

Jeremiah

Chapter 11

The Broken Covenant

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 2 “Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 3 You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Cursed be the man who does not hear the words of this covenant 4 that I commanded your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you. So shall you be my people, and I will be your God, 5 that I may confirm the oath that I swore to your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day.” Then I answered, “So be it, LORD.” 6 And the LORD said to me, “Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. 7 For I solemnly warned your fathers when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. 8 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart. Therefore I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not.” 9 Again the LORD said to me, “A conspiracy exists among the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 10 They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused to hear my words. They have gone after other gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers. 11 Therefore, thus says the LORD, Behold, I am bringing disaster upon them that they cannot escape. Though they cry to me, I will not listen to them. 12 Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry to the gods to whom they make offerings, but they cannot save them in the time of their trouble. 13 For your gods have become as many as your cities, O Judah, and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up to shame, altars to make offerings to Baal. 14 “Therefore do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble. 15 What right has my beloved in my house, when she has done many vile deeds? Can even sacrificial flesh avert your doom? Can you then exult? 16 The LORD once called you ‘a green olive tree, beautiful with good fruit.’ But with the roar of a great tempest he will set fire to it, and its branches will be consumed. 17 The LORD of hosts, who planted you, has decreed disaster against you, because of the evil that the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done, provoking me to anger by making offerings to Baal.” 18 The LORD made it known to me and I knew; then you showed me their deeds. 19 But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. I did not know it was against me they devised schemes, saying, “Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more.” 20 But, O LORD of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause. 21 Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the men of Anathoth, who seek your life, and say, “Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD, or you will die by our hand”— 22 therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: “Behold, I will punish them. The young men shall die by the sword, their sons and their daughters shall die by famine, 23 and none of them shall be left. For I will bring disaster upon the men of Anathoth, the year of their punishment.”

1:1–13:27 Because of Judah’s violations of its covenant obligations, the people will be exiled to Babylonia. The section is perhaps to be dated to the reign of Josiah. (CSB)

Ch 11 Jeremiah tries to rouse his hearers from their fatal complacency by labeling their apostasy a revolt against God. Their unfaithfulness is not a sin of momentary weakness but a deliberate conspiracy to defy God's claim to their loyalty. (TLSB)

11:1–17 God's people have broken his covenant with them. (CSB)

11:2 *hear the words*. A common divine imperative in prophetic writings, summoning God's people—as well as the nations—into his courts to remind them of their covenant obligations to him and, when necessary, to pass judgment on them. (CSB)

words. A technical term for covenant stipulations (see vv. 3–4, 6; 34:18). (CSB)

this covenant. See vv. 3, 6, 8, 10; Dt 29:9. Reference is to the covenant established by God with Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai (see v. 4; Ex 19–24). (CSB)

Occurring four more times in the next eight verses, this term encompasses everything essential to the relationship the Lord established with His people. It is also used as a synonym for biblical religion (cf Gen 6:18; 17:2, 10; Ex 24:6–8; Dt 29:1). The Book of the Covenant was found in the temple early in Jeremiah's career (2 Kg 22:8; 23:2). (TLSB)

speak to the men. Periodic public reading of covenants was a common and necessary practice (see Dt 31:10–13; Jos 8:34–35). (CSB)

Jeremiah here being reminded of the duty which was incumbent upon all prophets of the Lord. (Kretzmann)

11:3 *Cursed is the man*. The phrase appears at the beginning of every verse in Dt 27:15–26. Blessings resulted from obedience to the covenant (see Dt 28:1–14); curses resulted from disobedience (see Dt 28:15–68; see also Dt 11:26–28; 29:20–21). (CSB)

The rebels against God's lordship made themselves liable to the threats of punishment clearly stated in Ex 20:5; Dt 27:15–26; 28:15–68. (TLSB)

In calling to remembrance the awful curse found in the books of Moses, in the proclamation of the covenant. (Kretzmann)

11:4 *out of the land Egypt ... the iron furnace*. Suggests that the period in Egypt was a time of affliction, testing and refinement for the Israelites. (CSB)

I command you. See v. 7; 7:23; Ex 19:5. (CSB)

Namely, the words of the covenant. (Kretzmann)

so shall you be my people you will be my people ... your God. The most basic summary of the relationship between God and Israel implied in the covenant at Sinai. (CSB)

11:5 confirm *the oath I swore*. The special promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Kretzmann)

land flowing with milk and honey. This beautiful and rich land being still in the possession of the children of Judah. (Kretzmann)

