



Call to Return (Summary of Jeremiah 1-9)

A. Jeremiah's Call - Understanding the Times and Seasons (Ch 1)

1. Prophet's call and commission: Jeremiah is reluctant, but the call of God is inescapable. (1:5-10)
2. Jeremiah must not fear man or opposition. God's prophetic mantle comes upon him in audio-visual encounters: (a) a branch of almond tree budding pointed to the newness of the times and seasons; (b) a boiling pot about to tip over from the north pointed to the dangerous days ahead. (1:11-16)
3. The promise of God's divine presence and power is inside Jeremiah's call. He needed a strong sense of call to be victorious in the difficult days ahead. The years ahead will require a strong backbone and courage from God's people today. It is time for the church to man up. The prophetic words sown into the soil of the nations are about to germinate and spring forth. Fear will endanger us in the spiritual warfare and perils ahead of us. We need reinforcement in the Spirit (1:17-19).

B. Understanding the Jealousy of God (Ch 2-3)

1. Jeremiah's prophetic message starts with God's heart longing for His people (2:1-3) - God misses the old days of the honeymoon with Israel in the wilderness. Israel didn't have anything in the wilderness, but Israel had God and they were very happy. Israel was willing to follow the Lord anywhere. God provided them with manna and protected her as the apple of His eye. All nations respected Israel when she was '*holiness to the LORD*'. (v3)
2. However, when God brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey and blessed them abundantly, she quickly forgot her God. This was breaking God's heart. (2:6-11) He says to them:
 - a. This did not happen overnight. It was a slow backsliding over the generations, that started with their forefathers and continued with Israel's current leadership: 'They did not seek God.' They didn't ask, 'Where is the LORD?' (2:6-8) God's people have committed two sins: '*For My people have committed two evils. They have forsaken Me, the fountains of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns – broken cisterns that can hold no water.*' (2:13)
 - b. This is the reason why Israel began to decline in international influence, and her nationhood diminished from twelve tribes to now only two. Their spiritual decline was the real reason behind their political decline. Northern Israel imported 'Baal' and 'Asherah' worship from Phoenicia through 'Jezebel'. And God's people left holiness for the syncretic mixed religion that promised prosperity and indulged in sexual immorality in their 'worship service'.
3. God's heart breaks, 'Can a virgin forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet My people have forgotten Me days without number.' (2:32)
 - a. What was Israel's response? '*You are not really angry, are You? Why can't we just have a casual-relationship like all other religions?*' (3:4-5) God's response was, '*You are trying to come back just for the rain. That is not good enough. If you are not going to come back to Me as a holy wife, then don't come back at all.*'
 - b. God lamented, '*The backsliding Israel is more righteous than the pretentious Judah who says, "I will obey the Lord," then does the opposite.*' (3:9) God doesn't want the pretentious religion, and He sends His final invitation to Judah to return to Him. If only she returns, God would restore everything! Bring back their influence, honour, blessing, even the ten lost tribes of Israel! And He would heal Judah's backsliding heart! (3:14-22) Jeremiah even gives them the words to pray as they return. (3:23-25)
 - c. But deep repentance must accompany their return or else all will be lost, '*Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the LORD and take away the foreskins of your hearts.*' (4:4)

C. Blow the Trumpet in Zion: Understanding the Depravity of Man (Ch 4-6)

1. A sudden call to blow the trumpet comes upon Jeremiah to awaken God's people to an imminent invasion of Jerusalem. It will collapse their leadership structure, that was wicked to the core (4:5-18).
 - a. Jeremiah warns of an unusually dry summer wind, which is not good news for the harvest and winnowing season. It will be too much heat for them to handle. It will burn up harvest (4:11-12).
 - b. God's judgment will take the form of the siege of Jerusalem, and it will lead to the complete destruction of the city to the pre-creation chaos level, becoming 'formless and void' (4:14-29).
 - c. Jeremiah sees the chilling vision of Judah being murdered in cold blood by her lovers: 'She will find out that her lovers were seeking her life, not her love.' (4:30-31)
 - d. Jeremiah is traumatised and his heart is throbbing in pain: '*O my soul, I am pained in my very heart! My heart makes noise in me...*' (Jer 4:19-21) He questions if God's judgment too severe!
2. God challenges Jeremiah to go and look for one good man in Jerusalem who truly walks in justice, truth and righteousness. (5:1-3) This is the covenant requirement for those who know their God.
 - a. Jeremiah looks among the spiritual leaders, but finds none among them (5:4-6).
 - b. Jeremiah is shocked to see Jerusalem filled with an unspeakable level of immorality after God has blessed them financially. They were like a she-camel in heat that nothing can stop from running after a male camel. Their problem was rooted in idolatry worshipping 'Baal & Asherah' poles which were phallic symbols used in pagan religion. '*Shall I not punish them for these things?*' says the LORD. (5:9) What caused such a rapid moral decline in their society? *The people have lost the fear of God. They do not fear God anymore.* (5:22)
 - c. Israel's further degradation (5:26-31) was brought by (a) a wicked group of extremely rich and powerful elites who have taken hold of the nation (shadow government); (b) They have corrupted the nation's judicial system by bribery; (c) The spiritual leaders who have compromised, are responsible; (d) To God's astonishment and horror God's people love it so!
 - d. God says, '*That's why you need to blow the trumpet, Jeremiah.*' (6:1) Let My people take heed and prepare for the invasion and the siege that will eventually pull the city down.
 - e. What about God's temple, the sole witness of YHWH to the nations! God tells Jeremiah, '*I don't want expensive perfume from the foreign land arising from the pagan hearts. It is worthless to Me.*' (6:20) Jeremiah has been set apart by God as an 'assayer' of Judah's heart. An assayer tests metal to determine its quality. And Judah is found to be refuse silver, rejected silver (6:27-30).

