

Jeremiah Chapter 8

Verses 1-3: As a mockery, God would allow this desecration, spreading the “bones” of the dead Jewish leaders before Judah’s “god” (the “sun”, the “moon,” and all of the “host of heaven”), which were of no help in time of need.

Jeremiah 8:1 "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:"

“Bring out the bones”: Conquerors would ransack all the tombs to gain treasures and then humiliate the Jews by scattering the bones of all, including the rich and honored in open spaces, as a tribute to the superiority of their gods (verse 2).

We see in this Scripture they had no regard for the bodies of the dead. It did not matter whether it was the bones of some official in the government or some high official in the temple, they did not bury their bodies. They just left them to the vultures. It appears also from this, they might have even robbed some of the graves and brought their bones out too. This is showing total disgust and disregard for the people of Judah and Benjamin.

Jeremiah 8:2 "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."

The stars refers to “the host of heaven”. This shows not only that they should be publicly exposed; but, as it refers to their idolatrous worship of the sun, moon, and stars, that these deities will not be able to help them. As they could not prevent their dead bodies being dug up, so neither could they order or cause them to be gathered together and buried again.

"Whom they have loved": Whereas they ought to have loved the Lord their God, and Him only. It means an idolatrous love of and affection for them; and not the love of them, as objects for use and delight. Otherwise the light of the sun, moon, and stars, is splendid, and their influence great; and a pleasant thing it is to behold them, and especially the sun, the fountain of light and heat.

“And whom they have served”: more and besides the Creator, whom they should have served, the Lord of hosts, and Him only.

"And after whom they have walked": Not in the natural and literal sense, but in a religious one, as is next explained.

"And whom they have sought": For advice and counsel, and by making their prayers and supplications to them.

"And whom they have worshipped": By bowing the knee. By offering sacrifices, and burning incense, and putting up petitions to them. By trusting in them, and expecting good things from them (2 Kings 21:3).

"They shall not be gathered, nor be buried": Meaning, the bones that are brought out of the graves, having been scattered about, would not be collected together again, or replaced in their sepulchers.

"They shall be for dung upon the face of the earth": That is, they shall lie and rot upon the face of the earth, and crumble into dust, and become dung for the earth (see Psalm 83:10).

The reason God allowed this, was so they could be placed in front of all these things they had worshipped falsely. It was to show that the sun, moon, and stars, and all the idols of false worship had no power to revive them. They were left to decay. Their bodies came from the earth and they would decay and return to that earth.

Jeremiah 8:3 "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."

By them that should be alive in those times, who would be carried captive into other lands. And be exploited and made to suffer greatly, by the nations among whom they should dwell (see Rev. 9:6). The Septuagint version, and those that follow it, make this to be a reason of the former, reading the words thus, "because they have chosen death rather than life" (see Deut. 30:19). But the other sense is best, which is confirmed by what follows:

"By all the residue of them that remain of this evil family": The nation of the Jews has become very corrupt and degenerate. So, the people of Israel are referred to as an "evil family" (Amos 3:1). Now it is foretold, that those which remained of that people, who died not by famine, or were not slain by the sword. Yet should be in such a miserable condition, as that death would be more preferred to them than life.

"Which remain in all the places whither I have driven them, saith the LORD of hosts": For, though they were carried captive by men, yet it was the LORD's doing, and a just punishment upon them for their sins.

Even the fate of the dead was better than the fate of those left living. They would be taken into a foreign country as slaves. Death would have been welcomed. Notice again, this judgement is from God.

Jeremiah 8:4 "Moreover thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD; Shall they fall, and not arise? shall he turn away, and not return?"

Jeremiah spoke of the natural instinct of one who falls, to get up, and one who leaves, to return, but Judah did not possess this instinct.

These people had not just committed a single sin against God. They had taken on the sinful way of life. They were not repentant at all. God may turn away from them for a moment because He cannot bear to look upon sin, but He is always ready to accept their repentance. It is not a natural thing for a person to fall and not get back up. This can be in the spirit as well as in the flesh. God will help them arise if they repent and turn to Him.

Jeremiah 8:5 "Why [then] is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return."

These people fell into sin, and rose not again by repentance. They turn away from the good ways of God and religion, and return not again. They backslide from and revolt against the LORD, and they continue in their revolt and rebellion. Their backsliding is an everlasting one; there is no hope of their repentance and recovery. It is a vehement and passionate expostulation about the people of the Jews, founded upon the former general observation, showing them to be the worst of all people. It is a common saying, "it is a long lane that has no turning". But these people, having departed from the Lord, return no more. A very learned man renders the words, "why does Jerusalem turn away this people with an obstinate aversion?" that is, the rulers and governors of Jerusalem, as in Matt. 23:37. Or rather thus, "why does a stubborn aversion turn away this people, O Jerusalem?" And so, they are an address to the magistrates and inhabitants of Jerusalem.

