which it is guilty. This unholy desire for lies and unwillingness to face uncomfortable truths has created fertile ground for the most ridiculous and dangerous conspiracy theories imaginable. Those who propagate them are modern false prophets. Some of them, self-named Christians, even go so far as prophecy in the name of Jesus. They have uttered any number of false predictions only to continue to be honored and paid by foolish and beguiled followers.

Yes, we have and do witness the same type of “appallingly horrid thing” in our land that Jeremiah observed in his. We need not imagine how it will end. It has been witnessed over and over again in cultures and societies that have long since died. Can we bring ourselves to repent before it is too late? The answer lies in each of us.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*(edition: april 23, 2024 )*

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<sup>11</sup> Jeremiah 4.<sup>23-26</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See Jeremiah 5.<sup>12-13</sup>; author’s translation