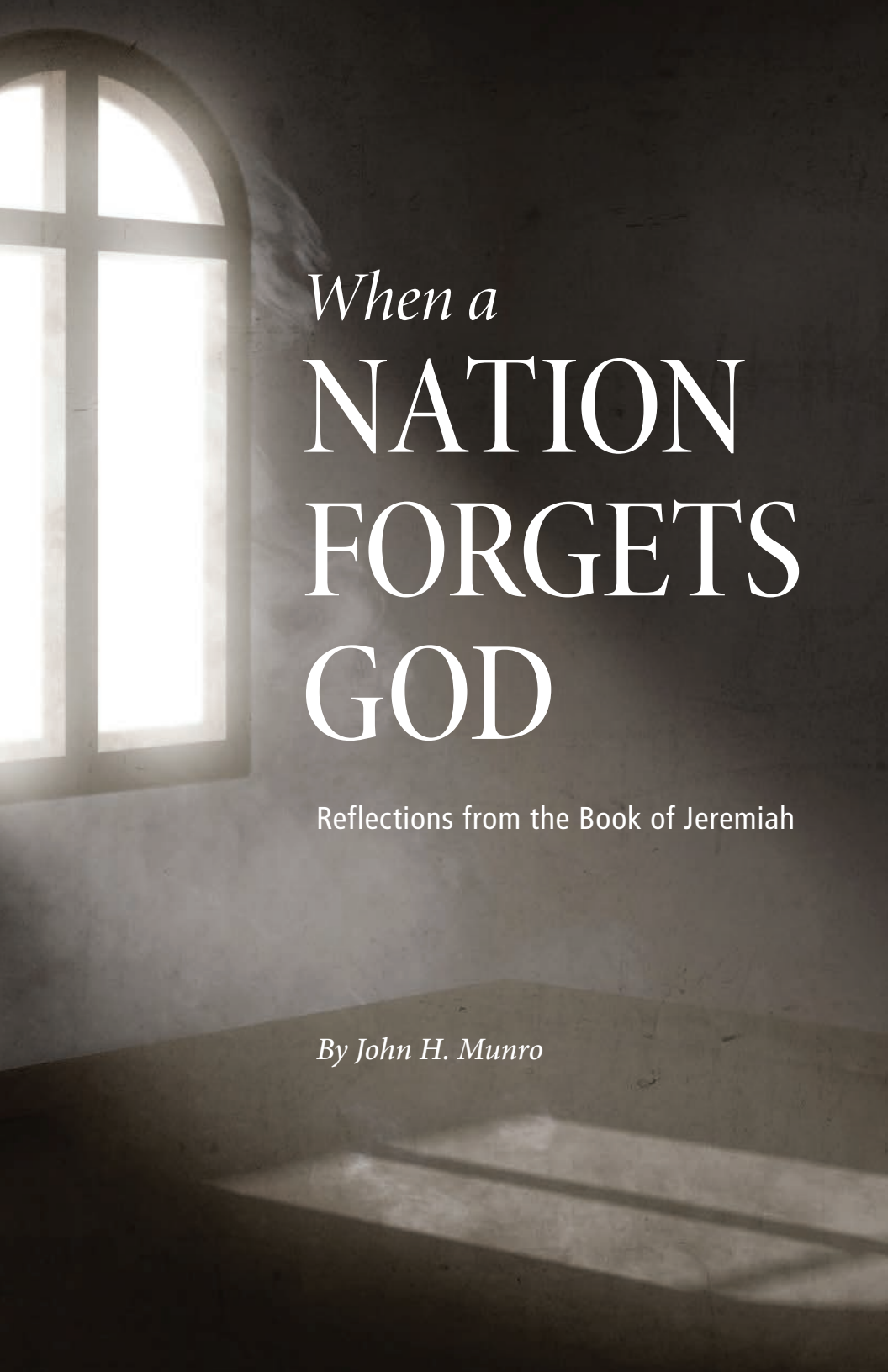
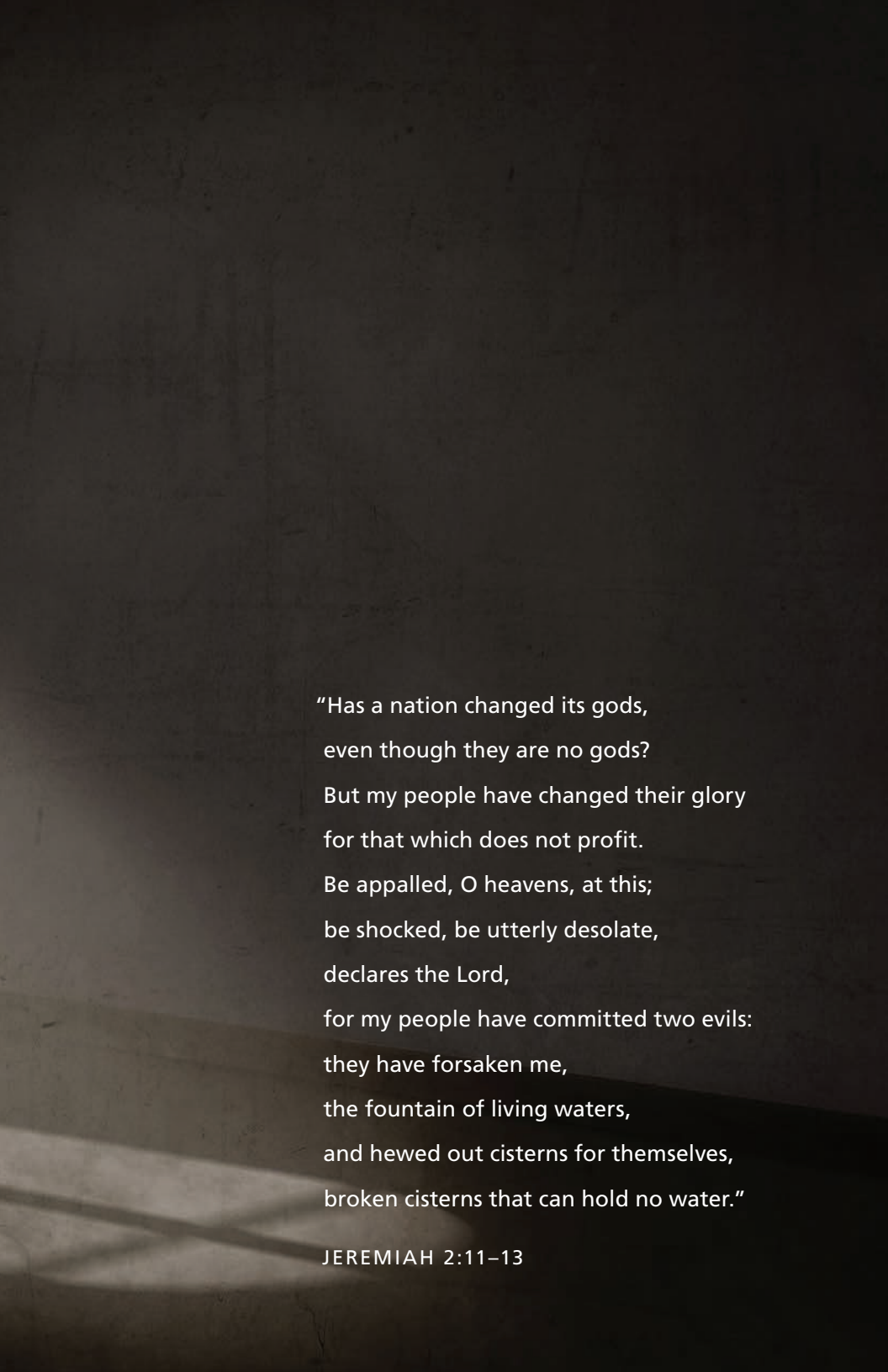


