***Jeremiah 2:14-25 “Is Israel a servant? Is he a homeborn slave? Why is he plundered? 15The young lions roared at him, and growled; They made his land waste; His cities are burned, without inhabitant. 16Also the people of Noph and Tahpanhes Have broken the crown of your head. 17Have you not brought this on yourself, In that you have forsaken the Lord your God  
When He led you in the way? 18And now why take the road to Egypt, To drink the waters of Sihor? Or why take the road to Assyria, To drink the waters of the River? 19Your own wickedness will correct you, And your backslidings will rebuke you. Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing That you have forsaken the Lord your God, And the fear of Me is not in you,” Says the Lord God of hosts. 20“For of old I have broken your yoke and burst your bonds; And you said, ‘I will not transgress,’ When on every high hill and under every green tree You lay down, playing the harlot. 21Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality. How then have you turned before Me Into the degenerate plant of an alien vine? 22For though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap, Yet your iniquity is marked before Me,” says the Lord God. 23“How can you say, ‘I am not polluted, I have not gone after the Baals’? See your way in the valley; Know what you have done: You are a swift dromedary breaking loose in her ways, 24A wild donkey used to the wilderness, That sniffs at the wind in her desire; In her time of mating, who can turn her away? All those who seek her will not weary themselves; In her month they will find her. 25Withhold your foot from being unshod, and your throat from thirst. But you said, ‘There is no hope. No! For I have loved aliens, and after them I will go.’***

We’re back with Jeremiah tonight as he begins to cry in the streets for Judah to repent. As we travel through this book, we’ll see that this cry changes – it changes from one of “cry before it’s too late” to one of “it’s too late to cry, rejoice and find joy in the Lord, even in the time of the exile and captivity in Babylon”. Tonight, God lays the responsibility where the responsibility belongs – at the feet of a rebellious nation. God has not changed. His requirements have not changed. His standards have not changed. It is the nation of Judah, the leaders, the priests, the people that have changed. Now, they are being called to account.

Verse 14*“Is Israel a servant? Is he a homeborn slave? Why is he plundered?* In Exodus 4:22, God describes Israel as His son, even His firstborn. Here, God is asking a series of questions that we know the answers to – No, Israel is a son, not a servant, a child, not a homeborn slave. Israel is the peculiar and special people of God. Israel’s situation and slavery is owed to its actions. This is the consequence of unfaithfulness to God. Sin is the cause of being plundered. In Isaiah 52:2-3, God says this is Israel – *Shake yourself from the dust, arise; Sit down, O Jerusalem! Loose yourself from the bonds of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion! 3 For thus says the Lord: “You have sold yourselves for nothing, And you shall be redeemed without money.*

Verses 15-16 *The young lions roared at him, and growled; They made his land waste; His cities are burned, without inhabitant. 16Also the people of Noph and Tahpanhes Have broken the crown of your head.* ***The young lions*** denote powerful enemies that come against the nation of Israel. Assyria and Babylon both are noted as lions in various prophecies. Given the past tense of the word roared, the lions in view here are probably princes of Assyria. *They made his land waste; His cities are burned, without inhabitant.* Now, Jeremiah looks to a future time, when the cities will be laid waste, burned and destroyed, left desolate. God’s determination has been made. Absent of repentance and a turning back to God, this is what the prophet sees ahead. *Also the people of Noph and Tahpanhes Have broken the crown of your head.* Saying the people of Noph and Tahpanhes, the prophet is speaking of Egypt. Tahpanhes is also known as Memphis. Of course, we know that, 2 Kings 23:29-34 tells us that the king of Egypt slew King Josiah at Megiddo. Eventually, this led to the king being a figurehead only, and a puppet to the latest conquering nation. This broke the crown of Israel’s head.

Verse 17 *Have you not brought this on yourself, In that you have forsaken the Lord your God When He led you in the way?* Jeremiah now returns to the theme in Verse 14 – why is Israel plundered? The calamities are due to sin. Idolatry, trusting in other nations, debasing the priesthood, and pretending to honor God have proven contemptible to God. God honored Israel by making them His peculiar people, but they failed to honor Him. They have forsaken God and left His protection. With God leading, there was peace in the land and prosperity. Josiah had worked to restore Judah and the worship, removing images, and high places. In the end though, true repentance and return never took place and the consequences are coming.

Verse 18*And now why take the road to Egypt, To drink the waters of Sihor? Or why take the road to Assyria, To drink the waters of the River?* The people made allegiance with Egypt, when it was stronger, and Assyria, when it was stronger. They drank the water of the Nile and then the water of the Euphrates. But, remember that in verse 13, these are compared to broken cisterns that will not hold water. They turned from the living water of God.

