

# JEREMIAH 1–3; 7; 16–18; 20

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## Historical Context

Jeremiah was a prophet during the end of the seventh century and the beginning of the sixth century BC. He served in Jerusalem during the reigns of five Judahite kings: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah (approximately from 627 to 580 BC). He was a contemporary of Lehi (see 1 Nephi 5:13); therefore, he was ministering when King Josiah was killed by Pharaoh Necho in 609 BC (2 Kings 23:29) when Babylon defeated the Egyptians, who were helping the defeated Assyrians, thereby taking control of the land in 605 BC (Jeremiah 46:2). Nebuchadnezzar had become king of Babylon in 604 BC, meaning he was king when Jerusalem was besieged in 597 BC (2 Kings 24:10) and eventually destroyed in 586 BC.<sup>1</sup>

## Jeremiah 1

### 1:1–6

The prophet Jeremiah was of a priestly line that dwelled in the land of Benjamin. Anathoth, where Jeremiah lived, was three miles (about 5 kilometers) northeast of Jerusalem. Some argue that Hilkiah, Jeremiah's father, is the same Hilkiah who found the book of the law in the temple with Shaphan during the reign of Josiah (2 Kings 22:8), providing more context for Jeremiah's close relationship with the descendants of Shaphan (Jeremiah 26:24; 29:3; 36:10).<sup>2</sup>

This first set of verses is an overview of Jeremiah's ministry, from Josiah's reign to the carrying away of the Jerusalemites by Babylon. Jeremiah's ministry began with the call to be a prophet, a spokesman for

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<sup>1</sup> Some commentaries say 587 BC.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Elliot Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 125–126.

the Lord. Indeed, his calling began much earlier in the premortal world. Jeremiah's foreordination before he was formed "in the belly" is a direct reference to the doctrine of premortal life.<sup>3</sup> Most Christians will acknowledge the premortal existence of Jesus Christ, the Word who became flesh (John 1:1–2, 14). However, without the knowledge of the plan of salvation, they may not understand that we were all in the premortal world as well (Hebrews 2:14). Having been set apart by the Lord before his birth, Jeremiah was certainly one "of the noble and great ones" in the councils on high (Abraham 3:22).

Latter-day Saint doctrine recognizes our separation from our Heavenly Father and our premortal life at birth, symbolized as a veil of forgetfulness. Due to this veil of forgetfulness,<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah did not consider himself prepared to fulfill his calling. The book of Jeremiah demonstrates to the reader precisely how Jeremiah was worthy and diligent in his calling despite the challenges he faced during his time as a prophet.

### **1:7–10**

The Lord gently reproved Jeremiah for his lack of confidence. The call to preach to all and to speak whatsoever he is commanded was an invitation to take courage and trust in the Lord. Church callings can be challenging at times and may appear to be beyond our talents. Just as the Lord blessed Jeremiah's mouth to give him words, so too the Lord can bless us with the necessary tools and talents to serve with all of our heart, mind, might, and soul. Jeremiah was then told that he had been placed "over the nations and over the kingdoms," which could have been overwhelming. The Lord's next words offer a plan for the prophet; the Lord not only gave Jeremiah a calling but also provided him with general instructions. Jeremiah was to begin with the difficult, and perhaps harsh, tasks: he was told to "root out," "pull down," "destroy," and "throw down." After the bringing down of sin would come the lifting up of righteousness. Jeremiah was then "to build, and to plant." In all our callings, we too are to build and plant unto the Lord. Building implies strengthening those we serve, and planting may imply sowing the seeds of faith and testimony.

### **1:11–16**

The prophet sees two visions. The first consists of a wordplay; a better English translation for "I will hasten" in verse 12 is "I am watching." In the original Hebrew, the word for "almond" (*shaqed*) sounds very similar to the word for "watching" (*shoqed*;<sup>5</sup> "hasten" in the King James Version). The message here is that the Lord is watching, awaiting fulfillment of His divine mandates.<sup>6</sup> The second vision consisted of a boiling

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3 Other ancient records have similar statements, including the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh and the Egyptian story about the god Ammon and king Pianki. See John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentario del contexto cultural de la Biblia: Antiguo Testamento* (El Paso, TX: Editorial Mundo Hispano, 2005), 724.