When a NATION FORGETS GOD

Reflections from the Book of Jeremiah

By John H. Munro

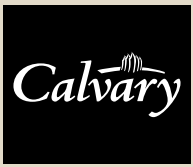


"Has a nation changed its gods,
even though they are no gods?
But my people have changed their glory
for that which does not profit.
Be appalled, O heavens, at this;
be shocked, be utterly desolate,
declares the Lord,
for my people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me,
the fountain of living waters,
and hewed out cisterns for themselves,
broken cisterns that can hold no water."

JEREMIAH 2:11–13

THE VERDICT

WITH PASTOR JOHN H. MUNRO



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When a NATION FORGETS GOD

Reflections from the Book of Jeremiah

By John H. Munro

AUTHOR'S NOTE

At first glance, the Old Testament book of Jeremiah may seem a strange book to study, but it is part of the Holy Scripture and cannot be dismissed. And the parallels between Jeremiah's time and ours are striking and thought-provoking!

During the time of Jeremiah, the nation of Israel abandoned God. They committed abominations and lost the capacity to blush. They also trusted in religious observances rather than having a living faith in the one true God.

In these dark spiritual conditions, God called a young man, Jeremiah, to be His prophet and declare an unpopular message of judgment to the nation. Yet despite the reality of judgment, we still see the love of God, the mercy of God, and the patience of God at work in the lives of His people. As Jeremiah explains, if Israel repents and returns to the Lord, the Lord will forgive and restore them, and they will have a future and a hope.

We live in our own dark and uncertain times. And our nation, with its many blessings from God, its remarkable history, and even the motto "In God We Trust," is increasingly marginalizing and even denying God.

What is going to happen? Has God abandoned us? Are we beyond hope? I encourage you to bring these questions to our study of Jeremiah. In Holy Scripture, God gives us solemn warnings—but also hope, encouragement, and the way of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dr. John H. Munro

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An introduction to

Jeremiah

Read Jeremiah 1

WHY STUDY JEREMIAH? Shouldn't we, who are followers of Jesus Christ or those interested in spiritual truth, focus on the New Testament and deal with contemporary and practical issues? Here is the response of the apostle Paul in the New Testament book of Romans: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

The Old Testament is part of Holy Scripture, written for our instruction and encouragement during tough times so that we might have hope. In Jeremiah, we will learn from the idolatry of the Israelites who abandoned the true and living God and worshiped false gods.

Jeremiah delivered the message of God and called the people of Israel to repentance. Those who are following Christ have a similar calling. If there is no repentance, judgment is coming. So, this ancient book of Jeremiah has both warnings and encouragements that are relevant to us today.

Approach and Historical Context

The Old Testament book of Jeremiah is a very long book of 52 chapters, and the content is not always presented chronologically. So, we will not go verse

by verse but will deal with central themes, referencing key passages. Be ready to open your Bible and follow along. References refer to the book of Jeremiah unless otherwise noted.

It is also helpful to understand the historical background. After the death of King Solomon, the twelve tribes of Israel were divided. The northern kingdom was known as Israel, and the southern kingdom was known as Judah. The northern kingdom was defeated by the Assyrians in 722 BC. Jeremiah served as a prophet of God to the southern kingdom for over 40 years, from 627 to 585 BC. During the time of Jeremiah, there are three main kings of Judah: Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah.

Israel is located in the center of the world in what is known as the Promised Land. Some Israelis say, "God gave us a beautiful land, but He gave us difficult neighbors." In Jeremiah's time, the difficult neighbors were the Assyrians to the north, the Babylonians to the east, and the Egyptians to the south.

In 605 BC, the Babylonians defeated the Assyrians and the Egyptians and became the superpower of the day. God calls Jeremiah to warn the southern kingdom (Judah) that Babylon is about to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple.

The Call of Jeremiah

> *Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."*
>
> *Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth."*
>
> *But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord."*
>
> *Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."*
> *— Jeremiah 1:4–10*

Jeremiah comes from the little town of Anathoth, just outside Jerusalem. God set the direction of Jeremiah's life. God "formed" him; God "consecrated" him; God "appointed" him (1:5). It was God who chose Jeremiah to be a prophet. Jeremiah was set apart by God before he was born. What an incredible thought: God has this personal knowledge of us and loves us before we are even born.

Like Jeremiah, each one of us is made by God, known by God, and created by God for a specific purpose. Jesus said to His disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit" (John 15:16). Your life is not for you to live any way you want. If we are wise, we bow to God's sovereign purposes for our lives. And when you do God's will, you feel His pleasure, even when the surrounding culture is hostile.

Jeremiah's Task

Jeremiah is called to be a prophet speaking the words of God (9). Initially, Jeremiah is reluctant to accept the task! But those whom God calls, He empowers and equips. Our response should be, "Lord what do you want me to do?" "Where am I to serve you?"

Jeremiah is to speak the Word to "nations and kingdoms," calling them to repentance (10). Delivering this message will require great courage. He is to "pluck up" nations and turn them over. He is also "to break down," probably referring to demolishing idols. Yet, there is also a message of restoration and renewal. Jeremiah is to "build and plant" (10). Demolition and restoration! Isn't that what occurs when the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives? Sin is uprooted; obedience is planted.

God's Promises to Jeremiah

Notice that the Lord also graciously makes several promises to Jeremiah. He promises to give Jeremiah the words to speak (7, 9). Repeatedly in Jeremiah we read: "And the word of the Lord came to me, saying" (1:4, 11, 13; 2:1). Jeremiah is not to give his own opinions or ideas, but "let him who has my word speak my word faithfully" (23:28). In an age of tolerance and evil, we must speak God's truth in love.

