

## Chapter Twelve

This new chapter begins with Jeremiah giving vent to his frustration at being a prophet and continues through vs. 4. He begins politely with calling the Lord righteous or *tsadyq* found next in 20.12: “O Lord of hosts, who tries the righteous.” In the same breath he adds the fact that he’s making a complaint or *ryv* (cf. 2.9; 11.20 for the noun). This he does in the context of pleading his case which is put literally as “speaking judgments” (*davar* and *mishpat*; cf. 10.24 for the latter).

Immediately in vs. 1 there follow two rhetorical questions which form Jeremiah’s complaint: why do the wicked prosper and why do the treacherous thrive. The first pair consists of *rashah* and *tsalach* (cf. 5.25 and 2.36 respectively); the second, *shalah* and *bagad* (cf. 9.2) which reads literally as “being treacherous of treachery.” *Shalah* also means to be at ease, to prosper: “May they prosper who love you” [Ps 122.6]!

In vs. 2 Jeremiah throws responsibility for these two types of people onto the Lord, that is, he was responsible for having planted them. At the same time they are close to the Lord or appear to be so by reason of what they speak but far from him in their heart or *kelayoth* (cf. 11.20). At the same time Jeremiah is quick to add that the Lord knows, sees and tries him (*yadah*, *ra’ah* and *bachan*, cf. 11.18, 5.1 and 11.20 respectively) or more specifically, his mind which is rendered as *lev* (cf. 11.20). Despite this, he wishes the Lord to set them aside for slaughter as sheep.

Vs. 4 consists of two sentences, the first being rhetorical and symptomatic of Jeremiah’s frustration. He asks how long will the land (*’erets*, cf. 11.5) mourn because of the wicked (*raha* or *rah*, cf. 11.17) dwelling in it. Their presence causes all living things to be swept away, *saphah* also as to be consumed. “Let them be put to shame and confusion altogether who seek to snatch away my life” [Ps 40.14]. While all this evil is being done, those involved are saying to themselves that the Lord doesn’t see their end or what happens to them.

To this the Lord responds in vs. 5 with two rhetorical questions as to how men can compete racing with horses and how they can extricate themselves from the jungle of the Jordan, *ga’on* more specifically as swelling or pride. “Even so will I spoil the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem” [13.9]. In addition to this, members of their own families who have dealt treacherously (*bagad*, cf. vs. 1) are crying after them, *qara’* (cf. 11.13). They aren’t to be believed despite their fair words, the verb *davar*.

In the verses following vs. 7 the Lord laments the fate of Israel brought on by their own actions, that is, he has forsaken his house (Jerusalem temple) and has abandoned his heritage (*nachalah*, cf. , 3.18) the two verbs being *hazav* and *natash* (cf. 9.13 and 7.29 respectively). To top it off, the Lord who calls Israel the beloved of his soul (*ydyd* and *nephesh* (cf. 11.15 and 6.8 respectively) will give her into her enemies’ hands, presumably the Babylonians. As for being the Lord’s heritage, because Israel has lifted up her voice against the Lord, literally as “has given on my in voice” (*qol*, cf. 11.16), the Lord hates her.

In vs. 9 the Lord throws out another rhetorical question as to Israel having become a speckled bird of prey and thus summons wild beasts to come against her along with shepherds. They are to trample down the Lord's heritage called a portion in vs. 10, *cheleq* (cf. 10.16). The verses through 13 speak of how these shepherds have made the land desolate, all this due to the Lord's fierce anger or *charon* (cf. 4.8).

Despite the unremitting bitterness the Lord shows toward Israel, from vs. 14 to the end of this chapter he turns attention to his evil neighbors who have touched Israel whom he still calls his heritage, *nagah* (cf. 4.18) being the verb. In other words, he is determined to pluck them up from their land as well as pluck up Judah from among them, *natash* (cf. vs. 7). This *natash* is a preliminary phase, for the Lord will have compassion, *racham* (cf. 6.23) followed by a return to their heritage and land, *nachalah*, *'erets* (cf. vss 7 and 4 respectively).