4 See Guide to the Scriptures, "Veil," online at churchofjesuschrist.org.

5 See John Bright, trans., *Jeremiah*, 2nd ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 5, 7.

6 Compare Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31.

pot that faced north. Babylon was in the north (northeast, specifically) and would be coming to execute judgment (Jeremiah 52). Ancient Israelites held a true fear of having “all the families of the kingdoms of the north” inhabit their land. Anciently, everyone had their own land (and their own god, for that matter; see 2 Kings 5:17). When the Northern Kingdom of Israel was overcome by Assyria in 721 BC, their land was inhabited by non-Israelites (2 Kings 17:30–31). It would spell disaster were Jerusalem to suffer the same fate.<sup>7</sup>

### **1:17–19**

The focus of the text then returns to the prophet’s call, written as a chiasm. The section begins with Jeremiah’s call, moving on to the two visions, then returning to the prophet’s mission. The invitation was for Jeremiah to arise and boldly speak the words of the Lord. Jeremiah may represent the city of Jerusalem: just as Babylon would attack the city, Jeremiah would be attacked by the people of Judah, including their kings, princes, and priests. The prophet received the promise that the Lord would abide with him. Such is the case for those who serve faithfully (see Matthew 28:19–20).

## **Jeremiah 2**

### **2:1–4**

This chapter begins with the Lord reminiscing about the early days of Israel, specifically after the Exodus. The Lord compared early Israel to Jehovah’s bride, saying that in those early days, the people of Israel followed the Lord, even “in the wilderness.”<sup>8</sup> The nostalgia of the early days is then compared to Israel’s current disobedience.

In the wilderness period, the priest<sup>9</sup> and tabernacle were identified with the words “Holiness unto the Lord” (Exodus 28:36). Here, the Lord said all of Israel “was holiness” before Him, comparable to the “first fruits” of the harvest. The line “all that devour him shall offend” is rendered, “All who ate of it incurred guilt,” in the English Standard Version. Thus, because of their sin, when the people consumed the “first fruits,” evil would “come upon them.”

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7 This may be comparable to the Saints’ fear of the “gentiles” who would reach Utah after the completion of the railroad system in 1869. The principal reason why President Brigham Young had the Zion’s Cooperative Mercantile Institution organized on October 24, 1868, was to mitigate the merchandise brought by train that might be tempting to the Saints. See Thomas G. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1993), 207; Devery S. Anderson, *Salt Lake School of the Prophets, 1867–1883* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2018), loc. 1491 of 16087, Kindle.

8 The Prophets often paint the wilderness period more positively than do the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. See Hosea 9:10.

9 The Levitical title of high priest is most likely postexilic and in the first five books of the Bible only appears in Numbers 35, a later addition to the text. Comparing 2 Kings 12:11; 22:4, 8; 23:4 to parallel passages in Chronicles, “high priest” appears to be a later gloss to the text. See Roland de Vaux, *Instituciones del Antiguo Testamento* (Barcelona, ES: Editorial Herder, 1976), 486. This may explain why the high priests of the Book of Mormon are much different than those in the Bible.

## **2:5–8**

Here we see that the sin of the people was that they were not seeking the Lord and their previous blessing. By not seeking, they were not remembering their history. They had separated themselves from God because they did not remember that the Lord had been with them while they were in the desert. The Lord brought them to the promised land, but then they became corrupt. Their priests and pastors had fallen to sin, and their prophets were following Baal, a Canaanite storm god.<sup>10</sup> When leaders are wicked, the people often follow. People can be led down the wrong path when they forget blessings they previously received. That is why it is important for disciples to express gratitude either by prayer or by other means. By giving thanks, we remember how the Lord has blessed us and are reminded to seek Him when we need blessings and protection.

## **2:9–13**

The Lord compared the obedience of His people to other nations' obedience to false gods. Chittim is the Hebrew name for Cyprus (in Greece),<sup>11</sup> while Kedar appears to describe a people descending from Ismael who dwelt in southeastern Arabian Peninsula.<sup>12</sup> In other words, from west to east people were faithful to their nonexistent gods. Yet Israel committed “two evils.” The first was that the people had rejected “the fountain of living waters.” In the Gospel of John, Jesus taught that if anyone believes in Him, “out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). Jehovah, the premortal Jesus, is the fountain of living waters (Isaiah 12:2–3). The second evil was that the idols of the false gods were most likely the “broken cistern” that cannot hold any refreshing water.

## **2:14–19**

Israel was neither a servant nor a homeborn slave but had now become one of the spoils of war. Noph (Memphis) and Tahapanes are cities in Egypt, while Sihor is another name for the Nile.<sup>13</sup> The prophetic words in these verses may be referring to the time when Pharaoh Nechoh killed King Josiah in 609 BC. With so much destruction, the people would learn from their wickedness. However, being compelled to obedience is never the best option. Playing on the imagery of living waters in verse 13, these verses explain that the waters of Assyria (the Euphrates and other rivers) and the Nile of Egypt do not compare to the waters of the Lord.