I answered – The manner of the people when they pronounced the will of the Lord antiphonally, Deut. 27,15-22. (Kretzmann)

so be it. Appears at the end of every verse in Dt 27:15–26. (CSB)

Literally, "Amen, Jehovah." (Kretzmann)

11:6 Proclaim. On a journey through the entire country, but especially in the capital city. (Kretzmann)

do them – for it is not a mere external hearing of His Word which satisfies the Lord, but only the acceptance of faith and a consequent doing of His will. (Kretzmann)

11:7 warning them again and again. The Hebrew idiom underlying this phrase is found frequently in Jeremiah (v. 25; 11:7; 25:3–4; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:14–15; 44:4), but appears nowhere else in the OT. (CSB)

11:8 did not listen – Did not even make an attempt to give heed. (Kretzmann)

stubbornness of his evil heart. A stock phrase referring to Israel's disobedience and often involving the worship of pagan gods (see 9:14; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17. (CSB)

brought upon them all the words of the covenant. All the punishments threatened to the transgressors in the special curses pronounced in the proclamation of the Law. (Kretzmann)

The Lord is ever ready to show long-suffering and loving-kindness, but in the end He is bound to punish the obstinate transgressors of His holy will. (Kretzmann)

11:9 conspiracy. Against the intended reforms of Josiah. (CSB)

A plot in opposition to Jehovah and to the demands of right and duty, the entire nation being involved in this wickedness. (Kretzmann)

11:10 turned back to the iniquities – By which Israelites of the former generations heaped guilt upon themselves. (Kretzmann)

refused. Their sin was deliberate. (CSB)

Deliberately combining to deny Him obedience in His just demands. (Kretzmann)

the covenant. Lit. "my covenant," emphasizing its origin in God himself. (CSB)

11:11 thus says the Lord – Jehovah, the same God of the covenant who was still seeking His children with the same loving-kindness as of old. (Kretzmann)

I am bringing. Judah will be judged, just as Israel had been judged earlier (see v. 10; see also 2Ki 17:18–23). (CSB)

11:12 *cry to the gods* – They were utterly unable to do so, being but dead images, who could not deliver in any calamity. (Kretzmann)

11:13 *as many gods as . . . cities*. Every ancient Near Eastern town of any importance had its own patron deity (cf. Ac 19:28, 34–35), and many towns were named after deities. (CSB)

shame, alters to make offering to Baal. Lit. “to the shame(ful god)... to Baal.” (CSB)

This idol being the chief abomination of the Canaanite nations since remote times. The Lord, having thus set forth the obstinate wickedness of the people of Judah, turns to His prophet with the command that he should not interfere with His just punishment upon the apostate nation. (Kretzmann)

11:14 *Do not pray for this people*. As a true prophet would (see 27:18; Ex 32:31–32; 1Sa 12:23). See 11:14; 14:11. There is virtually no hope for them. On various occasions, however, Jeremiah prayed for his countrymen (see, e.g., 18:20); cf. 1Jn 5:16. (CSB)

11:15 *my beloved*. Judah (see 12:7; cf. Dt 33:12, where Benjamin is called the “beloved of the LORD”). (CSB)

vile deeds – Having become guilty of spiritual adultery in its most revolting form. (Kretzmann)

sacrificed flesh – The Lord calls their worship an enormity, because it was, in truth, a hollow mockery, with which they deceived none but themselves. (Kretzmann)

can you then exult – The entire second part of the verse may be rendered: “Will vows and holy flesh take thy calamity from thee? Then mayest thou exult!” All the religious customs upon which they relied could not protect them. If they were sincere in their worship, then there would be reason for congratulating themselves. (Kretzmann)

11:16 *called you . . . olive tree*. He had regarded Israel in the days when He chose it for His own. (Kretzmann)

tempest. The Hebrew for this word appears elsewhere only in Eze 1:24, where it is translated “tumult” in reference to the noise made by an army (see Isa 13:4). (CSB)

branches will be consumed. Ten tribes of the original nation having already been taken away into captivity and the tree thus badly crippled. (Kretzmann)

11:17 Fulfilled when Judah was destroyed in 586 B.C. (see 44:2–3). (CSB)

11:18–23 The first of Jeremiah’s “confessions” (see Introduction: Author and Date). (CSB)

