

Oh, Adonai ELOHIM!

Surely You Have Deceived This People

Jeremiah's First Complaint

4: 5-18

DIG: Where did the disaster come from that was about to strike Judah? Who will be affected by the invasion? Who was really "deceiving" the people? What do the people think will happen to them? What five word pictures does Yirmeyahu use to describe the Babylonians? Can Jerusalem be saved? How so (see 3:23 and 4:1-2)? Why has God brought the Babylonians to attack His people?

REFLECT: The false prophets told the people of Judah that they didn't need to change because ADONAI would never punish them (3:10). What was in it for the prophets and their listeners? Who tends to "profit" from such "prophets?" Do you know of any situations where trouble is coming unless people change? What, if anything, can you do to help them? When you get yourself in trouble, do you blame God? Or take responsibility for your actions? When your life ends up in the ditch, is it because YHVH moved away from you, or did you move away from Him? What can you do?

During the reign of Josiah

Like a clap of thunder, the sound of **the shofar** is heard as an unidentified army approaches. The horsemen and bowmen advance, destroying small cities along the way. The leaders of **Tziyon** fail in the time of crisis. YHVH announces His inflexible purpose. **Jeremiah** cries his personal anguish. The scene concludes with the death-screams of **the City of David** personified as a woman. The reason for this impending tragedy is clearly stated in **4:18**, but this is not the heart of the section. **The prophet** is not primarily foretelling military events, nor is he laying blame for the sorrows that were certainly to come. No, he is primarily calling his people to repent (**shuwb**). The heart of the section is this: **Yerushalayim, wash the evil from your heart and be saved (4:14a).**⁵⁹

YHVH declared: **Announce in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem: Sound the shofar. The Land was being threatened! Cry aloud and say: Gather together! Let us flee to the fortified cities (4:5)!** The purpose here was to warn. God was initiating the process by which the invader was coming. It was not that **the LORD** allowed the invader to slip in. No. **He** summoned the invader to come and **destroy Judah**. **She** had been acting like the world and **Ha'Shem** was declaring holy war against **her**. **She** was now the enemy of **God (Ja 4:4)**.

Raise the signal to go to Tziyon! The signal was a pole with a banner on it (Isaiah 5:26). It showed an invading army that was well spread out the way they must go for the attack. And now **a signal** has been raised pointing toward Yerushalayim as the place to be attacked from the north. **Flee for safety without delay! For I am bringing disaster from the north even terrible destruction (4:6).**

Now that **the shofar** had sounded, the people fled to **Jerusalem** and **her** protective walls. Farmers and tradesmen would drop their work on the spot, gather up their wives, children and servants and make a mad dash for **the City**, hoping that they could get within the safety of her gates before they were closed. Hoping also that the elders had made adequate provision for food and water for the duration of the siege. Sieges in ancient times could last a long time. Nebuchadnezzar besieged the Phoenician city of Tyre for thirteen years before the city acknowledged Babylonian sovereignty. And **Tziyon herself**, in **her** final besieging, would hold out for twenty months from the 10th of Tevet 588 BC to the 9th of Av 586 BC.

A lion has come out of his lair. The lion was the symbol of Babylon, although Babylon was still unnamed at this point (49:19; 50:17 and 44) – **a destroyer of nations has set out.** **The words emphasize both the might and ruthlessness of the attacker.** He has left his place to destroy your Land. **Your towns will lie in ruins without inhabitant (4:7).** In theory, it might have been possible for Judah to handle a human enemy; but to be opposed by YHVH, who brings on and who sponsors an enemy, was an impossible situation. No wonder Yirmeyahu urged Judah to lament, wail and put on sackcloth, a sign of mourning, for the fierce anger of Ha'Shem has not turned away (**shuwb**) from us (4:8).⁶⁰ **God was still angry with His people because they had not repented . . . or their repentance had not been sincere.** Judah is left only to grieve the death that is now for sure.