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<sup>10</sup> See also Jeremiah 7:9, 11, 13, 17; 12:16; 19:15; 23:13, 27; 32:29, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Called Kittim in Genesis 10:4.

<sup>12</sup> Called Kedar in Genesis 25:13.

<sup>13</sup> See John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentario del contexto cultural de la Biblia: Antiguo Testamento* (El Paso, TX: Editorial Mundo Hispano, 2005), 726.

## **2:20–30**

Here Israel is compared to a beast who has broken the yoke and burst the bands that restrained her. Although the King James Version reads, “I will not transgress,” the people are in fact declaring that they “will not serve” (*abad*) the Lord. This word identifies servanthood in a vassal/covenant relationship. However, the Israelites at this time were yoke and covenant breakers. They were performing idolatrous acts on high hills and under trees, contrary to the Deuteronomistic reforms Josiah made (Deuteronomy 12:11–14; see also Hosea 4:11–14).

The Lord said that despite the soap they used to wash themselves, the people continued to be “polluted,” chasing after the Baalim (Canaanite gods) like a camel lost in the wilderness or a donkey in heat.<sup>14</sup> If they would draw closer to the Lord, He could heal and cleanse them: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

Those who were said to be against the prophet in Jeremiah 1:17–18—the king, the princes, the priests, and the prophets—would show some remorse for their actions but would turn to seek help from their idols made of stock (Asherah) and stone (Baal).<sup>15</sup> These idols would not save them. To make a point, the Lord said that punishment was done in vain because the people did not seek correction. “For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant” (Doctrine and Covenants 58:26). The consequences of our actions often serve as a reminder to mend our ways and straighten our paths. However, it is better to be righteous not out of fear but out of love for the Lord (see John 14:15).

## **2:31–37**

Having forgotten their blessings, the people desired to govern themselves, thinking they had no need for the Lord. It is often said that when life is good, God can be forgotten by the people who serve Him. Here, circumstances were disastrous and yet the people did not turn to the Lord.

The text returns to the imagery of the Lord’s bride (see verse 2–3). A loving bride does not forget her wedding dress or ring, but the people had broken and forgotten their covenant with the Lord. The blood of the innocents was on their hands, and they were placing their trust in foreign nations like Egypt and Assyria. Assyria had been defeated in 612 BC, and Egypt would ultimately fall in 332 BC.

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<sup>14</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Hewlys Publishing, 2002), 68.

<sup>15</sup> See John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *Comentario del contexto cultural de la Biblia: Antiguo Testamento* (El Paso, TX: Editorial Mundo Hispano, 2005), 728.

## Jeremiah 3

### 3:1–5

Continuing with the imagery of a wayward wife (see Jeremiah 2), the people have committed whoredoms, polluting themselves with other gods (high places) and nations. According to Deuteronomy, once a divorced woman has been with another man, it is wrong for her to return to the original husband (Deuteronomy 24:1–4). However, here the Lord is telling the people to “return again to me.” (Compare with the book of Hosea.) He does this out of love because of the strength of His covenants.

The Lord’s desire to be called “My father” (verse 4) may be confusing, especially given that this unfaithful woman was the bride, not a daughter. This title is applied to Jehovah because of His presiding role over Israel.<sup>16</sup>

### 3:6–11

The reign of Josiah was a time of prosperity and growth. After the fall of the North Kingdom of Israel, many survivors traveled south to the Kingdom of Judah. By the time Josiah became king, the oppression from foreign nations was not as strong.<sup>17</sup> In the imagery of this passage, Israel (the captive nation of the north) and Judah (the unfaithful nation of the south) are described as sisters, both unfaithful to the Lord. Judah did not fear when her sister Israel was taken away by Assyria and only feigned loyalty, lusting after stones (Baal) and stocks (Asherah).

### 3:12–19

Despite the people’s disobedience, the Lord continued to show mercy, desiring that they return to their mutual covenant. With this came the invitation to repent and acknowledge their iniquity. The concept of turning (or returning) is directly connected to repentance. Turning back to the Lord allows grace and the Spirit to inspire us to change our ways and repair the damage we have caused. If the people respond obediently, the Lord will restore the nation to Zion—not only a location but also a state of being (Moses 7:18).

