***Jeremiah 4:1-18 “If you will return, O Israel,” says the Lord, “Return to Me; And if you will put away your abominations out of My sight, Then you shall not be moved. 2And you shall swear, ‘The Lord lives,’ In truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; The nations shall bless themselves in Him, And in Him they shall glory.” 3For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: “Break up your fallow ground, And do not sow among thorns. 4Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, And take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My fury come forth like fire, And burn so that no one can quench it, Because of the evil of your doings.” 5Declare in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem, and say: “Blow the trumpet in the land; Cry, ‘Gather together,’ And say, ‘Assemble yourselves, And let us go into the fortified cities.’ 6Set up the standard toward Zion.
Take refuge! Do not delay! For I will bring disaster from the north, And great destruction.”***

***7The lion has come up from his thicket, And the destroyer of nations is on his way. He has gone forth from his place To make your land desolate. Your cities will be laid waste, Without inhabitant. 8For this, clothe yourself with sackcloth, Lament and wail. For the fierce anger of the Lord Has not turned back from us. 9“And it shall come to pass in that day,” says the Lord, “That the heart of the king shall perish, And the heart of the princes; The priests shall be astonished, And the prophets shall wonder.” 10Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Surely You have greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, Saying, ‘You shall have peace,’ Whereas the sword reaches to the heart.” 11At that time it will be said To this people and to Jerusalem, “A dry wind of the desolate heights blows in the wilderness Toward the daughter of My people - Not to fan or to cleanse - 12A wind too strong for these will come for Me; Now I will also speak judgment against them.” 13“Behold, he shall come up like clouds, And his chariots like a whirlwind. His horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us, for we are plundered!” 14O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, That you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you? 15For a voice declares from Dan And proclaims affliction from Mount Ephraim: 16“Make mention to the nations, Yes, proclaim against Jerusalem,
That watchers come from a far country And raise their voice against the cities of Judah. 17Like keepers of a field they are against her all around, Because she has been rebellious against Me,” says the Lord. 18“Your ways and your doings Have procured these things for you. This is your wickedness, Because it is bitter, Because it reaches to your heart.”***

We’re with Jeremiah tonight as he finishes speaking of the treacherous ways Judah has acted toward God, worse than Sodom and worse than Israel. Remember that last week we closed with God calling the people to repent and glimpses of the Messianic Kingdom to come, how people would truly repent and know that God is the only source of Salvation, through Jesus. We continue that theme for the first four verses of our scripture tonight, then we change tones to warnings of invasion.

 Verse 1 *“If you will return, O Israel,” says the Lord, “Return to Me; And if you will put away your abominations out of My sight, Then you shall not be moved.* As we left Israel and Judah last week, they were promising, while weeping and sobbing, that they would repent. Now, God graciously instructs on proper repentance. Remember that repentance with the lips and not from the heart is no repentance at all. It can’t be hypocritical. It must not be delayed. Now is the time of Salvation, this moment. Repentance is most keenly felt when the wound of our sin is freshest! We realize and repent. The people must put away their abominations and idolatries out of God’s sight, literally – from before Me. We know that God sees everywhere, in both light and dark, public and private. Sin is not hidden from God. If they are willing to put the abominations out of their hearts, and thereby out of their land, God will restore their inheritance and will not remove them from the land. They shall no longer wander from God.

 Verse 2 *And you shall swear,‘The Lord lives,’ In truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; The nations shall bless themselves in Him, And in Him they shall glory.”* This has the idea of taking a solemn oath before God, acknowledging Him as the only True God, and seeing Him as King and Ruler over the nations. This oath will be in sincerity, made reverently, deliberately, and taken seriously. In righteousness, the people will seek to always keep the oath and call out things that violate the oath that are being done by others. Nations will come and turn to the One True God. This is a flash to the Kingdom of Jesus. The heathen nations, as well as the Jewish nation, will turn from their idols and glory in the name of God alone.

Verse 3 *For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: “Break up your fallow ground, And do not sow among thorns.* Jeremiah now addresses Judah and Jerusalem directly, exhorting them to repent. He uses the image of breaking up, plowing ground – purge the thorns and weeds, the wild grass growing in your hearts and prepare to receive good seed, the divine word of God. Plowing ground softens it, allowing the new growth to take deep root. Sow not among the worldly lusts and pride, the corruption currently growing. The thorns of worldly cares will choke the good seed.

Verse 4 *Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, And take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My fury come forth like fire, And burn so that no one can quench it, Because of the evil of your doings.”* Put away the corruption from your heart, allow it to be changed through and through. Not just the outside, but the inside as well. If the people refuse to change, refuse to repent, refuse to return, God’s wrath will pour out on the land like a consuming fire, unquenchable. Why? Because of the evil of your doings. God is giving a final call before it is everlasting too late. Perhaps we’re in final call now.

Verses 5-6 *Declare in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem, and say: “Blow the trumpet in the land; Cry, ‘Gather together,’ And say, ‘Assemble yourselves, And let us go into the fortified cities.’ 6Set up the standard toward Zion. Take refuge! Do not delay! For I will bring disaster from the north, And great destruction.”* God now gives a very clear warning of the judgement that is coming. Blow the trumpet is a clear indication that this will be enemies attacking and war in the nation. Assemble, go to the fortified cities. No missing what God is saying here. Do not delay! Destruction comes from the north. We know Chaldea and Babylon is the tool in God’s hand for this destruction.