Jeremiah is also promised the presence of the Lord (8, 19). "Don't be afraid, for I am with you" is a constant command in Scripture. Jeremiah will be ridiculed, persecuted, beaten, and imprisoned. But in all these situations, he is assured that the Lord is with him. Just as our Lord Jesus promises His followers in the Great Commission: "And I am with you always even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

There is also the promise of the Lord's care and strength (12, 19). Wherever Jeremiah goes, the Lord will watch over him. Wherever he goes, the Lord will give him the strength he needs. Jeremiah will be like an iron pillar (18). He will stand strong against all the kings, officials, and priests who oppose him. Followers of Jesus Christ know that God is with us. He cares for us. He protects us. He strengthens us. Therefore, be strong and courageous. God is watching over you. God is always faithful to His promises.

■ *For Prayer and Reflection*

Jeremiah is called by God. God also has a call on your life. Have you surrendered to His call? Will you obey Him and follow Him wherever He leads?

Followers of Jesus Christ are called to be the voice of God—to display and proclaim Jesus Christ as God's way of salvation. The message is not ours but God's. We are commanded to go into all the world with the good news of the Gospel (Matthew 28:18–20). But the message is also a warning. Those who do not repent and believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ will experience the eternal judgment of God (2 Thessalonians 1:8–9).

The people of Judah thought they were immune to the judgment of God (7:3–4). They refused to hear the Word of God (25:3–4). The Babylonian Captivity was the result (25:8, 9, 11). Jerusalem was going to be overthrown, and the temple destroyed. God is not mocked. What we sow, we reap. The United States has been blessed as few countries have been. But we are like ancient Judah. We have turned from God. We not only practice evil, we applaud it.

There is increasing opposition in our culture. Claim the Lord's unassailable promises. Stand steadfast on His Word. Rely on God's strength and guidance. Live by faith each day and be among those whom "God is not ashamed to be called their God" (Hebrews 11:16).

CHAPTER ONE

The Unthinkable Happens

Read Jeremiah 2–5

THE NATION OF ISRAEL FORGOT GOD. This is inconceivable! Israel had no reason at all to forget God, their Creator and Redeemer. God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, parted the Red Sea, and led them through the wilderness. He protected and provided for them, bringing them "into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things" (2:7). The Lord had been abundantly gracious and good to Israel.

Yet fourteen times in Jeremiah, we read they forgot God (2:17, 19, 32). Fifteen times, we read that the people of God disobeyed. Thirty-four times, we read that they did not listen to Him. What did they do? They committed spiritual adultery. They worshiped false gods (1:16; 2:27).

The spiritual leadership of the nation totally failed (2:8; 5:30–31). Rather than being faithful to the Word of God, the priests (the spiritual shepherds) and the prophets gave false prophecies; they gave their own opinions. And the people loved to have it so. Sound familiar? What the nation had done was appalling, shocking, and deserving of utter desolation (2:11–12). And Jeremiah is delivering God's call to repentance, "I bring disaster from the north, and great destruction" (4:6).

The United States is forgetting God.

Our nation, with its many blessings from God, is increasingly forgetting God, ignoring God, and even denying God. Like ancient Israel, the fear of God is not in us (2:19).

We have same-sex marriages, openly gay preachers and pastors, rampant divorce, transgenderism, and epidemic immorality. We now not only tolerate sinful conduct, we openly applaud it! And if we don't applaud, we are regarded as backward and bigoted. The prophet Isaiah writes, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" (Isaiah 5:20).

Meanwhile, many churches are strangely silent. Biblical preaching and the teaching of doctrine are de-emphasized, if not ignored, and replaced by sermonettes designed to make us feel good, inspiring and sentimental stories, political ideology, traditions, pragmatic and therapeutic techniques, hype, fun, excitement, raw emotionalism, and pop psychology. Attempting to be cool, many churches simply mirror the surrounding pagan culture.

What do we expect when we go to our physicians? They are to identify our physical problems and instruct us on how to remain healthy. What are spiritual shepherds supposed to do? Proclaim God's perfect truth. Feed people "with knowledge and understanding" (3:15). The spiritual leaders in Jeremiah's time (and many in our time) "will become wind; the word is not in them" (5:13). Wind bags! "And My people love to have it so" (5:31). People don't want the truth.

What about you? Do you want spiritual leaders who proclaim the truth? The apostle Paul warned Timothy about the time when people "will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths" (2 Timothy 4:3–4).

Our nation has turned from listening to the truth, has forgotten God, and pursued idols such as money, sensuality, success, entertainment, and sport. Idolatry is worshiping something or someone other than God. We have

chosen to dethrone God and put ourselves at the center of our lives. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

What happens when people forget God?

When God is forgotten, life becomes meaningless. Consider the case of Israel. "They went far from Me and went after worthlessness and became worthless" (2:5). Solomon uses the concept of "worthlessness" in Ecclesiastes. Life without God is vapor, vanity, pointless, and empty. They "went after things that do not profit" (2:8). Chasing after wind!

Pursuing false gods is a worthless and pointless endeavor. When trouble and judgment come, there is nothing these idols can do (2:28). Where do you go in your time of trouble? Listen to what the Lord is saying through Jeremiah. Life without God is meaningless. "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36).

The Lord describes the people as committing two evils (2:13). First, they have forgotten the Lord, "the fountain of living waters." Second, they have "hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water." Keep in mind that water is a rare commodity in ancient Israel. This is utter madness!

Why would you leave a spring of fresh water and drink from an old, cracked cistern that can't hold water? Any water in it is old, dirty, stagnant, polluted, stale, and infested with insects and disease. What the people have done is disgusting and appalling! They have exchanged the glory of God for false idols (2:11).

> *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things." — Romans 1:21–23*

This is what happens when a nation, a family, a church, or an individual forgets God. We live meaningless lives chasing the wind.

For Prayer and Reflection

Are you forgetting God? Are you marginalizing God? God must never be taken for granted. Each day of our lives, we are to thank Him, praise Him, and realign our lives with the living and true God who is good, compassionate, and merciful.

You may have drunk deeply of the many experiences and pleasures of the world. But they have left you dissatisfied, empty, and disappointed. Never have so many people pursued so many new experiences. And never have so many people been bored, discontent, and insecure.

Listen to Jesus, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again" (John 4:14). You are created by God. You are accountable to God. Do not forsake God. Do not take God for granted. He is the living sovereign Lord. He created you for a purpose. Don't drink from the broken cisterns of the world. Find your fulfillment in a living relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER TWO

A Message of Repentance

Read Jeremiah 6–8

THE NATION OF ISRAEL ABANDONED GOD. They forgot the living and the true God, the God who had delivered them from Egyptian slavery, the God who had parted the Red Sea. They forgot the God who had provided for them during the 40 years in the wilderness and led them into the Promised Land. But it was worse than that.

Not only had they forgotten the Lord, the fountain of living waters, but they had pursued and partaken of the polluted waters of the idols of the pagan nations. This was appalling—a shocking act of treachery and spiritual adultery. They forgot God and "went after worthlessness and became worthless" (2:5).

