***Jeremiah 8:12-22 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, Nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; In the time of their punishment They shall be cast down,” says the Lord. 13“I will surely consume them,” says the Lord. “No grapes shall be on the vine, Nor figs on the fig tree, And the leaf shall fade; And the things I have given them shall pass away from them.” ’ ” 14“Why do we sit still? Assemble yourselves, And let us enter the fortified cities, And let us be silent there. For the Lord our God has put us to silence And given us waterof gall to drink, Because we have sinned against the Lord. 15“We looked for peace, but no good came; And for a time of health, and there was trouble! 16The snorting of His horses was heard from Dan. The whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of His strong ones; For they have come and devoured the land and all that is in it, The city and those who dwell in it.” 17“For behold, I will send serpents among you, Vipers which cannot be charmed, And they shall bite you,” says the Lord. 18I would comfort myself in sorrow; My heart is faint in me. 19Listen! The voice, The cry of the daughter of my people From a far country: “Is not the Lord in Zion? Is not her King in her?” “Why have they provoked Me to anger With their carved images - With foreign idols?” 20“The harvest is past, The summer is ended, And we are not saved!” 21For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt. I am mourning; Astonishment has taken hold of me. 22Is there no balm in Gilead, Is there no physician there? Why then is there no recovery For the health of the daughter of my people?***

We left Jeremiah the last time speaking about how the priests had preached peace even as the armies of the Babylonians and Chaldeans were at the gate. They told the people what the people wanted to hear, rather than the Truth that they needed to hear. God is calling Judah to repentance and the leaders of the nation are encouraging sin, greed, covetousness, and wickedness. Immorality is everywhere, even within the priesthood! Into this, we step tonight with God speaking again to Jeremiah.

Verse 12*Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, Nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; In the time of their punishment They shall be cast down,” says the Lord.*One of the things we see today is the lack of shame among people. Sin and immorality have become something to brag about. It was that way in Jeremiah’s time as well. The hearts of the Jewish people have been hardened. They are not ashamed – God adds, “at all”. They couldn’t even blush. They gloried in wickedness. This applied particularly to the priests and the prophets that soothed the people with false hopes of peace. Even when they were shown to have lied, they were not ashamed. The priests will fall with those they deceived. They will not be spared.

Verse 13 *“I will surely consume them,” says the Lord. “No grapes shall be on the vine, Nor figs on the fig tree, And the leaf shall fade; And the things I have given them shall pass away from them.”* God will consume all of Judah. There will be no fruit left, signifying that nothing will be left of the people, young or old. Just as a leaf withers when it is burned in summer heat or is frost bitten, so the people will wither as they are deprived of God’s blessings. God will withdraw His hand from Judah and all blessings will disappear.

Verse 14-15 *“Why do we sit still? Assemble yourselves, And let us enter the fortified cities, And let us be silent there. For the Lord our God has put us to silence And given us waterof gall to drink, Because we have sinned against the Lord. 15“We looked for peace, but no good came; And for a time of health, and there was trouble!* The verses suggest that Jeremiah now turns and addresses his fellow citizens. He advises that the people flee to the fortified or walled cities. Many towns in that time were not fortified. When threats approached, the people went into the fortified cities and shut the gates until the trouble passed. The Babylonians were ravaging the countryside. Jeremiah uses the present tense because he knows that God’s judgement is soon to come to pass. Let us be silent in the city. This is allowed by God. The king has no way to defend the open country. The nation is weakened. Calamities have come. Jeremiah knows that the sin of the nation has caused this, so there is no value in complaining to God about the situation. Bitter water is given to drink because of the sin. Jeremiah points out that the people believed the deception of the false prophets, when they called for peace and prosperity rather than repentance. The people believed the false teachings of health and wealth, rather than seeing the truth of their rejection of God and crying out. There will be no time to recover strength. God has judged.