D. Exposing Shallow Religious Reform (7-9)

1. God sends Jeremiah to the temple gate, the heart of the religious centre, to prophesy the destruction of the temple, which just went through an extensive renovation. Josiah's sweeping reform involved: (a) destruction of the idols; (b) repair of the temple; (c) reinstatement of the Davidic worship system; (d) rediscovery of God's law; (e) and the greatest Passover ever celebrated in Israel's history. Anyone would have said, 'Our nation has turned a corner.' But unbeknownst to them, the religious revival inflated their pride in their external worship, symbolised by '*the temple of the Lord.*' (7:1-4)
2. Jeremiah spells out at the temple gate that God is not interested in an external religious reform if it doesn't involve the inward reform of the heart. They may have rediscovered the law, but it didn't reform their heart. Even having an impeccable theology is no substitute for the changed life, who truly seeks after God and lives out one's faith in justice, truth and righteousness. Jeremiah points out one particular sin in Judah that deeply pains God. 'Tophet', the place of burning (7:31) was where the babies born from 'Baal & Asherah cultic sex' were killed. They were 'mere inconvenience to be

discarded'. God says of these people, 'You are a generation of My wrath.' (7:29) God would require their blood to be spilled in the valley of Slaughter (7:28-8:3).

3. God finally addresses the problem of the irreconcilable gap between what God says of His people and what the people say of themselves (8:8). The people say, 'We have the law of God, and we are wise.' But God says, 'They do not know God. They refuse to know God.' (9:3, 6) God reveals to Jeremiah:
 - a. What is the reason for such divergence? The Word of God has been corrupted by biblical scholars. (8:8-12) Covetousness for monetary gain is widespread among them, and is controlling the direction the spiritual leaders are taking. They have become shameless even in their immorality. And this would lead to the nation's economic bankruptcy. Therefore, discernment is of supreme importance to know who carries the true voice and the word of God.
 - b. When the judgment comes, only then Judah will wake up and finally ask the question, 'Why isn't God among us?' (8:14-17) But not before. So much deceit and lies in commerce have already distorted Israel's market system (9:3-9). This will be followed by an environmental disaster in the form of bushfires (9:10-11).

God asks the people, 'Is there anyone wise enough to tell Me why this environmental destruction is taking place? It is because they have forsaken the law of God.' (9:12-16)

E. How can God's people prepare? (9:17-24)

1. This was Jeremiah's advice to God's people. The coming judgment is not only for Israel or for Jeremiah's time, but it is coming to the entire world (9:25-26). The only mark that God will recognise that day will be the *inward circumcision of the heart*, not the external mark on the flesh. Both Jews and Gentiles will be judged by the righteous God with complete justice and truth.

Do you have a circumcised heart? That is what God is looking for.

2. Dress in sackcloth and mourn. Sober up. Learn to mourn rather than just living it up (9:17-22). Only their whole-hearted return will mean something to God. We must radically reform our 'hearts', and walk in justice, truth, and righteousness in our daily life.

3. Pay attention to the trumpet sound. These are the watchman's prophetic warning (6:17).

We are in the middle of the season of trumpets right now. Listen to Jesus' trumpet sound to the churches before the trumpet sound goes out to the world.

Pray for the USA's election in Nov 2020 as it is one of the most important elections in modern history. What happens in the USA impacts the nations of the world. Remember that a good king can only delay the judgment of God on a nation, but it cannot ultimately avert it. Only the reformed hearts of God's people can turn a nation around.

Valley of Hinnom – Pray for the horror of baby-killing to be turned. Ruth Ginsburg's replacement with a right-wing federal judge could begin to turn the judicial system in the USA.

4. Look for the good old path and walk in it (6:16). Don't go for the popular and easy ways of the modern western convenience-seeking Christianity. Find the old pathway that is rooted in the word of God, no matter how unpopular.

Pray for the word of God to come forth with clarity from God's house as a clear witness to the world.

Pray for spiritual discernment for God's people.

5. Know your God (9:23-24). God's people ought to be busy knowing God in such a time as this.

Watch out for the false unity movement in this decade, including the Third Temple movement in Jerusalem. The need for discernment among God's people cannot be exaggerated in these days.