Jeremiah prophesied that there would be a time (“in those days”) when the ark of the covenant would no longer be remembered. In the tabernacle and the temple, the ark had been kept in the holy of holies, representing God’s presence (Exodus 26:33–34; 30:6). When Jesus’s death on the cross “rent in twain” the temple veil (Mark 15:38), the early Christians understood this to mean that Christ’s Atonement allowed them to boldly “enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil” (Hebrews 10:19–20). Therefore, the symbol of the ark would not be the focus of worship but was rather a symbol of oneness with the Godhead: “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us” (John 17:21).

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<sup>16</sup> See Deuteronomy 32:6; Malachi 1:6; 1 Nephi 25:12. Compare Deuteronomy 14:1–2.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2007), 45–49.

### **3:20–25**

In a firm voice, the Lord reminded the people of their wickedness, commanding them to return. These were the final words of Jeremiah and are reminiscent of the command to the restored Church to “Say nothing but repentance” (Doctrine and Covenants 11:9). With true repentance comes the blessing of healing and of being made whole.

Either the people or Jeremiah then responded, “Behold, we come unto thee.” This may be Jeremiah speaking on behalf of the people of Judah because the inhabitants were not very penitent.

## **Jeremiah 7**

### **7:1–7**

Jeremiah was then called by the Lord to preach by the temple gates about the people’s incorrect view of the temple. There are many psalms regarding the protection bestowed upon the temple.<sup>18</sup> However, it is not the temple structure itself that offers protection but rather the covenant relationship we form with the God of the temple. The sacrifices performed at the temple were the result of legal violations or rites of purification. Nonetheless, the laws of Leviticus that governed the rules of sacrifice did not include laws in favor of the strangers, widows, and fatherless as found in Exodus, “the book of the covenant” (Exodus 22:21–22; 24:7). It seems that the people had maintained the temple, albeit corruptly, and had ignored their social and charitable duties to protect the destitute.

### **7:8–16**

Several of the Ten Commandments were referenced in Jeremiah’s preaching (compare Exodus 20:3–17). The people were breaking the commandments, including by burning incense to Baal and placing other gods before the Lord. Additionally, the people were approaching the temple without the desire to repent of the sins they were carrying with them. This was a recipe for destruction.

Shiloh had once been the dwelling place of the tabernacle (see 1 Samuel 1:3, 9). Although the Bible does not outline the outcome of Shiloh, it may have been destroyed by the Philistines in the battles narrated in 1 Samuel 4.

### **7:17–20**

All members of Judah families were participating in false idolatrous worship, from the children to the parents. Jeremiah would later face a particular group who defended their worship of the queen of heaven (most likely Asherah; see Jeremiah 44).

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<sup>18</sup> Psalms 46; 48; 79; 132:13–16.



### **7:21–28**

The reverential message of sacrifices had been lost to the people. In divine sarcasm, the Lord declared that sacrifices were not what He had commanded (see Amos 4:4–5). In fact, what He had commanded was obedience to the principles behind the rites. To follow the covenant path is to walk in “the ways that I have commanded you” (Jeremiah 7:23). The passage spells out the general sin of the entire nation. The Lord reminded the people of their past redemption from Egypt and the ministry of the prophets. Reminding the people of their wilderness wandering with Moses was a common theme during this time period. Nephi also preached a similar message to his brothers (see 1 Nephi 4:2–3; 17:23–25).

### **7:29–31**

The command to the people to cut off their hair can be understood in several ways. Because of the political strife and ensuing destruction, this could have been an invitation to lament (see Job 1:20; Micah 1:16). On the other hand, certain haircuts and shaving one’s head was spoken against in the law of Moses (Leviticus 19:27; Deuteronomy 14:1). Therefore, this could simply be an invitation to express their lamentation, or the Lord may also have been telling them to mark themselves as covenant breakers.

Tophet means “hearth” or “place of fire,” and the “the valley of the son of Hinnom” was southwest from Jerusalem and was where people would sacrifice their children by fire (2 Kings 3:27). The Lord here conveyed the general sin by comparing the idolatrous “high places” to children-burning valleys, the institutionalized sin in Jerusalem to the abuse of one’s children.

### **7:32–34**

Speaking of the future Christ, Isaiah had preached that “every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low” (Isaiah 40:4; compare Luke 3:5). Quite the opposite happens here in a very gruesome way: carcasses would fill the “valley of slaughter” until “there be no place” or room there.