The Lord reveals to Jeremiah that his own townspeople of Anathoth are plotting to kill him. It is not surprising that rebels conspiring to dethrone God should also seek to silence His messenger. Jeremiah does not desire personal revenge; he would have given his life to save his people. Nevertheless, as God’s spokesman, his cause is also God’s cause. Those who tell him not to prophesy are in effect telling God He has no right to impose His will on them. God vindicates His prophet’s jealous zeal for his Lord by ordering Jeremiah to declare the punishments of death and

disaster for the people of Anathoth. Jesus also pronounced woes on His adversaries (cf Mt 23:33). (TLSB)

11:18-20 Our text is part of a larger unit that begins at 11:1 with this formula: “The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD” and ends at 13:27. A parallel prophetic formula, “The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD,” introduces a new unit at 14:1. The sub-units in chs 11–13 mix poetry and prose in a series of oracles (some in dialogue form) that explain why God is bringing judgment on his people. The oracles are undated and could have been delivered at any time in Jeremiah’s ministry (about 627–587 BC). One way to divide the section is as follows:

11:1–17: Yahweh commands Jeremiah to announce that he will bring disaster upon Israel because she has broken the covenant.

Dialogue:

11:18–20: *Jeremiah* laments his suffering to God.

11:21–23: *Yahweh* responds to him that Jeremiah’s oppressors will die by the sword.

12:1–4: *Jeremiah* laments a second time, asking God, “Why do the wicked prosper?”

12:5–6: *Yahweh* suggests that greater hardship is ahead for Jeremiah.

12:7–17: *Yahweh* himself laments Judah’s fate.

13:1–27: Jeremiah is commanded to perform symbolic acts.

The text, 11:18–20, is the first of seven “laments” (also called “confessions” or “complaints”; the others are 12:1–6; 15:10–21; 17:14–18; 18:18–23; 20:7–13; and 20:14–18) in which Jeremiah expresses his deepest spiritual and emotional distress. In this section, Jeremiah’s distress is countered by Yahweh’s own lament over the destruction of Judah. The laments together express deep grief and pain over Judah’s sin; we get a glimpse of the sorrow and pain that evil causes God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

11:18 *made it known* - *’az hirā’ibani ma’alālehem*, “Then you showed me their deeds.” Though *’az* (“then”) usually marks a temporally or logically subsequent action, it is sometimes used to place emphasis on a phrase (Josh 22:21; Gen 49:4; Ex 15:15). Here: “*Surely* you showed me their deeds.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

their. Jeremiah’s personal enemies, the “men of Anathoth” (vv. 21, 23), his hometown. (CSB)

There is a switch from third person address (“*The Lord* made it known to me”) in the first half of the verse to second person (“*You* showed me their works”) in the last half. This kind of switch, known as *enallage*, is common in Hebrew poetry. The switch to direct address lessens the distance between Jeremiah and Yahweh, and it seems like a bold and non-deferential way to talk to God. Jeremiah is not afraid of God (cf. 12:1–4). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

They were Jeremiah’s personal enemies. Verses 21 and 23 tell us that they were the men of Anathoth which was his hometown. Jesus, too, was not liked or welcome in his home town. They didn’t like the prophecies from God that he was sharing. Bad news is seldom welcome except maybe by wise people.

Jeremiah’s preaching had hit home – too close to home. His own fellow-villagers turned against him. Anathoth is located in the territory of Benjamin and was assigned to the priests. Although Jeremiah was related to the priestly clan, his kinsmen found his message incredible. They had witnessed the great renewal under Josiah. That renewal was certainly a move in the right

direction. What more did Jeremiah want? Why not give credit for the progress already made? Didn't his preaching threaten to undermine everything? Surely God's people, and especially His priests, did not need someone telling them what to do and how to think. Jeremiah began to experience firsthand the truth of the proverb once used by Jesus, "A prophet has no honor in his own country" (John 4:44). (PBC)

This incident was to shatter his illusions. It demonstrated to him how little the reformation of Josiah had reached their hearts. The people had not changed, and they did want to change their ways. Thus Jeremiah gained further insight into the immense difficulty of his ministry as God's prophet. (PBC)

11:19 *lamb led to the slaughter.* 'alluḥ, a noun/adjective variously translated as "obedient," "gentle," "friend," "companion." In combination with kebes ("lamb," "young ram") it might be translated as "gentle/docile lamb," "pet lamb," and so on. The simile "I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter" momentarily evokes our pity for Jeremiah and our disdain for his enemies. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