"They hold fast deceit": Practice it, and continue in the practice of it, both with God and man.

"They refuse to return": To the LORD, to His worship, and to the right ways of holiness and truth, from whence they had erred (see Jer. 5:3).

(See note on 2:19).

The word "perpetual" tells it all. They have continued in sin. Their backsliding is not for a moment but is a continuous thing. They have deliberately rejected the God of their Fathers. They should see the error of their ways and turn back to God. They are too stubborn to ask for God's help. They cling to their belief in false gods. They have believed a lie.

Verses 6-7: Unlike birds, whose instincts guide them to know the seasons ("appointed times"), and fly in the right direction, the people did not have enough sense to discern "the judgment of the LORD" and treat it as a reason to repent and change their ways.

Jeremiah 8:6 "I hearkened and heard, [but] they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle."

God, before passing sentence, carefully listens to the words of the people; compare Gen. 11:5, where the divine judgment is preceded by the Almighty going down to see the tower.

"Not aright": Or, "not-right;" which in the Hebrew idiom means that which is utterly wrong.

"No man repented": The original phrase is very striking: "No man had pity upon his own wickedness." If men understood the true nature of sin, the sinner would repent out of immense pity upon himself.

"As the horse rusheth": Literally, "overfloweth." It is a double metaphor; first, the persistence of the people in sin is compared to the fury which at the sound of the trumpet seizes upon the war-horse. And then its rush into the battle is likened to the overflowing of a torrent, which nothing can stop in its destructive course.

A horse goes into battle without thinking, because he goes wherever his rider directs him. This is true with these people. They rush into sin like the horse that does not think rushes into battle. They have their ears of understanding closed off to the message God sends them. They are on the road of sin, and have no intentions of turning around. They do not stop and consider what is happening. They do not repent of their sins. Jeremiah heard and obeyed, but they just heard words which meant nothing to them.

Jeremiah 8:7 "Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the LORD."

I.e. in the air, which is often called heaven, where the birds fly (Psalm 8:8; compare Jer. 7:33), who possibly observe the fit time by the temperature of the air.

"Knoweth her appointed times": i.e. observes the several seasons of her going and coming by some natural instinct, and this is said of the stork.

"Observe the time of their coming": The same thing showing in these several fowls that they know also their seasons.

"But my people know not": This notes the great stupidity of His people, seeming not to have as much sense in them as the birds in the air. Not knowing their summer of prosperity, to make good use of God's favors, nor the winter of adversity, either to prevent or remove the wrath of God that hangs over their heads (Isa. 5:12; Luke 19:42, 44). They know not their time for repentance, and making their peace with God. Compared also, on the same account, to the beasts of the field (Isa. 1:3). And thus, Christ upbraids the Pharisees (Matt. 16:2-3).

"The judgment of the LORD": Either God's vengeance in general, or particularly hovering over Jerusalem and Judea. Or rather, the manner of God's dispensations with them.

Even animals know their appointed times, but man who has the gift of common sense does not even stop to consider the LORD. An animal follows the instincts God has given him. Even though all of this happened to these people of God, they never once considered that they brought it on themselves with their sins.

Verses 8-12: The people did not know how to “blush” (had no shame), because they had rejected “the word of the LORD”. Rather than living faithfully and teaching the truth, Israel’s spiritual leaders had “healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly”, the equivalent of putting a bandage on a deep, open wound.

Verses 8-9: Judah’s “wise men” show the shallowness of their misdirected “wisdom” by rejecting their basic commitment to “the word of the LORD” (compare 9:12-14 with Psalms 119:9-16, 89:112; Prov. 1:7; 15:33). The office held by the “scribes” was an old one by Jeremiah’s day. It must have existed early in Israel, but seems to be little noted as a particular profession before the time of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:18; compare Prov. 25:1). In Judah, scribes appear to have been organized into distinct families or guilds (1 Chron. 2:55), and were certainly active in Jeremiah’s time (2 Chron. 34:13). Unfortunately, the mere handling of God’s Word is no guarantee of spiritual fidelity. The Word must master its readers and become part of their lives. In the New Testament times, the scribes were condemned by Jesus for partaking of a corrupt society (compare Matt. 23:13-36).