When faced with the truth, either our hearts become softer, and we receive the truth, or we resist the truth, and in so doing, our hearts become harder. In the case of Israel, Jeremiah said, "They refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rocks, they have refused to repent" (5:3). Jeremiah preached more about repentance than any other prophet. Repentance is not a very popular word. It sounds so negative, so old-fashioned. Who wants to be told they need to repent?

Yet when Jesus began His public ministry He said, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel"

(Mark 1:15). Jesus said to His disciples before His ascension, "Repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:47). On the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38).

The False Security of Religion

Tragically, Israel had a false sense of security (7:3–4). They had violated the commandments of God but felt secure because of their magnificent temple. They were aware of their enemies (Egypt to the south and Babylon to the north), but they thought they were safe. Surely God would not allow His temple to be destroyed. "This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord" (7:4). They were trusting in their religiosity and their heritage. But they were deceiving themselves.

The promises the Lord had made to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant—land, numbers, and blessings—made them assume they were invulnerable as a nation. But Jeremiah calls on them to repent (7:3). If they don't repent, the ritual of temple worship will not protect them. He tells them to remember Shiloh (7:12, 14).

Shiloh was a reminder that God had judged the nation in the past. Shiloh was where the tabernacle was erected when Israel first came into the Promised Land (Joshua 18:1). The people of Israel began to think they were invincible because they carried the ark of the covenant into battle. Instead of trusting in God, they put their trust in the ark of the covenant. But the Lord allowed Shiloh to be destroyed. The desolation of Shiloh is a reminder that the temple by itself does not guarantee Israel's security. The nation must repent.

What would repentance look like in Israel? Jeremiah gives a fourfold description: justice (7:5); not oppressing the immigrant, the widow, or the orphan (7:6); not shedding innocent blood (7:6); and not going after other gods (7:6). This still applies. The people of God are to be people of justice. We are to treat well the oppressed, the marginalized, the immigrant, the poor, and the orphan. We are not to shed innocent blood but uphold the sanctity of life (a warning against abortion, euthanasia, and murder).

When a nation forsakes God, inevitably the people worship other gods and disobey the commands of God. Is this the United States today? Our country has forgotten how to blush (6:15). We are not ashamed. We take pride in our sin and are most upset if it is not applauded. Do we think that because we go to church, sing some hymns, and give some money, God will accept us?

Our faith must make a difference in how we live (2 Corinthians 5:17). Religious observance without humble obedience will not save you (1 Samuel 15:22; Hosea 6:6). If you are pursuing false gods, living in disobedience to the Word of God, or embracing the pagan culture, your churchgoing, your religiosity, and your good deeds will not exempt you from God's judgment. The answer is repentance.

The Meaning of Authentic Repentance

Authentic repentance means an acknowledgment of specific sins. A.W. Tozer said, "Beware of vain and over-hasty repentance. Particularly let us beware of no repentance at all." Regret, tears, and shame, may be present without authentic repentance before God. Prisons are full of people who say they are sorry—sorry they have been caught, sorry for themselves, sorry for the consequences of their actions.

The Westminster Confession of Faith states, "Men ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every man's duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins, particularly." What are you specifically and particularly repenting of? Don't hide behind platitudes and generalities, such as "I have a problem. I have an issue. No one is perfect." Expose the sin, isolate the sin, name the sin. Sin wants to be left alone; sin loves secrets. But God wants sin exposed.

Don't see yourself as a victim. Take responsibility for your sin. The prodigal son in Luke 15 experienced true repentance when he said to his father, "I have sinned against heaven and before you." He realized he was no longer worthy to be called a son but deserved to be treated as a hired servant. Authentic repentance stops pointing the finger at others. The prodigal does not blame his father or brother. "Only acknowledge your guilt, that you rebelled against the Lord your God" (Jeremiah 3:13).

Authentic repentance means a change of attitude and action. It means you are going in one direction, but now turn and go another way. Jeremiah often uses the term "return."

> *"Return, faithless Israel, declares the Lord. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, declares the Lord; I will not be angry forever." — Jeremiah 3:12*

> *"Return, O faithless children, declares the Lord; for I am your master." — Jeremiah 3:14*

> *"Return, O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness." — Jeremiah 3:22*

You may be caught in a terrible cycle of sin, glib confession, sin again, and so on, because you may have never actually turned from your sin. Jesus said to the immoral woman, "go, and from now on sin no more" (John 8:11). Biblical repentance is not just a confession of the lips but a changed heart and life.

Being regretful and sorry doesn't necessarily change anything. Authentic repentance changes and transforms our lives. It is going on a different path. It is amending our ways. Genuine repentance forsakes the sin. It turns from our wrong path to the Lord's path of righteousness. In authentic repentance, we come to a crossroads, and God's Word is our infallible guide.

> *Thus says the Lord: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls." — Jeremiah 6:16*

> *Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. — Jeremiah 7:3*

> *But this command I gave them: 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.' — Jeremiah 7:23*

Authentic repentance means asking God for forgiveness of your sin. When we acknowledge our sin is against God, we realize we need God's forgiveness. Our sin impacts ourselves and others, but above all our sin is against God. When we confess our sins, we agree with God that we have done wrong.

We can claim God's forgiveness if we have placed our trust in Jesus as Savior. Because Jesus died on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for all sin, His blood cleanses us from sin and all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7–10).

When you come to Him in true brokenness and confession, the Lord will not turn you away. God loves to forgive and to restore His people. It was God who made a way for your salvation, even in the face of your sin. "He restores my soul" (Psalm 23:3).

■ *For Prayer and Reflection*

Perhaps you have never known the forgiveness of sins. Perhaps there has not been authentic repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus. Maybe you have tried by your own efforts to get rid of your guilt, to atone for your sins—but to no avail. You need supernatural cleansing and divine transformation. You need God's forgiveness.

Today, come to the cross of Jesus Christ. Realize that when He died on the cross, He died for your sins, and His blood cleanses you from all sin. No sin is so small that it does not need forgiveness; no sin is so great that God will not forgive you. What joy to have your sins forgiven and to enjoy a restored relationship with God! "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12).

CHAPTER THREE

Making Scarecrow Idols

Read Jeremiah 9–12

IF YOU ARE A FOLLOWER OF JESUS CHRIST, do you find living for Christ difficult? God has given the prophet Jeremiah a very tough assignment. He is to bring a message of repentance and judgment to the nation of Israel. And in the midst of his difficult task, Jeremiah asks God honest and emotional questions: "Why?" "Why do you allow the wicked to prosper?" "Why do you allow this to happen, God?" "How long will this last?"