Chapter Twelve ends on a twofold condition. First Israel's neighbors are to learn diligently (double use of *lamad*, cf. 10.2) the ways of the Lord's people, intimating a return to the Torah followed by swearing (*shavah*, cf. 11.5) by the Lord's name, not that of Baal. This will result in the people not just being built up (*banah*, cf. 1.10) but in the midst (*betok* intimates the center) of the people. Implied is that some remained faithful to the Lord despite so many instances where they had gone astray. Failure to do this voluntarily will result in being plucked up (*natash*, cf. vs. 14) and then destroyed or *'avad* (cf. 10.15).

1) tsadyq, ryv, mishpat, rashah, tsalach, shalah, bagad, 3) yadah, ra'ah, bachan, lev, 4) 'erets, rah, saphah, 5) ga'on, 6) bagad, qara', 7) nachalah, hazav, natash, ydyd, nephesh, 8) qol, 10) cheleq, 13) charon, 14) nagah, natash, 15) racham, nachalah, 'erets, 16) lamad, shavah, banah, 17) natash, 'avad

## Chapter Thirteen

Most divine communications beginning with the words "Thus says the Lord" are to the people of Israel but here we have one directed to Jeremiah alone which initially must have made him feel quite uncomfortable. The Lord bids his prophet to procure a linen waistcloth or *'ezur* which he isn't to wash. "He (Elijah) wore a garment of haircloth with a girdle of leather about his loins" [2Kg 1.8]. Without hesitation Jeremiah goes out to get one "according to the *davar* of the Lord" which doesn't preclude him dreading the prospect of putting it on indefinitely. Obviously linen is a more expensive material and associated with priests, Jeremiah being one (cf. Ezk 44.17). Thus his purchase didn't raise any eyebrows.

In vs. 3 the *davar* of the Lord came a second time though the interval between the first *davar* and the current one isn't given. The Lord's command not to wash the linen waistcloth intimates that Jeremiah had to keep it on much longer than he'd expect under normal conditions. So contrary to any priestly use, he is to hide it in a cleft of a rock by the Euphrates River. Again, Jeremiah obeyed without questioning though as often with such things he must have wondered what it was all about.

Vs. 6 says that the linen waistcloth remained in that cleft for many days and that the Lord bade Jeremiah to fetch it. As for this second time interval, nothing is said what the prophet had been doing, but he must have been preoccupied by the recent events at hand. As expected, Jeremiah found the waistcloth ruined after which we have another divine *davar* coming to him along with a second “Thus says the Lord” not to Jeremiah as in vs. 1 but with regard to Israel. As expected, the waistcloth was symbolic of pretty much what Jeremiah had been railing against thus far, the corrupting behavior of his people. The Lord intends to spoil the pride of both Judah and Jerusalem, the latter’s singled out as “great.” The verb at hand is *shachat* (cf. 5.10) which also means to destroy. As for it’s object, *ga’on* (cf. 12.5) intimates as swelling.

In vs. 10 the Lord tells what Jeremiah already knew about the disintegrated waistcloth that he had worn a long time before putting in the cleft. As to be expected, the Lord calls Israel an evil (*rah*, cf. 12.4) people whose fate is to end up as this garment by reason of the following three:

- 1) Refusing (*ma’en*, cf. 11.9) to hear his *davar*.
- 2) Going in the stubbornness of their hearts (*lev*, cf. 12.3), *shryroth* connoting hardness and found last in 3.17 but not noted there.
- 3) Went after other gods to both serve and worship them, *havad* and *shachah* (11.10 and 8.2 respectively), the former suggestive of being a slave to such divinities.

On the positive side, the image of this waistcloth—made of linen and thus connoting a certain priestly element—is symbolic of the union between the Lord and Israel by way of its clinging to him, *davaq* as glue holding two pieces together. “Then the sword which you fear shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt” [42.16]. If Israel chose this *davaq*, praise and glory would resound as praise and glory to the Lord. The last two nouns are *tehilah* and *tip’arah* (cf. 17.14 and vs. 18 respectively), the latter suggestive of being an ornament. Now comes the clincher. Vs. 11 ends with Israel not listening, *shamah* (cf. 11.13) being the all-important condition both now and in the future.