Jeremiah 8:8 "How do ye say, We [are] wise, and the law of the LORD [is] with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he [it]; the pen of the scribes [is] in vain."

These things considered, where is your wisdom, when you see the very fowls of the air are not as stupid as you are? He speaks either to princes and priests, or to the whole body of the people.

“The law of the LORD is with us”: This may be referring to all the people in general, or more specifically to the priests, with whom it was entrusted (Deut. 33:10; Mal. 2:7). They were accustomed to boast much of the law, as well as of the temple (Jer. 18:18; Rom. 2:17, 23).

"In vain made he it": For any use they made of it, they might have been as good without it. God needed not to have given them His law (Hosea 8:12).

"The pen of the scribes is in vain": Neither need it ever have been copied out, divulged, and conveyed down to them by the scribes (Deut. 17:18). Or the prevarications and collusions these lawyers used in the false interpretation of the law, wherein they sided with the false prophets, should be in vain. A scribe was a teacher, one well versed in the Scripture, or esteemed so.

These were not the heathen of the world but God's chosen people. They say they know the law. They believe that just the knowledge of the law will save them. To be able to memorize the law of God would be of no use at all, unless they understood the meaning of those words and diligently followed them. The pen of the scribes wrote the law in book form for them to read. It would be in vain to read it without understanding it. By the law, no man is saved.

Galatians 3:11 "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, [it is] evident: for, The just shall live by faith."

Abraham should have been their example. His faith in God was counted unto him as righteousness.

Jeremiah 8:9 "The wise [men] are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD; and what wisdom [is] in them?"

Ashamed of the wisdom of which they boasted, when it would appear to be folly, and unprofitable to them.

"They are dismayed and taken": Frightened at the calamities coming upon them, and taken as in a snare, as the wise sometimes are, in their own craftiness (Job 5:13).

"Lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD": Sent by the prophets, which urged obedience to the law. And is the best explanation of it; but this they despised, and refused.

"And what wisdom is in them?" To condemn that, which, if attended to, would have been profitable to them, and the means of making them wise unto salvation. Let them therefore boast of their wisdom ever so much. It is certain there can be none in persons of such a spirit and conduct.

The wisdom they possessed was of the world. Their wisdom is of nothing. The real wisdom that is a gift from God and comes when we fear and reverence God. The wisdom (verse 9 is speaking of), is not of God, but from the world. That kind of wisdom is worth nothing at all.

Verses 10-12: These verses are almost identical with Jer. 6:12-15.

Jeremiah 8:10 "Therefore will I give their wives unto others, [and] their fields to them that shall inherit [them]: for every one from the least even unto the greatest is given to covetousness, from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely."

To strangers or to the Gentiles. There was nothing that could be more disagreeable to the people of Judah, or a sorer punishment, of a worldly nature.

"And their fields to them that shall inherit them": Or, to the heirs. And who should possess them as if they were their true and rightful heirs.

"For everyone from the least even to the greatest is given to covetousness, from the prophet even unto the priest everyone dealeth falsely": Covetousness and false dealing, which prevailed in all ranks and orders of men among them, were the cause of their ruin. Covetousness is the root of all evil; and to deal falsely, or lie, as the words may be rendered, is diabolical and abominable in the sight of God. And especially in men of such characters, who were to preach truth to others (Jer. 6:13).

Their wives were taken by the Babylonians. The land and goods go to the victor. In this case, the victor is Babylon. The reason for this judgement from God, was the fact that Judah was a sinful nation. Sin had even entered the temple. A few hundred years later, Jesus will tell the priests in the temple that the laws they practiced were their own, not God's. This was the case here as well. They had twisted the law to fit their own needs. It was no longer recognizable as God's law.

Jeremiah 8:11 "For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when [there is] no peace."

The temple priests were crying "peace" when war was at the door. The only true peace comes when Jesus sets up His kingdom of peace.

This verse is almost identical with Jeremiah 6:14.

Jeremiah 8:12 "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the LORD."

They have been put to shame because they have committed abomination; yet they take not shame to themselves, ashamedness they know not. Therefore, they shall fall amongst them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall stumble.

They had committed so many sins, they had forgotten what it was. Their conscience had been seared over. The more they sinned, the less they recognized sin for what it was. Judgement begins at the house of God. When Jesus judges the world, there will be many that will cry out to Him and say, didn't we do this or that, in Your name, and He will say, Get away from me, I never knew you. It will not matter how big the church was that you pastored; if your heart is not right with God, you will be cast down by Jesus. This was the same thing here.