It will affect all four classes of leaders. **"In that day,"** declares the LORD. When Jeremiah (under the direction of the Holy Spirit) uses the phrase **in the days to come; the days are coming; in those days; in that day, at that time; or for the time will surely come,** the context points either to the **near historical future** or the **far eschatological future** and which one should be used. This is the second of twenty-five times that Yirmeyahu uses one of **these phrases.** In this context, the **near historical future** destruction of Tziyon is in view. **In that day, the king and the officials, who should have been the first to encourage and strengthen the people in time of crisis, will lose heart, lose courage, the priests will be horrified, and the prophets will be appalled (4:9).** **Everyone** will be demoralized, paralyzed and unable to function.

It is not an easy task to characterize most of the so-called "writing prophets" of the TaNaKh. To learn something about a man's characteristics, his likes and dislikes, his emotional struggles, his spiritual qualities, his relationships with his family, and so forth, requires a minimum amount of biographical details, recorded either by the man himself or by one of his friends or disciples. Such details are plentiful for men like Abraham, Jacob,

Joseph, Samuel, or David, so that we have no great difficulty in evaluating their personalities with some degree of confidence.

But when we begin thinking about the lives of men like **Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Habakkuk, or Zechariah**, the number of biological details suddenly shrinks considerably by comparison. And yet we would have to confess that **Isaiah and Joel and Zechariah** were just as great in their own spheres as Abraham and Joseph and David were in theirs. In fact, if we only knew something of the personal experiences and inner struggles of the writing prophets, I am sure that we would discover incidents and events just as glamorous and exciting as those in the lives of their more famous predecessors.

So generally, we are a little disappointed with the lack of material concerning the lives of the writing prophets. But there is a notable exception to this general rule: a number of autobiographical notes on the life of **Yirmeyahu** have been preserved for us. In fact, more is known about **Jeremiah's** life than that of any other writing prophet in the TaNaKh.

When viewed historically, **the prophet from Anathoth** can be demonstrated to have handed down to us the fullest account of a prophet's life and character, the fullest account by far, to be found anywhere in Scripture. As a result, our attention is focused on the seven so-called "complaints or confessions" of **Jeremiah** (1) **Ax - Oh, Adonai ELOHIM, Surely You Have Deceived This People**; (2) **Bj - The Plot Against Jeremiah**; (3) **Bk - Why Does the Way of the Wicked Prosper? Why Do All the Faithless Live at Ease?**; (4) **Cm - Woe to Me, Mother, That You Gave Me Birth**; (5) **Cs - Heal Me ADONAI, and I Will Be Healed, Save Me and I Will Be Saved** (6) **Cx - Jeremiah's Response to a Threat Against His Life**; and (7) **Db - You Deceived Me, LORD, and I Have Been Deceived**.

Then **Jeremiah** said: **Oh, Adonai ELOHIM! Surely You have sadly deceived this people and Yerushalayim by saying, "You will have peace," when the sword is at our very throats (4:10 CJB)! Since the people in obstinate disobedience refused to listen to God's Word, the LORD not only permitted, but sent false prophets to deceive their hardened hearts by repeatedly saying: You will have peace (6:13-14, 23:17; also see First Kings 22:20-23). Jeremiah's greatest enemies were fellow false prophets who kept prophesying the exact opposite of what he said. And to make things worse . . . Yirmeyahu's prophecies would not be fulfilled for forty years.**

As far as **Jeremiah's** response goes, there was a side of **the prophet's** character that becomes clear in many of **his** dealings with **YHVH**, namely, that **he** not only declared **his** visions but also felt them deeply. The present vision of the foe from the north really tore **him** up emotionally. At first glance **Yirmeyahu's** words appear to be blasphemous. How dare **he** speak to **Ha'Shem** like that? Along with Rabbi Sha'ul we might ask: **Who are you, sir, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" Surely the potter can do what he likes with the clay (Romans 9:20-**

21; also see **Isaiah 45:9** and **64:8**). And yet **Jeremiah** was far from a blasphemer. **He** had a deep conviction **ADONAI** was sovereign and would work out **His** purposes. Rather, when **the prophet** says things like this we shouldn't see it being a reasoned, thought-out judgment, but the spontaneous reaction of **a man** in turmoil over the tragedies of life, whether **his own** or those of others. The same tendency recurs in **his** later outpourings of soul before **God**.⁶¹