Verse 7 -8 *The lion has come up from his thicket, And the destroyer of nations is on his way. He has gone forth from his place To make your land desolate. Your cities will be laid waste, Without inhabitant. 8For this, clothe yourself with sackcloth, Lament and wail. For the fierce anger of the Lord Has not turned back from us.* ***The*** *lion has come up from his thicket, And the destroyer of nations is on his way. He has gone forth from his place* Nebuchadnezzar is this lion. We met him in Daniel. He was known for his strength, fierceness, and violence. At the time, Babylon was not a great power – remember that Jeremiah is speaking about 50 years before the attack. Babylon is rising and gathering a cohort with it. At this time, Assyria is the dominant power, but beginning in 639 BC, Assyria will begin to wane and Babylon will rise. God has already chosen Babylon and it begins to devour all the nations around Judah. *To make your land desolate. Your cities will be laid waste, Without inhabitant.* This will be the result, and we know that when Jerusalem fell, one of the things done was to take the best and brightest and take them to Babylon, leaving the city in ruins. *For this, clothe yourself with sackcloth, Lament and wail. For the fierce anger of the Lord Has not turned back from us.* Put on the garments of mourning and lament. God’s fierce anger comes by way of the Chaldeans and the destruction they bring. He will not relent. The decision has been made and is set.

Verse 9 *“And it shall come to pass in that day,” says the Lord, “That the heart of the king shall perish, And the heart of the princes; The priests shall be astonished, And the prophets shall wonder.”* The wisdom, strength, and bravery of the king, the princes, the priests, and the mighty men will fail. Priests will be unable to help the people or counsel the king. The false prophets shall wonder. They’ve been saying – God loves us. Peace and prosperity! No danger.

Verse 10 *Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Surely You have greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, Saying, ‘You shall have peace,’ Whereas the sword reaches to the heart.”* Aha Lord, this can be an expression of admiration and sadness. In this case, the prophet is likely sad that the people have been deceived by false prophets. These false prophets spoke only things that tickled the ears and pleased what the people wanted to hear. 2 Thess 2:11-12 says  *And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness*. The prophets lied and said peace would prevail when God’s wrath, in the form of the Babylonians, was on the way and coming right outside the gate. We must beware false prophets that teach all is well, when we see evil all around us.
Verse 11 *At that time it will be said To this people and to Jerusalem, “A dry wind of the desolate heights blows in the wilderness Toward the daughter of My people - Not to fan or to cleanse.* When the calamity comes upon the people, it will come like an unwelcome greeting to Judah and Jerusalem. Jeremiah uses the image of a dry wind, or a very hot, bothersome wind, to describe the Babylonian army sweeping across the wilderness and bringing destruction. One theologian translated the verse as – Behold, a wind hangs over the mountains of the deserts and it shall come upon the daughter of my people, not to fan or cleanse, but to destroy.

Verse 12 is reiterating verse 11 *A wind too strong for these will come for Me; Now I will also speak judgment against them.* A mighty wind, from God, will come upon Judah and Jerusalem. In this wind, God will speak His judgement on the people.

Verse 13 *“Behold, he shall come up like clouds, And his chariots like a whirlwind. His horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us, for we are plundered!”* Behold, we now know, Nebuchadnezzar will come as a whirlwind, horses and chariots, swifter than eagles. Babylon was known for it’s horsemen and chariots. Of course, our study of Daniel and other Old Testament books has given us a good base of knowledge about the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem.

Verse 14 *O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, That you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?* O people of Judah, cleanse your spirit from wickedness. Repent that you may yet be saved. James 4:8 tells us *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.* How long will the people trust in idols, foreign armies, and false gods? Without true change in the nation, judgement will prevail. Repentance and regeneration in Christ is our only hope, just as hope in God was the only hope of ancient Israel and Judah.

Verse 15 *For a voice declares from Dan And proclaims affliction from Mount Ephraim:* The reports of war are already meeting the ears of the people. Assyria is crumbling, Babylon is rising. Dan is the northern most part of Judea. History tells us that the Chaldeans and Babylonians didn’t march directly to Judea, but came through Syria, taking the army directly past Mt Ephraim. Jeremiah gives the people the route the attackers will take, 40-45 years before Babylon marches.
Verse 16 *“Make mention to the nations, Yes, proclaim against Jerusalem, that watchers come from a far country And raise their voice against the cities of Judah,* Tell the nations, broadcast to Jerusalem, that which is coming upon them – the Chaldean army. Soldiers, here called watchers, from Chaldea are watching, looking for opportunity and weakness. They cry out and tell the cities to give up, as we saw Sennacherib do with Hezekiah back in 730 BC. It unnerves the people and undermines the leadership.

Verse 17 - *Like keepers of a field they are against her all around, Because she has been rebellious against Me,” says the Lord.* God will cause the Chaldeans to be diligent, looking for opportunities to conquer and take Judah into captivity.

Verse 18 *“Your ways and your doings Have procured these things for you. This is your wickedness, Because it is bitter, Because it reaches to your heart.”* Your choices have brought this judgement. Your rebelliousness is by your own hands. God offered fresh water. Judah chose broken cisterns filled with dirty, stale water. He offered goodness. They chose wickedness.

So we leave Jeremiah again tonight. He is giving warning about the judgement to come. The false prophets are saying pleasant and easy things – you do you, do what makes you happy, you do whatever makes you happy, sin all you like – like today, people ignore the truth. Let’s never be deceived or deluded. God is not mocked. We cannot expect goodness from God when we turn to our own wicked hearts.