Verse 19 *Your own wickedness will correct you, And your backslidings will rebuke you. Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing That you have forsaken the Lord your God, And the fear of Me is not in you,” Says the Lord God of hosts.* God will use Judah’s own wickedness to reclaim His people. Losing everything, the people will cry out to God and return, but things have to become very bad first. True repentance only comes with true clarity of our wretchedness. Jeremiah continues – Know therefore – Call to mind that it is an evil thing to turn from our True Friend, God, towards false friends. God is calling for the people to ponder seriously upon how they have turned away from His Goodness and what that has cost them. When we read this verse, we can read it with an ear for the desperate plea of Jeremiah to a people heading for the cliff, but not gone over yet. There may yet be time to turn and repent.

Verse 20-21 *For of old I have broken your yoke and burst your bonds; And you said, ‘I will not transgress,’ When on every high hill and under every green tree You lay down, playing the harlot. 21Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality. How then have you turned before Me Into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?* ***For*** *of old I have broken your yoke and burst your bonds* Through Jeremiah, God reminds the people of His deliverance from Egypt. *And you said, ‘I will not transgress.* When God delivered, the people made promises that they would never transgress again. They worshipped with their mouth, but they were not being truthful in heart. *When on every high hill and under every green tree You lay down, playing the harlot –* The people were saying one thing and doing another. They claimed to be worshipping God, but set up idols on the hillsides and worshipped false gods. They were not being faithful to what Hosea 2:7 calls – “My first husband.” Israel was adulterous and unfaithful. Jeremiah uses words that have the idea that Israel is without shame.  *Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality. How then have you turned before Me Into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?* Isaiah 5:2 talks about God planting and cultivating the finest vine and getting wild grapes from the vine instead. In verse 21, He calls Israel a noble vine, the highest quality seed, the very seed of Abraham. Now, God sees that the vine is producing fruit not worthy of the original seed. It is an alien and low quality fruit. When the people came into the Promised Land, they had strong leaders, strong priests, and a hunger for God. Joshua 24:31 tells us that Israel’s elders, leaders, and people served God, even after Joshua’s death. Each generation since had moved further and further, forgetting the grace and mercy God had shown their fathers. I would say that America is in that same pickle today. In less than 50 years, we have seen great decline.

Verse 22 *For though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap, Yet your iniquity is marked before Me,” says the Lord God.* No matter the soap, the words, the traditions, the ancestry, or the rites of prayer, the stain of sin will remain clearly seen in the eyes of God. The people cannot claim innocence or righteousness. God knows. Only true repentance and change will cause Him to pardon and forgive. In Christ, we have His blood to cleanse us, but we too must repent and turn from our sin.

Verses 23-24 *How can you say, ‘I am not polluted, I have not gone after the Baals’? See your way in the valley; Know what you have done: You are a swift dromedary breaking loose in her ways, 24A wild donkey used to the wilderness, That sniffs at the wind in her desire; In her time of mating, who can turn her away? All those who seek her will not weary themselves; In her month they will find her.* ***How****can you say, ‘I am not polluted, I have not gone after the Baals’?* This has the idea that the people cannot claim they are pure with a straight face. It’s so obvious, yet they try to claim God’s righteousness and favor. The people have gone after idols, here represented as Baals. The people have mixed the worship of God with the worship of idols, again degenerating the purity of God’s plan.  *See your way in the valley; Know what you have done.* Hill or valley, the people must consider what they have done, the idolatry and harlotry that they have followed. Consider thy ways. *You are a swift dromedary breaking loose in her ways –* Like a fast camel, the people chase idols and serve their own flesh. Like an unbridled animal, so are the people uncontrolled, running to and fro. *A wild donkey used to the wilderness, That sniffs at the wind in her desire; In her time of mating, who can turn her away? All those who seek her will not weary themselves; In her month they will find her..* Jeremiah, by God’s direction, is comparing the Jewish people to a donkey in heat. Nothing will stop her, nothing will stop the him. They are both out of their mind. But then, when that time is over, they will come back to their senses. Likewise, the Jewish people will one day come back to their senses and return to God. When we were children, we’d get to running and acting wild in the house. Daddy would come in and tell us to get outside until we could act like we had some sense. I get the picture of God sending the Jews into exile until they could come back and act like they had some sense. America needs to get back to acting like we have some sense.

Verse 25 *Withhold your foot from being unshod, and your throat from thirst. But you said, ‘There is no hope. No! For I have loved aliens, and after them I will go.* Stop following the idolaters and making yourself thirsty pursuing ungodly things. Don’t open yourself to wickedness. Sinners may point to the Hope in Jesus, while continuing in sin unabated. They claim to love God, while pursuing the flesh. Their lips praise God, but their hearts are far away.

And so we leave Jeremiah tonight, crying out this warning. A warning that applies to us today. We cannot serve two masters: God or mammon. Choose ye’ this day whom you will serve. Joshua asked this question more than 1000 years ago. It’s still a valid question today. God or false gods. As for us and this house, we will serve the Lord.