Notice the Lord's answer, "If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? And if in a safe land you are so trusting, what will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?" (12:5). In other words, if you think the going is tough now, Jeremiah, you haven't seen anything yet! Jeremiah's tough assignment is going to become even more difficult. Instinctively, we think that if we follow Jesus Christ and seek to obey God's Word to live as a "good person," life will be easy. That's not always the case!

Do you find yourself falling apart when disappointments and setbacks come into your life? How do you think you will handle the future? Jeremiah will tell us that we must stop looking at scarecrows and look up to our great God.

Don't follow contemporary society.

At the time of the prophet Samuel, the Israelites wanted a king. They didn't listen to Samuel but said, "No! But there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:19–20). The desire to conform to the surrounding nations (to be like everyone else) is a very strong human emotion. Go with the flow. Don't stand out. Israel was to be "a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6), distinct from the other nations. But the people insisted on learning "the way of the nations" to their destruction.

We are often like Israel. Instead of following the Lord, we follow our surrounding culture. Instead of being transformed by God, we are conformed to the world. The trends and customs of our surrounding society are "vanity" (10:3): worthless, pointless, meaningless. "Learn not the way of the nations, nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens because the nations are dismayed at them" (10:2).

Realize the folly of idols.

"Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field" (10:5). Can you picture this? A farmer erects a structure in the middle of his field to scare away the crows and other birds. It is a stick-like, helpless, and pathetic figure. The farmer can put a hat on its head and clothes on its frame, but it is still a scarecrow. Jeremiah's point? The scarecrow can do absolutely nothing.

This is a vivid illustration of what Israel has done. The people have turned away from God, the all-powerful Creator, the fountain of living waters. They cut down a tree from the forest, hammered a few pieces of wood together, and decorated it with silver and gold. And this is what they want to worship? This is utter folly and stupidity (10:3–8).

But isn't this what we do? We erect scarecrows of comfort, success, education, entertainment, money, sport, and pleasure. And we worship them! We make scarecrow idols and become "worthless" (2:5). To say the obvious, these idols are totally hopeless in helping us in our time of need.

Are there any scarecrows in your life?

God will have no rivals and is opposed to all scarecrows. Consider the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). The apostle John writes, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). We are not to allow anything to supersede our love for God.

Let me offer a quiz to help you determine whether you have any scarecrow idols in your life. You grade yourself!

What do you love in life?

In your free moments, what do you think about?

How do you spend your money?

What do you choose to do in your spare time?

Who or what gives you security? What or whom are you trusting for the future?

How did you do? To love or trust in anything more than God is to make it an idol. If you are trusting in your riches, you are making your resources your god. If you are an anxious person, you are allowing your circumstances to control you and be your god. If you love your family or friends more than God, you are making them a god.

Also, be wary of saying, "My God is like this!" Too often, we try to fashion an idea of God that fits into our ideas and culture. Our perception does not define God. He has graciously given us the revelation of His Word and the gift of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, so we may know and worship Him. Don't worship false gods.

Boast only in the true God.

Resist any misplaced urge to boast in the scarecrows of your ability, resources, or achievements (9:23–24). The wise men of Jeremiah's day will be put to shame (8:8–9). True wisdom comes from God. Our natural intelligence comes from God. Any strength or talents we have all come from God.

The Lord is the one true God, the everlasting King (10:6, 10, 12, 13). We are born, grow old, and die, but God is eternally present. He is the ever-present

One: I AM who I AM. Everlasting, almighty, and utterly unique. Think of the power and brilliant wisdom of this God who speaks and the worlds come into existence! Why would you leave Him and worship scarecrows?

■ *For Prayer and Reflection*

Don't try to work out your own path in life. You will end up worshiping yourself or something as foolish as a scarecrow in a patch of cucumbers. Listen to Jeremiah: "I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps" (10:23). Don't direct your own steps or follow the steps of another. They will only lead you away from the Lord.

The wisdom of God and the power of God are demonstrated in the cross of Christ. What to the world may seem like foolishness (a crucified Savior) is a display of God's wisdom and power. Our only boast should be in our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:31). Why? He is to us "wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Demolish the scarecrows in your life. They will never save you. Surrender your life to Jesus Christ, and in Him you will know the one true God. Follow and worship Him.

CHAPTER FOUR

Plans of a Future and a Hope

Read Jeremiah 29

ALL OF US NEED HOPE. Without hope, we die. To live without hope is to plunge into the darkness of despair and depression. Despite the faithlessness of Israel and God's message of judgment, we will see that God still had plans for them. And God has plans for you—plans for a future and a hope!

> *"For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile." — Jeremiah 29:10–14*

Understand the historical context.

These are some of the best-known verses in the book of Jeremiah. Many people have these verses framed in their homes or have memorized them. But while a favorite verse on a calendar might be encouraging, the key to

interpreting Scripture is context. To fully understand Jeremiah 29:10–14, we must understand the historical context.

Israel has forgotten God. Not only have they turned their face from God, but they have also pursued worthless things and fallen into pagan idolatry. Jeremiah's message to the nation is to return to the Lord. Repent, or the Babylonians will destroy the Temple and take you into captivity for 70 years (25:6–11). The message is clear, repeated, and unambiguous. But the people do not listen.

In 597 BC, around 3,000 Jews had already been taken captive to Babylon. Others were going to be taken captive, culminating in the final captivity and destruction of the Temple in 586 BC. In Jeremiah 29, the prophet writes a letter to the 3,000 exiles. Some of the exiled false prophets said Babylon would soon fall, and the exiles would shortly return. But Jeremiah, who is in Israel, writes the letter warning the exiles not to listen to the false prophets (8–9). The exiles should trust in the Lord's promise of restoration (10–13).

The plans are God's, not ours.

Notice God makes the plans: "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord" (11). What were the plans and the future for the exiles? Live a God-centered life with humble repentance. What gave them hope? After 70 years of captivity in Babylon, God will bring them back to the Promised Land (10).

If you are going to live a God-centered life, you must follow God's plans for you. So often, we make our plans and schedule and then ask God to bless them. God knows the plans He has for you. Don't oppose God. Don't resist Him. Don't think you know better than God.

Seek the Lord daily.

The exiles in Babylon are to seek the Lord. They are to "call upon the Lord." They are to "come and pray" to the Lord (12). They are to "seek" the Lord and "find the Lord." They are to do this "with all (their) heart." Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

Are you calling on the Lord? Or are you looking to the scarecrow idols in your life for comfort, for happiness, for success, for fulfillment?

"Seek the Lord while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."
— Isaiah 55:6–7

Turn from your sin. Perhaps you are not seeing God at work in your life because you have not forsaken your sinful ways. Seek the Lord daily, and He will be found.

Live for God in the present.

How were the Israelites to live for the Lord in pagan Babylon? The answer may surprise you! Protest? Sabotage? Isolate? Quite the contrary. Don't rebel. Get involved. Live as responsible citizens. Build houses, plant gardens, take wives, give daughters in marriage, seek the welfare of Babylon, and pray "to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (7).