Jeremiahs then uses five word-pictures to describe the oncoming Babylonian horde. At that time, in the near historical future, this people and Tziyon will be told, "Like a scorching wind from the barren heights in the desert blows toward My people, but not to winnow (that separates the grain from the chaff) or cleanse (that blows dust from the grain); a wind too strong for that comes from Me. The enemy will swoop down on Judah, not like a gentle wind separating the grain from the chaff, but a scorching wind that will show no mercy. Now I pronounce my judgment against them" (4:11-12). The wind comes at the command of ADONAI and represents the swiftness of the invading army.

Look! The military juggernaut's advances are swift and unstoppable. **He** comes as swiftly as a sudden **thunderstorm**, as an **eagle** swooping down on **his** unsuspecting prey, as destructive as a **whirlwind**, and **his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us! We are ruined (4:13). They will experience the whirlwind because they had sown the wind (Hosea 8:7). Then a final warning: Yerushalayim, wash the evil from your heart and be saved (4:14a). The defense against aggression from the north is spiritual cleansing from within. God's warnings are conditional; He warns so that He may not destroy (18:8).**

This **invader** is so overwhelming that **Judah** is reduced to funeral songs to sing of **her** death. For one brief moment it is suggested that the washing of repentance might still permit rescue (**Isaiah 1:16; Psalm 51:7**). The prophet clings to that thin possibility. This was **their** one last chance to avoid judgment. **YHVH** asks: **How long will you harbor wicked thoughts (4:14b)?** Just as **Josiah** delayed **God's judgment** in the days of **Manasseh**, by washing the evil from **their hearts, they could even delay judgment in their day. There was still time to avert doom, for Y'hudah, all prophecies of doom are conditional on her repentance.** But nothing came of it. **Judah** did not respond . . . so the invasion comes.

Jeremiah returns to the dramatic portrayal: **A voice is announcing from Dan, proclaiming disaster from the hills of Ephraim. Dan** is located at the very northern boundary of **Isra'el. Ephraim** is on the northern border of **Judah. The enemy** had entered the Land. **Time was short; repentance was urgently needed.** First **Samaria, now Judah!** Tell this to the neighboring peoples: **Pay attention. Proclaim concerning Jerusalem: A besieging army is coming from a distant land, raising a war cry against the cities of Judah (4:15-16).**

Why did **God** bring the **Babylonians** to attack **His people**? As the fields were not always provided with fences it became necessary to have persons to watch them, especially while the fruit was ripening, in order to keep off all those who would eat it, whether people, beast or bird. **They surround her like men guarding a field, because she has rebelled against Me, declares the LORD.** Then **God** reminded **Yerushalayim** of the dire consequences of her rebellion. **"Your own conduct and actions have brought this on you. This is your punishment" (4:17-18a).**

But now the readers of **Jeremiah's** scroll, the exiles in Babylon, need to understand - if they could - why disaster had come. Compare **5:19 CJB: And when your people ask, "Why has ADONAI done all these things to us?" you are to give them this answer, "Just as you abandoned Me and served strange gods in your own Land, so likewise you will serve strangers in a land that is not your own."**

And **9:12-14: Who is wise enough to understand this? Who has been instructed by the LORD and can explain it? Why has the Land been ruined and laid waste like a desert that no one can cross?**

Then the **LORD** answered, saying: **It is because [you] have forsaken My Torah, which I set before [you]; [you] have not obeyed Me or followed My Torah. Instead, [you] have followed the stubbornness of [your] own heart; [you] have followed the Ba'als, as [your] ancestors taught [you].** The deep hurt had reached the heart of those who survived **Tziyon's** downfall and who knew a bitterness worse than death.⁶² **How bitter it is! How it pierces to the heart (4:18b)! Their judgment had penetrated as deep as their wickedness.**