## **Jeremiah 16**

### **16:1–9**

The grammar in these verses appears to identify Jeremiah alone as the recipient for the command to “not take . . . a wife.” This is generally understood as a command for the prophet to be celibate.<sup>19</sup> However, this may have been a situational command because of Jerusalem’s forthcoming destruction. When Jesus prophesied the coming Roman destruction of Jerusalem, He taught: “And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!” (Matthew 24:19). In a very practical sense, when the

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<sup>19</sup> John Bright, trans., *Jeremiah*, 2nd ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 112.



capital would be sieged and destroyed, having fewer family members to take care of would be a blessing. In fact, we have gruesome stories of those who were left in Jerusalem with small children: “The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children” (Lamentations 4:10; compare Deuteronomy 28:53). Jeremiah may have been older at this point, but we can only wonder what would have happened to his young family if he would have married. Yet, it is possible that this was a command that was to be preached to the people of Jerusalem for the same reason. Later, Jeremiah preached the opposite due to the steady life that Babylon offered: “I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon. . . . Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters” (Jeremiah 29:4–7). It is important to remember the context when looking at such commands.

### **16:10–13**

The Lord prepared His prophet by providing possible questions that the people might ask regarding the reason for the drastic change of their circumstances and whether it was the Lord’s fault. The Lord taught His servant to first address the corruption of the fathers. It appears that the next step was for Jeremiah to tell his audience that they were “worse than [their] fathers,” which very well may have been the case. However, it is also possible that as the prophet’s audience listened to him recount their fathers’ wickedness, they realized their own sinful nature.

### **16:14–15**

The Exodus was ingrained in the people’s religious past. The Lord said that soon the people would not be speaking of the Exodus as the Lord’s greatest act of love; the message would instead be about the people’s return to their land. The concept of bringing back, returning, or turning is related to repentance. Therefore, the ultimate fulfillment would be to turn to the Lord, not necessarily to the land. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32).

### **16:16–21**

This is a well-known passage associated with missionary work. The comparison to hunting implies an effort on the part of the member missionary. To search from the mountains to the “holes of the rocks” implies we are to search high and low.

The following verses may be addressing the process of repentance, which also is connected to missionary work. When a disciple acknowledges their sin, the consequences become more apparent. The repentant will see themselves and their past differently. As a result, they will come to know the name and power of the Lord.

## **Jeremiah 17**

### **17:1–4**

The people's wickedness was registered, as with a pen, upon their life. Their sin would be written on the horns of the altar of sacrifice and on their hearts (where the ancients believed the center of thought was located<sup>20</sup>). Because of their poor example, it was quite possible that their children would practice idolatry at their altars (Baal) and in their groves (Asherah).

### **17:5–8**

Those who trust in the arm of flesh will suffer the consequences of their decisions. They will not know when blessings are near or available. Trusting the Lord will bring protection from the sun and the heat. Perhaps an allusion to family connecting back to children from verse 2, those who are believers are as trees whose branches spread wide and whose roots go down deep, never ceasing “from yielding fruit” (compare Malachi 4:1).

### **17:9–11**

The Lord is the ultimate judge because He can “search the heart” (verse 10). The consequences of our actions are meted out to us fairly. Unfortunately, the consequences of other's mistakes may begin to affect us. You may, like the partridge, do your hard work, but someone else might reap the world's honor and glory.

### **17:12–14**

True disciples “seek . . . first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33) through the heavenly “sanctuary.” False or wayward disciples forsake “the fountain of living waters” (compare Jeremiah 2:13). Later, Ezekiel would associate living water with the temple (see Ezekiel 47:1, 9).

### **17:15–18**

The people, perhaps mockingly, asked where they might find “the word of the Lord,” even though Jeremiah had been preaching about this throughout his ministry (see Jeremiah 1:2–3). Before the temple had been defiled (Jeremiah 7:30), Isaiah had preached that the temple was a source for the word and knowledge of the Lord (Isaiah 11:9). Because of the people's stubbornness, Jeremiah stood alone, pleading to be protected, desiring judgment upon his persecutors (see Jeremiah 16:18).

### **17:19–27**

The gates were not only a place of judgment (Deuteronomy 17:5) but were also a place of commerce (Nehemiah 13:19–20). Therefore, by the gates Jeremiah could speak judgment and also see those who

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<sup>20</sup> S. Leticia Calçada, Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England, eds., *Diccionario Bíblico Ilustrado Holman, actualizado y aumentado* (Nashville, TN: B&H Español, 2014), 364.

were buying and trading on the Sabbath. The “burden” that was being carried out on the Sabbath could have been idols (see Isaiah 46:1–2) or agricultural products (see Nehemiah 13:15). Whatever the case, the people were not dedicating the day to God and family.