Jeremiah 8:13 "I will surely consume them, saith the LORD: [there shall be] no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; and [the things that] I have given them shall pass away from them."

The Lord expected His people to produce fruit. True faith always expresses itself in actions (Matt. 21:19; Luke 13:6).

God had miraculously fed them, but that will be no more. In some sense they were the branches, but they produced no fruit. I believe in this, God is speaking of cutting off their source of help from Him. Now God will not look upon them or care for their needs. The things of nature would no longer cooperate with them. This is like the curse on the ground spoken of in Genesis.

Verses 14-16: In vain, Jeremiah urged the people to wake up to what was happening. Already God's judgment was becoming apparent, but these warnings were ignored.

Jeremiah 8:14 "Why do we sit still? assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the defended cities, and let us be silent there: for the LORD our God hath put us to silence, and given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against the LORD."

In the country, where were barrenness and want of provisions. In the villages and un-walled towns, where they were exposed to the spoils and ravages of the enemy.

"Let us be silent": Not assault the enemy, but merely defend ourselves in quiet, until the storm blows over.

"Put us to silence": Brought us to that state where we can no longer resist the foe; implying silent despair.

"Water of gall": Literally, "water of the poisonous plant," perhaps the poppy (Jer. 9:15; 23:15).

This is certainly a bitter cup that they must drink. Remember they brought it on themselves by being unfaithful to God. They are in silence because they know it is true, and there is nothing left for them to say. They could have fled south as they had been warned to, but they just sat and let it happen. I believe they thought God would NOT allow this to happen to them.

Jeremiah 8:15 "We looked for peace, but no good [came; and] for a time of health, and behold trouble!"

Upon the persuasion of our prophets, we expected that these troubles would never come, but that all would be well. But we find ourselves merely deluded by them. We looked so long, till even our eyes failed us, but we see no remedy for us (Lam. 4:17), a metaphor. In scripture, miseries are often compared to diseases, and deliverances to healing (Deut. 32:39; Psalm 103:3; Jer. 33:6).

Remember, their leaders had cried "peace". They believed the leaders and thought peace was on its way. They never once dreamed of the trouble that would come. They never even bothered to repent and seek God's face.

Jeremiah 8:16 "The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan: the whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones; for they are come, and have devoured the land, and all that is in it; the city, and those that dwell therein."

"Dan": The territory of this tribe was on the northern border of the land, where the invasion would begin and sweep south.

This was a mighty army of horses and men that came to devour the land. Fear rose up in the people, when the horses got near enough for them to hear them snorting and neighing. The sad thing is, it was too late to run or even to repent. Everything was destroyed.

Jeremiah 8:17 "For, behold, I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which [will] not [be] charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the LORD."

“Send serpents”: This is a figurative picture of the Babylonian invaders.

God’s picture of judgment here, makes us recall the punishment of His people during the Exodus (Num. 21:6), when stinging “vipers” bit the wanderers and drove them to look upon the bronze “serpent” on a pole, an Old Testament prefiguring of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross (John 3:14).

The serpents that God sent were both physical, and of a figurative nature. It appears that vipers (very poisonous snakes), roved through the land biting people. Similarly, the army of invaders were like serpents. Look with me at another time when God sent serpents:

Numbers 21:6 "And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died."

Notice also why they came and who sent them in the following Scripture:

Numbers 21:7 "Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people."

God controls the serpent the same as He controls everything else.

Jeremiah 8:18 "[When] I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart [is] faint in me."

Either naturally, by eating and drinking, the necessary and lawful means of refreshment. Or spiritually, by reading the word of God, and looking over the promises in it.

"My heart is faint in me": At the consideration of the calamities which were coming upon his people; and which were made known to him by a spirit of prophecy, of which he had no room to doubt. So the Targum takes them to be the words of the prophet, paraphrasing them, "for them, saith the prophet, my heart grieves."

Even though God had told Jeremiah ahead of time about all the problems, Jeremiah still felt great sorrow for these people. He was known as “the prophet of sorrows”. Jeremiah had not planned to grieve, but it was more than he could endure. His heart was broken.

Jeremiah 8:19 "Behold the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people because of them that dwell in a far country: [Is] not the LORD in Zion? [is] not her king in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images, [and] with strange vanities?"

“Far country”: This is the cry of the exiled Jews that will be heard they are taken captive into Babylon. They will wonder why God would let this happen to His land and people.