In vs. 12 the Lord shifts from the image of a linen waistcloth, telling Jeremiah to speak a *davar* with regard to all jars being filled with wine. *Nevel* most likely pertains to a wineskin and is related to a verbal root meaning to be foolish or stupid which fits in with what’s going on here. Vs. 13 has *hineh* (cf. 11.15) or “behold,” a means by which the Lord wishes to get attention with regard to this image of jars/wineskins. That is to say, he will fill all the people with drunkenness or *sikaron*, this word having two other biblical references (Ezk 23.33 and 39.19), the latter being cited here: “You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow.” The Lord is at pains to listen kings, priests and prophets...no one is exempt.”

How to rectify this all-pervasive stupor? The Lord will dash them against each other, *naphats* also as to scatter. “You are my hammer and weapon of war; with you I break nations in pieces” [51.20]. He continues with withholding pity, sparing or having compassion (*chamal*, *chus*, *racham*: cf. 15.5, 21.7 and 12.15) and ends with *shachat* (cf. vs. 9) or to destroy the people.

In vs. 15 the Lord continues his plea to Israel with that oft-mentioned *shamah* or hear along with giving ear or *’azan*. “Give ear to my words, O Lord” [Ps 5.1]. Linked with this is not being proud or

*gavah* as in Ezk 16.50: “They were haughty and did abominable things before me.” Then the Lord concludes with the fact that he has *davar*, in essence the only thing he can do with his people, awaiting their response or as in most cases, their lack of it.

The Lord changes his approach in vs. 16 when he bids his people to give him glory or *kavod* (cf. 2.11), for inevitably he will bring upon them darkness, *chashak* similar to the sentiments of Ps 105.28: “He sent darkness and made the land dark; they rebelled against his words.” Even when the people are looking for light, the Lord will turn it into gloom and deep darkness or *tsalmaveth* and *haraphel*. The former is found in 2.6 but noted there. As for the latter, “A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness” [Jl 2.2]!

Vs. 17 is quite revealing of the Lord’s concern for his people who won’t listen to him. His soul (*nephesh*, cf. 12.7) will weep in secret, *bakah* and *mistar* (cf. 9.1 and 23.24 respectively) over their pride. It reads literally as “from faces of pomp” or *gevah*. This noun has two other biblical references, Job 22.29 and 33.17, the former being cited here: “For God abases the proud, but he saves the lowly.”<sup>1</sup> This lengthy verse continues with the Lord weeping bitterly because his flock has been taken captive (by the Babylonians). The verb *damah* (-*h* being the letter ‘hayin’) is used twice which emphasizes divine bitterness, this being its only use in the Bible.

Vs. 18 mentions the king and queen mother, the NIV noting it’s probably Jehoiachin and Nehushta (cf. 2Kg 24.8), the two presumably being taken into captivity by the Babylonians. Both are to get off their thrones because “your beautiful crown has come down from you head” which the RSV notes as “obscure.” To top it off, the Lord continues with saying that the cities in the Negeb are shut up and Judah is exiled.

Vs. 21 has two rhetorical questions presumably addressed to King Jehoiachin as to his response to presumably former allies, Egypt and Babylon, the latter now pressing upon him. This will resemble a woman undergoing the pangs of childbirth. As for the question posed as well as the remaining verses of this chapter, they can apply equally to Israel as a whole. We can intimate this by the concluding words of vs. 27 where the Lord utters a “woe” against Jerusalem and wondering how long it will be before she is cleansed, *tahar* also as to shine or to be bright. “I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me” [33.8].

Sandwiched in between these verses is the Lord going on about Israel’s iniquity...familiar territory...saying in vs. 25 that such is her lot and portion which he has measured out, *goral* and *manah*. “Come, let us cast lots” [Jon 1.7]. “The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot” [Ps 16.5]. Such is the fate of forgetting the Lord as well as trusting in lies, *shakach* and *sheqer* (3.21 and 10.14 respectively).

1) ‘ezur, 9) shachat, ga’on, 10) rah, ma’en, shryroth, lev, havad, shachah, 11) davaq, tehilah, tip’arah, shamah, 12) nevel, 13) hineh, sikaron, 14) naphats, chamal, chus, racham, shachat, 15) shamah, 16)

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<sup>1</sup>The RSV has a footnote saying part of this verse reads literally as “When they abased you said, ‘Proud.’”

kavod, chashak, tsalmaveth, haraphel, 17) nephesh, bakah, mistar, gevah, damah, 25) goral, manah,  
27) tahar