This type of lamb was tame because it had been raised in an environment without fear. That made it all the more vulnerable. This reflects Isaiah 53:7 and how Jesus was to and did die. Those who follow Jesus should come to expect the same treatment. (QV)

Romans 8:36 "As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

I did not know – vəlo' yada'ti ki 'alay chashəbu machashabat, "I did not know it was against me they devised schemes saying . . ." This clause (introduced by a və) explains why Jeremiah thought he was like a lamb being led to the slaughter (i.e., "for I did not know . . ."). The ki 'alay introduces the object clause after the verb of perception (yada'ti). ESV has added "saying" in the translation, which is absent in the Hebrew text. In the Hebrew text, the enemies' speech suddenly "breaks in on" Jeremiah. The jarring syntax matches the harshness of their words. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

destroy the tree and its fruit. Contrast 12:2. (CSB)

This was a good way to totally get rid of someone. If you don't like what someone is saying then kill him and his speech will stop. People also do that to rulers whose governance they don't like. Chapter 12:2 however, tells us that what God plants no one can destroy. (PBC)

cut him off from the land of the living. See Isa 53:8; contrast Ps 27:13. (CSB)

usəmo lo' yizzaker 'od. This clause (again introduced by an u) is still part of the enemies' speech and describes the *result* the enemies hope to realize by killing Jeremiah: "so that his name be remembered no more." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

kawrath – To cut off in such a manner as to destroy and totally consume.

name. Since Jeremiah had no children (see 16:2), his name would die with him. (CSB)

be remembered no more. As though he were evil (see Job 24:20; Eze 21:32). (CSB)

His name would die out. This was a very bad thing and to be avoided at all costs.

11:20 Repeated almost verbatim in 20:12; see also 17:10. (CSB)

who judges righteously. shopet tsedeq, “who judges righteously,” the substantive *tsedeq* (righteousness) can function as an adverb, as it does here (cf. Deut 1:16; Prov 16:13). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

“But, O LORD of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause.” Jeremiah assumes his own innocence without fear. So, he moves from the Lord “who judges righteously” and “who tests the heart and mind” to his prayer for vengeance on *them*. Jeremiah is not afraid of being tested and judged by God. The “depressed” Jeremiah is not in evidence here. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

to you have I committed my cause – This he could do because he totally trusted God who had shown himself worthy of such confidence.

“Let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause.” Jeremiah’s plea parallels that of his enemies, “Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more” (v 19). But the prayer for vengeance in Jeremiah’s mouth is somewhat unsettling because we have learned that God’s people are to *love* their enemies and do good to those who hate them (Mt 5:43–44). At this point, our sympathy for Jeremiah and our ability to identify with him may weaken. And maybe they should. The prophet had a unique role in Israel that anticipated Christ; in Jeremiah’s suffering, the suffering of *the* Prophet is foreshadowed. Jeremiah prays for vengeance on his enemies, but in the Gospel, Christ does not. Like the imprecatory psalms, Jeremiah’s prayer may pose a problem for modern ears. How are we to understand his plea? (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

This call was not for personal satisfaction, but to announce that those who stand against the Lord’s Word cannot prosper or escape His judgment. Such vengeance would also serve as a warning to any others who might want to resist or threaten the prophet. (PBC)

11:21 *men of Anathoth who seek your life*. See 12:6. “A man’s enemies are the members of his own household” (Mic 7:6, quoted by Jesus in Mt 10:36). (CSB)

11:22 *sword . . . famine*. This means being cut down by the enemy in battle. (Kretzmann)

11:23 *remnant*. See 6:9; Isa 10:20–22 and notes. (CSB)

The Lord being determined to carry out His sentence of extermination upon them. (Kretzmann)

them. The conspirators in Anathoth, not its entire population, since 128 men of Anathoth returned to their hometown after the exile (see Ezr 2:23). (CSB)

Thus the punishment of the Lord descends upon the evil-doers in due time, often with terrible effect. (Kretzmann)

Ch 11 The people break God’s covenant, incurring the curses pronounced when their ancestors entered the Promised Land. Persistent apostasy can have only one outcome: God’s judgment. Yet

the Lord also stands ready to forgive His people and rescue them from impending disaster, if only they repent and return to Him in faith. • Dear Father, grant us Your Holy Spirit to work daily repentance in us and to keep us faithful to You. Amen. (TLSB)