Verse 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 have come and devoured the land and all that is in it, The city and those who dwell in it.”* We remember that the Chaldeans, led by Nebuchadnezzar, did indeed enter by way of the land of Dan. This land was in the northern part of the nation. The historian Grotius writes that Nebuchadnezzar first subdued the Phoenicians and then passed through the tribe of Dan on the way to Judea. The whole land trembled. They were terrified at this powerful army with so many horses and chariots. Judah, as we learned earlier, had very few horses or experienced riders. Horses and chariots were signs of great might for an army in this time. The army forages as they go, devouring everything in sight, taking all the crops and fruits, livestock to feed the advancing army. Jeremiah is writing as though this has already happened. He had seen the vision and knows that God has spoken. It is as good as done. Both the towns and the cities, the surrounding countryside are laid waste and destroyed. People and property alike are taken away. The sacking of Jerusalem will prove to be the greatest calamity of all.

Verse 17 *“For behold, I will send serpents among you, Vipers which cannot be charmed, And they shall bite you,” says the Lord.* There will be no appeasing or mollifying the enemy in this case. They will come as serpents and will not be able to be charmed. Snake charming was common in this time. The people will certainly be bitten and the land poisoned.

Verse 18-19 *I would comfort myself in sorrow; My heart is faint in me. 19Listen! The voice, The cry of the daughter of my people From a far country: “Is not the Lord in Zion? Is not her King in her?” “Why have they provoked Me to anger With their carved images - With foreign idols?”* Jeremiah now wishes he could comfort himself. But he sees no relief in sight. Instead, he sees every reason to fear and have dread in his heart. The misery to come for his countrymen is a weight on his heart. He has a burden for the people, though he knows they have sinned. Likewise, we must have a burden for people for we were once sinners and in rebellion as well. Jeremiah found himself inconsolable with sorrow. He knew the horrors to come. We know the horrors that await the unforgiven. This must weigh on our hearts and minds. Jeremiah hears the cries of the people in captivity, the wails of lament that will come when they are held in Babylon. They cry with a mix of grief and astonishment. They cry out as though God has forsaken them in a time of their innocence. God breaks in and points out that they did not remember Him or His service in previous times, but served carved images and foreign idols. They turned from Him, not He from them. God asks – why have they provoked Me to anger? They left the shelter of His protection. They chose, just as we are choosing to reject God in this nation today. It is we that choose to dwell somewhere other than the shelter of God’s wings.

Verse 20 *“The harvest is past, The summer is ended, And we are not saved!”* Jeremiah again speaks for the people. The people now realize that they have been lied to by the priests and false prophets. Again, Jeremiah has seen this vision and speaks as though it has already taken place. The summer has past, harvest is over, the Egyptians, on whom the people were counting have failed to save them. Jerusalem will be besieged later in winter. They will suffer through winter, spring, and will be conquered in the following summer.

Verses 21-22 *For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt. I am mourning; Astonishment has taken hold of me. 22Is there no balm in Gilead, Is there no physician there? Why then is there no recovery For the health of the daughter of my people?* Jeremiah now laments the misery coming. The Hebrew means literally to be heartbroken. His heart is wounded for the wounds of his people. He is astonished, stupefied by what he knows is coming. Balm is a type of resin, like turpentine, used for wounds. Gilead was famous for balm and spices, particularly sweet spices that were carried to Egypt. Even in the times of Joseph, Gilead was famous for these things. As a result of spices and balm coming from Gilead, many physicians vacationed there. Recall that God said that the prophets and priests had slightly healed the wounds of the people, telling them the things they wanted to hear. God had given the remedy – repentance and reform, but the people rejected this to their own hurt. Of course, we know that Christ is our balm of Gilead. No one need die in sin when the gift of salvation is offered freely by the Blood of Jesus.

And so we leave Jeremiah again tonight as the time has drawn near to the coming of the Babylonians. Within a year, Jerusalem will fall. Yet, the priests and prophets continue to deceive with false teachings. How long before God withdraws all blessings from our nation and allows the calamities that we have earned to fall upon us? There’s no way to tell. For now, let us have a burden for the lost and a wounded heart for those still in sin. Let’s offer the healing Balm of Jesus to all we come in contact with. Some may yet be saved before it is everlasting too late.