Consider the example of Daniel. Although he was a captive in Babylon, Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were the best students at the University of Babylon. They were trusted, respected, and promoted as rulers "over the affairs of the province of Babylon" (Daniel 2:49).

But they refused to be defiled by the culture and idolatry of Babylon. They refused to bow to Nebuchadnezzar. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were delivered from the fiery furnace. Daniel was delivered from the lions' den. They honored and served God in pagan Babylon, and God honored them. They were in Babylon, but Babylon was not in them! We follow the Word of God, not the pagan contemporary society, and not our own ideas.

You may be looking to the future, but what about the present? God's will for you today is that you do everything to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Be a responsible person today. Seek the welfare of the community where you live and the place where you work. Don't waste your time. Display Jesus Christ to those around you. God often guides us in the routine tasks of life. Be faithful where you are today.

Trust the Lord for your future.

Although they were disobedient, judged by God, and taken captive, God had not rejected His people. The promises of the Abrahamic Covenant and His prophets still stood. If the people repented and sought the Lord with all their hearts, they would find Him. And after 70 years, they would return to the Promised Land. Our Lord is good and gracious, patient and forgiving. And He is always faithful to His promises.

We read in chapters 32 and 33 that during this national crisis, Jeremiah buys property in his hometown of Anathoth—land in the middle of the warzone! From a human perspective, this seems ridiculous. Why would he do this?

This purchase was an act of faith. Jeremiah took God at His Word. He believed that Israel would be restored to the land after the captivity. Jeremiah's faith was not just theoretical but active and dynamic. "Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Do you have such faith in God—a living faith? A faith that results in action? Just as God was faithful to His promises to bring the Israelites back from Babylon to Israel, He will be faithful to you. If you seek the Lord, you will find Him. He has magnificent plans for you, plans for a future and a hope. Don't despair. Don't give up. In the words of Corrie Ten Boom, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God."

■ *For Prayer and Reflection*

Today is a day of grace, a day of pardon, a day of forgiveness if you seek the Lord and call upon Him. No one is excluded. No sin is too horrible or too shameful to keep you from the love and forgiveness of God.

In His great love and mercy, God sent His perfect Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to die for our sins and conquer death and darkness. Call upon Jesus Christ, and He will save you. Call on Him, and He will restore you. Call on Him, and He will lead you in His plans and paths of righteousness.

CHAPTER FIVE

A New Covenant

Read Jeremiah 31–32

THE BABYLONIAN CHRONICLE RECORDS the historical fact of Nebuchadnezzar's campaign against Jerusalem in 597 BC and the exile to Babylon. Zedekiah is the last king of Israel before the final Babylonian captivity (1:3). As of the tenth year of Zedekiah's reign, Israel and Judah have not yet repented (32:1). Destruction is about to come.

Jeremiah's direction that they should not resist when the Babylonians come has been rejected. Given his message, Jeremiah is now a prisoner and about to be tried for treason (32:2–3). Jerusalem is under siege. There is a famine. It is a very dark hour for Israel as God's judgment is about to fall.

But in the midst of the darkness, we see the mercy of God. If Israel repents and returns to the Lord, if they acknowledge their guilt, the Lord will forgive them and restore them. They will have a future and a hope. Another part of that future and hope is the glorious promise of the New Covenant (31:31–37) —a covenant which has been fulfilled in part and yet looks beyond to our eternal future.

The Design of the New Covenant

This New Covenant is not to be confused with the "old" covenant made when God delivered the Israelites from Egypt under the leadership of Moses (known as the Mosaic Covenant). God declared His laws in the Mosaic

Covenant, which had the Ten Commandments at its heart. If Israel obeyed, blessings would follow. If Israel disobeyed, curses would follow. The Mosaic Covenant was a conditional covenant since the benefits depended on Israel's obedience (Exodus 19:5–8).

Because of the Mosaic Covenant, many people today still think they can build a relationship with God through keeping His commandments. They look at the law (the Mosaic Law and the commandments) as a set of steps they can follow to reach God.

We must be clear and realize that the Mosaic Covenant itself was good and reflected the holiness of God. But the hearts of Israel were sinful. Israel did not keep their side of the covenant and repeatedly disobeyed. By the time of Jeremiah, the nation had fallen into idolatry. Jeremiah reminds them, "My covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord" (31:32).

If a relationship with God had been possible through the Mosaic Covenant, there would have been no need for a New Covenant. But not one of us can keep the commandments of God. And because of our inability to keep the Old Covenant, God introduces a New (and better) Covenant.

The Old Covenant was a two-party covenant that called for God and Israel to fulfill commitments. But this New Covenant is a one-party covenant. It depends not on what Israel and Judah do but on what God promises to do. Notice the repeated words by the Lord, "I will." And God is always faithful to His promises!

Consider that God was under no obligation to provide this New Covenant. Israel did not deserve it. We do not deserve it. Yet out of His matchless grace and love, He offers this New Covenant—this free gift—which must only be accepted by us. He does all of the work, and we reap all of the benefits. What a gracious God we serve!

The New Covenant made by God is established with the coming of Jesus Christ. The passage in Jeremiah outlining the New Covenant is quoted in the New Testament in Hebrews 8:8–13 as the writer explains the significance and preeminence of Jesus Christ, and how His coming transforms our relationship with God and forms the basis of the New Covenant.

But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. — Hebrews 8:6–7

Three New Covenant Promises Fulfilled

God's laws are written in our minds and on our hearts (31:33). The Ten Commandments were engraved on tablets of stone, but now God's Law is written "on tablets of human hearts" (2 Corinthians 3:3). The Old Covenant focused on external compliance: did we follow the Law? The New Covenant focuses on the internal condition of our hearts. In trusting the Lord Jesus as personal Savior, we are born again. God gives us the indwelling Spirit and His power to do His will. Under the New Covenant we have a new mind and a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26–28.)

We are able to know God personally (31:33–34). Under the Old Covenant, individuals approached God indirectly through priests and sacrifices. At the very heart of the Christian faith is a personal knowledge and direct relationship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Now, we come to God directly and personally through our Lord Jesus, not through any human priest. What is your relationship with God? Is it formal? Ritualistic? Keeping God at arm's length? Or have you trusted in Jesus Christ personally?

Our sins are forgiven (31:34). Under the Old Covenant, animal sacrifices could never "take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Now, through the offering of the perfect and unrepeatable sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, God has promised He will remember our sins "no more." They are completely and absolutely gone!

The Old Covenant is "obsolete and growing old, ready to vanish away" (Hebrews 8:13). The time for that covenant has passed. So don't live under the old mentality of the Mosaic Law. Stop trying to reach God by checking boxes or jumping through religious hoops. Enjoy the promises and blessings of the New Covenant. Receive and experience the glorious freedom of the grace of God.