The promise given for keeping the Sabbath holy was that Judah would have a Davidic king on the throne, for which the ultimate fulfillment would be Jesus Christ. Some may wonder why Sabbath-keeping was the determining factor for securing a Davidic king. However, Sabbath obedience here may represent the blessings of keeping all their covenants (see Deuteronomy 28:1–14).

## **Jeremiah 18**

### **18:1–10**

The comparison between the potter and the vessel represents the power the Lord has over the nations and kingdoms of the world. The Lord can work with His people, like a vessel in the making, to remove all blemishes, perfecting the product. The apostle Paul said that the Lord has a covenant people “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12). There is another factor regarding clay and pottery production; it becomes hard. People who become hardened and resist change may not turn from their wicked ways.

### **18:11–17**

When repentance was preached, the inhabitants of Jerusalem rejected the message. They began by saying, “There is no hope.” Often, when someone has lost hope the message of the gospel is not appealing. Repentance may not be a desired option for those living in sin.

A poem in verses 13–18 mentions the land of Lebanon, which is north of Israel and does have snow in the mountains.<sup>21</sup> The poem describes the scattering of Israel as a result of their disobedience.

### **18:18–23**

Jeremiah’s foes called him by his name, suggesting that they no longer saw him as one of the “many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent” (1 Nephi 1:4). They say that their priests will not lead them astray, and they were trusting in the arm of the flesh: their priests, their wise, and their prophets. This implies that their entire infrastructure was corrupt. Notice that the king is missing. The Lord had told Jeremiah that their records (scriptures) would also become corrupt: “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

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<sup>21</sup> This poem is believed to date to the reign of Jehoiakim. See John Bright, trans., *Jeremiah*, 2nd ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 126.

vain”<sup>22</sup> (Jeremiah 8:8). The Lord clearly taught through Jeremiah that along with the temple, the priests, the supposed wise, and the false prophets, the “pen of the scribes” (perhaps the scriptural record) would become corrupt.

Verses 19–23 show an aspect of Jeremiah that may make the reader feel uncomfortable: the prophet was angry with the people. They had not been receptive. Jeremiah’s burst of anger did not disqualify him from being a prophet.

## **Jeremiah 20**

### **20:1–6**

In the Old Testament, names are often used to provide meaning. Pashur means “joy all around,” and Magor-missabib means “terror all around.”<sup>23</sup> For, “I will make thee a terror to thyself, and to all thy friends.” Thus, the message remains the same: Babylon would come and take the people away (1 Nephi 1:13).

### **20:7–9**

Here, Jeremiah openly admitted how difficult his ministry in Jerusalem had been. Jeremiah truly understood what it means to be “persecuted for righteousness’ sake” (Matthew 5:10). With no apparent results from his years of preaching, he wanted to stop speaking in the name of the Lord. However, he felt that he could not stop. Perhaps the Spirit compelled him to move forward, which he felt in his “heart as a burning fire shut up in [his] bones.” The Lord states in Doctrine and Covenants 4:3, “If ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work.” If that true desire does exist, it will remain or resurface despite disappointments. Alma asked, “If ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?” (Alma 5:26). Similarly, all who have experienced this desire to serve can self-reflect to determine if this desire remains.

### **20:10–13**

Despite the words of persecution from the masses, Jeremiah built his confidence on his testimony. He knew the Lord was with him and that He was the Divine Judge. John the Revelator would later make an allusion to this passage: “I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts” (Revelation 2:23). In the original language, “reins” and “heart” are literally the kidney and the heart. The heart was thought to be our mind, and the kidney was the seat of emotions.

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22 The word translated as “vain” also means “lie.”

23 Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Hewlys Publishing, 2002), 286.

**20:14–18**

Whereas in Jeremiah 18:19–23 the prophet expressed his anger and frustration (“deliver up their children to the famine, and pour out their blood by the force of the sword”), here we see that the prophet may have been suffering from depression (“that my mother might have been my grave”). Prophets and apostles suffer from anguish due to circumstances and neurological processes just like other people. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said, “Hope is never lost. If those miracles do not come soon or fully or seemingly at all, remember the Savior’s own anguished example: if the bitter cup does not pass, drink it and be strong, trusting in happier days ahead.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey R. Holland, “Like a Broken Vessel,” October 2010 general conference, online at [churchofjesuschrist.org](http://churchofjesuschrist.org).