The people of God have provoked God to bring this terrible punishment on them, the temple, and the land, by worshipping false gods. They cry out because of their loss, not because they have repented. God never leaves Zion. Zion as we have said before, is the mount in Jerusalem, but is

also God's church. God never leaves the church. The answer for them or us, is repent and come back to God.

Verses 20-22: "We are not saved": The coming devastation is compared with the hopeless anguish when harvest time has passed but people are still in desperate need. Jeremiah identified with his people's suffering (verse 21), as a man of tears (compare 9:1), but saw a doom so pronounced that there was no remedy to soothe. There was no healing balm, the kind in abundance in Gilead (east of the Sea of Galilee), and no physician to cure (compare Gen. 37:25; 43:11).

Jeremiah is overcome with grief for his people. As "the passing of a harvest" season that failed to produce fruit gives rise to despair for the availability of food, so the passing days without repentance in Judah made destruction inevitable. Jeremiah was dismayed and cried out for its healing balsam (compare Gen. 37:25).

Jeremiah 8:20 "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."

Which was in the month of Ijar as Jarchi observes, and answers to part of April and May.

"The summer is ended": Which was in the month of Tammuz, and answers to part of June and July.

"And we are not saved": Delivered from the siege of the Chaldeans. And harvest and summer being over, there were no hopes of the Egyptians coming to their relief, seeing winter was approaching. And it may be observed, that it was in the month of Ab, which answers to part of July and August, that the city and temple were burnt. These are the words of the people of the Jews, despairing of help and salvation. So the Targum explains, "the congregation of Israel said, the time is passed, the end is up, and we are not redeemed."

The captivity of this people is not for just a season, but for many years. We know at the end of harvest the people rested, but there will be no rest for them. They have not been delivered from captivity. The children of Israel waited 400 years or more for God to send them a deliverer to bring them out of Egypt (world). This captivity will be shorter, but will not be over in one year.

Verses 21-22: The "daughter of My people" (8:11, 19, 21-22), represented all the people of Judah. "Balm" was a medicine taken from the bark of a tree and was one of the primary exports from Judah.

Jeremiah 8:21 "For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me."

Now the prophet again speaks in his own person. He is crushed in that crushing of his people. His face is darkened, as one that mourns. (Compare Psalm 38:6; Joshua 5:11).

The word translated "black" here, implies mourning. The mourning was great. It appeared to be the blackest time in their history. It was difficult to see any hope for them. "Astonishment" is speaking of surprise at the terribleness.

Jeremiah 8:22 "[Is there] no balm in Gilead; [is there] no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?"

"No physician there": i.e., in Gilead. Balm used to grow in Israel for the healing of the nations. Her priests and prophets were the physicians. Has Israel then no balm for herself? Is there no physician in her who can bind up her wound? Gilead was to Israel what Israel spiritually was to the whole world.

"Why then is not the health ... recovered?" Or, "why then has no bandage," or plaster of balsam, "been laid upon my people?"

We see a people who seem to be desolate without hope. The "balm of Gilead" was a substance with healing power in it. It was very expensive. I think of the Aloe-Vera plant when I see this mentioned. You can squeeze a little juice out for a burn or rash, and it is very helpful. The only medicine that would help them would come from the great Physician (Jesus). Their illness was spiritual. They must seek God anew. They will not recover until they repent of their false worship and turn to God.

Jeremiah Chapter 8 Questions

1. Whose bones will be brought out?
2. Where shall they spread the bones?
3. Why are the bones put in that place?
4. What will their bones become to the earth?
5. What was better than the fate of those left?
6. The judgement comes from _____.
7. What way of life had they taken on, that brought judgement on them?
8. When will God help them arise?
9. What kind of backsliding were they guilty of?

10. Who heard in verse 6?
11. What attitude did the people have?
12. What animal were they compared to in verse 6?
13. What did these evil people not consider even once?
14. What did they believe would save them?
15. What is wrong with that thinking?
16. What kind of wisdom did they have?
17. What happened to their wives?
18. What did Jesus have to say about the law of the temple?
19. What were the leaders crying out, that was not true?
20. Why were they not ashamed of their sins?
21. How had these people been fed in the past?
22. What is the bitter cup spoken of as in verse 14?
23. When did they begin to fear that what Jeremiah had said was true?
24. What did God send to torment them, besides the army?
25. When was another time God sent the same thing to punish people?
26. What effect on Jeremiah did all of this have?
27. Why did the people cry out?
28. How quickly had they thought God would send them a deliverer?
29. What does "black" indicate in verse 21?
30. What was the "balm of Gilead"?