Future Fulfillment of the New Covenant

This New Covenant given to the house of Israel and Judah (31:31) has been extended to all—Jew and non-Jew—who trust in Jesus Christ. However, it is important to understand that the New Testament church has not replaced Israel as the people of God. Today, Israel is recognized as a nation, but the people of Israel do not yet believe in Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah and are not in full possession of all the Promised Land (Jeremiah 30:1–3).

The New Covenant looks beyond Israel's return from the Babylonian Captivity to when the Lord will restore the fortunes of Israel for all time. God will raise up David their King (30:9), meaning our Lord Jesus Christ (David's greater descendant), when He returns to rule as King of kings and Lord of lords during the Millennial Kingdom. Then all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26), and the nation will be restored to the Promised Land.

We rejoice that ethnic Israel will ultimately return in belief to the land promised to Abraham, now reiterated in the New Covenant (31:1–6). Despite the persecution and prejudice against Israel, the nation will never be wiped out (31:35–37) because God is faithful to His people and His promises.

■ *For Prayer and Reflection*

Our context is somewhat different from the situation of Israel in Jeremiah 31. We don't have a visible enemy waiting to attack, but the forces of darkness continue against the church of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul writes that "in the last days there will come times of difficulty" (2 Timothy 3:1). It is getting more challenging to be an authentic follower of Jesus Christ. And it is not alarmist to anticipate that in the not-too-distant future, those who believe the Word of God may be censored and persecuted.

Yet, the people of God are not people of gloom and despair. If God is for us, then who can be against us? We have a living hope, grounded in the promises of God in the New Covenant, based on the perfect finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Make sure your trust is in Christ so you may know the benefits and blessings of this marvelous, gracious gift of God.

And I will give you a new heart,
and a new spirit I will put within you.
And I will remove the heart of stone
from your flesh and give you a heart of
flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you,
and cause you to walk in my statutes and
be careful to obey my rules.

You shall dwell in the land that I gave
to your fathers, and you shall be my
people, and I will be your God.

EZEKIEL 36:26–28

CHAPTER SIX

Burning God's Word

Read Jeremiah 36

DO YOU READ THE BIBLE? Do you read all of it or just some parts of it? Perhaps a verse a day or a few familiar passages? Do you ignore the parts you don't like?

In Jeremiah 36, we read of King Jehoiakim, who in 605 BC (before the reign of Zedekiah and the siege of Jerusalem) took his knife, cut out the pieces of the Word of God he didn't like, and threw them into the fire until there was nothing left.

> *It was the ninth month, and the king was sitting in the winter house, and there was a fire burning in the fire pot before him. As Jehudi read three or four columns, the king would cut them off with a knife and throw them into the fire in the fire pot, until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the fire pot. Yet neither the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words was afraid, nor did they tear their garments. Even when Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah urged the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them. And the king commanded Jerahmeel the king's son and Seraiah the son of Azriel and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel to seize Baruch the secretary and Jeremiah the prophet, but the Lord hid them.*

Now after the king had burned the scroll with the words that Baruch wrote at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: "Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah has burned."
— Jeremiah 36:22–28

The Inspired Word of God

Whether you believe it or not, the Word of God is inspired and true. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

The Bible has its origin in God, not us. It is the very Word of God. God (who is truth) breathes out the Scriptures. Therefore, the Scriptures are absolute truth and fully trustworthy. All of Scripture is inspired, not just some of it. Notice how many times "all the words" occurs in Jeremiah 36. Every part of the Word of God matters.

God used men like Jeremiah to write the Bible. These writers of Holy Scripture were "carried along" by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21), like a sailing ship being carried along by the wind. The result is what is written is the Word of God, not the opinions or interpretations of man. When the Bible speaks, God speaks.

The Old Testament is the Word of God. Some preachers ignore and reject the Old Testament as they think it is too harsh or irrelevant. Yet Jesus treated the Old Testament historical narratives about Noah, Lot, Abraham, David, and others as records of fact. Jesus often quoted from the Old Testament, and by so doing, He stated what God had said. Likewise, in Hebrews 10:15–17, the writer quotes from Jeremiah 31 and writes that the words are those of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul also writes, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

The New Testament is the Word of God. The apostles received revelation directly from God (1 Corinthians 11:23; 15:3). Paul writes, "For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not

man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:11–12).

Jesus said, "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). All of the Bible is true, not just parts of it. So whether you believe it or not, the Bible is still true. Peter quotes Isaiah, the Old Testament prophet: "The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever" (1 Peter 1:24–25). Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35).

The Indestructible Word of God

King Jehoiakim tried to eradicate the Word of God (36:23–24), but he was not the first or the last to attack God's Word. Satan's ongoing strategy is to undermine the reliability, authority, and accuracy of the Word of God. His question in the Garden of Eden, "Did God actually say?" reverberates today (Genesis 3:1). Skeptics have constantly vilified, ridiculed, and attacked the authority and reliability of Scripture.

When the Bible was first translated into English in 1382, reading it was against the law. William Tyndale was put to death because he persisted in translating the Scriptures into English, as the medieval church did not want the Bible in the hands of the common people. In mid-18th century France, Voltaire tried to stamp out the Bible but failed. Communists and Marxists in Russia, China, and elsewhere have done all they can to ban the Bible, but they, too, have failed. And they will always fail! The Bible has survived intact for over 2000 years and will persist because God's Word is indestructible.

Present Attacks on the Bible

Liberalism

Many liberal churches and denominations do not believe the Bible is the Word of God. They think it contains a mixture of truth and error based on what is reasonable to them. Like Jehoiakim, they throw out the parts they don't like, including creation, miracles, the blood of Christ, eternal punishment, and biblical teaching on marriage, gender, and sexuality. Instead of preaching and teaching the Bible, these churches become a mere echo and mirror of the surrounding pagan culture.

Scientism

This is the view that science has disproved the Bible. We are told to "trust the science. Science is the way to truth." Of course, these statements are not statements of science! If God does not exist and the universe had a beginning (as the Big Bang theory holds), where did the original matter of the Big Bang come from? The German philosopher Martin Heidegger said, "The most basic question is, 'Why is there something and not nothing?'"

While we all appreciate and benefit enormously from the advances of science in so many areas of our lives, science cannot answer the big questions of life: "What was there before the Big Bang?" "Where did we come from?" "Why are we here?" The Bible says, "In the beginning, God…" (Genesis 1:1).

Relativism

Our society holds tolerance as the highest virtue while rejecting the very existence of absolute truth. This relativism leads to subjectivism: my experience is primary rather than objective fact. So, if the truth conflicts with my desires, it is rejected. Unfortunately, this fallacy is embraced by many people, including many professing Christians. Life is all about their happiness, feelings, and personal interpretation of the Bible, allowing them to live remarkably similar lives to their non-Christian friends. In this way, morality and human behavior are reduced to matters of preference. And biblical teaching is ignored—thrown into the fire!

■ *For Prayer and Reflection*

How can I know God? How would I get to know you? Take you to a medical facility, put you through all kinds of tests? No, I would want to meet you, listen to you, and spend time together. Without you talking and revealing yourself to me, I would never be able to get to know you very well.

Has God revealed Himself? Absolutely. He has revealed Himself in creation—just look around! God has also spoken to us in words, which have been written in a book called the Bible, the Word of God. He has also revealed Himself by coming to us in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, who is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

Don't be intimidated by attacks on the Bible. F.B. Myer writes: "The drunken captain may cut in pieces the chart that tells of the rocks in the vessel's course, and put in irons the sailor who calls his attention to it, but neither will avert the crash that must ensue unless the helm is turned. You may destroy the record, but the stubborn facts remain."

King Jehoiakim cut out the parts of the Word of God he did not like and threw them into the fire (36:21–24). But the Word of God was not destroyed (36:32). And God's Word will never be destroyed! "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever" (Isaiah 40:8). Therefore, love it, read it, and obey it.

EPILOGUE

The Fate of a Nation

Read Jeremiah 39–45

FROM THE TIME OF HIS CALL, for over 40 years, Jeremiah delivers a message of repentance and judgment to the people of Judah (1:16). Unless the nation repents, judgment will come, and Jerusalem and Judah will fall to the Babylonians. Jeremiah is opposed by the kings, the priests, and the people of the land who reject the message of God.

The nation had no reason to forsake the living God. "They went far from Me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless" (2:5). They turn their back on God. They abandon God. But it is worse than that. "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (2:12–13). They nail together pieces of wood, adorn them with clothes and ornaments, and worship false gods who can't even move or talk!

In contrast to their pathetic, worthless gods, Jeremiah reminds them that no one is like the Lord. "He is the living God and the everlasting King" (10:10). He is the supreme Almighty Creator, who delivered them from slavery in Egypt and parted the Red Sea. Nothing is too hard for Him. But because they do not listen, and because they do not repent, the judgment of God now comes to Israel.

God's Judgment of Israel

The Israelites should have remembered their history. The Lord brought judgment in the days of Noah with the flood and judged Sodom and Gomorrah with fire. And now, as prophesied by Jeremiah, the Babylonians, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, capture Judah, destroy Jerusalem, set fire to the Temple, and capture King Zedekiah (52:1–16).

The Babylonians slaughter the sons of King Zedekiah before his very eyes. Then, his eyes are put out so that the last thing King Zedekiah sees is the death of his sons. The Babylonians then take Zedekiah in chains to Babylon, where he is imprisoned until his death.

Many are taken captive to Babylon. A remnant of poor workers are left in Israel to cultivate the land. The Babylonians had heard of Jeremiah and released him from prison. He is given a choice to remain in the land of Judah or come to Babylon. Jeremiah chooses to stay in the land, and Nebuchadnezzar appoints Gedaliah as governor to oversee the remnant left in Israel.

Gedaliah, the governor, is later murdered. Those left in Israel believed they should go to Egypt to escape the Babylonians. They ask Jeremiah for counsel, "that the Lord your God may show us the way we should go, and the thing that we should do" (42:3). Although they ask Jeremiah for advice, they do not listen when he tells them not to go to Egypt. They take Jeremiah and go to Egypt, continuing their idolatry there. Jeremiah likely dies in Egypt. The Babylonians later came to Egypt and conquered it. Once again, judgment has come. If there is no repentance, there is no escape from the Lord's judgment.

The Nature of the Lord's Judgment

This matter of the Lord's judgment may be difficult for us. But the Lord's judgment is the reaction of a holy God to sin (25:7–11). God is perfect in who He is and in everything He does. Unlike us, His attributes are perfectly balanced. God is gracious, and He is also truthful. God is compassionate, and He is also just. God is loving, and He is also holy. God forgives, and He also judges.

People ask why God doesn't do something about evil. But when they hear of God's judgment in the Bible or read that He will judge evil in the future, they reject it! Why is that? A good God is not neutral in the face of evil. We crave justice in an unjust world and can take comfort in the Lord's judgment, which is always just.

The Reality of Future Judgment

Jesus said, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

We are created to glorify God, to reflect the image of God. But like Israel, we pursue our own desires. We want to worship a god with whom we are comfortable, a god who makes us feel good about ourselves and helps us fulfill our dreams and desires—in other words, a false god we create and control. We have made idols of our possessions, careers, and relationships as we displace God and put ourselves at the center of our lives.

The Lord's judgment in the past is a foretaste of judgment that will take place in the future. "It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). As a preacher of God's Word, I must warn you—judgment is coming. In the last days, God's final judgment of evil will include the eternal judgment of those who are unrepentant and who have chosen their idols over the gift of God's forgiveness and grace.

> *When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.*
> *— 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10*

The Opportunity to Escape Judgment

God, in His love, has provided each of us the only way of escape from His judgment. In Christ's death on the cross, the wrath of God is satisfied. The perfect sacrifice of Christ bridges the gap between sinful people like us and the holy God. The apostle Peter writes: "For Christ also suffered

once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). Jesus is the only way to God. This is the good news of the Gospel.

There must be authentic repentance before God: an acknowledgment of your specific sins, a change of attitude and action, and an embracing of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Christ saves us from our sins, not so that we can continue in our sinful ways, but so that we can demonstrate our repentance in new lives, trusting God and His Word, and showing love and forgiveness to those who have offended us.

God will judge those who trust in themselves and their own efforts. But those who trust in the Lord are blessed by God (17:5–7). Jeremiah repeatedly called on the people to return to the Lord and repent (3:12–14). When Jesus began His public ministry, He said, "Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

What will you choose?

■ *My Prayer and Reflection*

He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.
The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

PSALM 1:3–4

THE VERDICT

WITH PASTOR JOHN H. MUNRO

"Where the Gospel is preached, the lives of men and women and boys and girls are transformed. Through His death and resurrection, Christ gives us peace with God, present power for living, and future hope for eternal life." — John H. Munro

The Verdict is a radio and podcast ministry featuring the expository Bible teaching of Pastor John Munro.

Born and raised in Scotland, John graduated from the University of Edinburgh and practiced law in Scotland before God called him to full-time ministry. He and his wife, Gudny, moved to Texas, where he attended Dallas Theological Seminary.

For more than 30 years, John has dedicated his life to pastoral ministry, preaching and teaching the Word of God. He presently serves as Senior Pastor of Calvary Church in Charlotte, North Carolina.

On The Verdict, listeners are challenged to turn to the Bible and render a "verdict" as they consider their personal response to the truth of God's Word. John Munro presents a clear examination of Scripture, offering insight and application for all backgrounds, from those unfamiliar with the Gospel to mature believers following Christ.

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