

# Jeremiah

## Chapter 15

*The LORD Will Not Relent*

Then the LORD said to me, “Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people. Send them out of my sight, and let them go! 2 And when they ask you, ‘Where shall we go?’ you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD: ““Those who are for pestilence, to pestilence, and those who are for the sword, to the sword; those who are for famine, to famine, and those who are for captivity, to captivity.’ 3 I will appoint over them four kinds of destroyers, declares the LORD: the sword to kill, the dogs to tear, and the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy. 4 And I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth because of what Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, did in Jerusalem. 5 “Who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem, or who will grieve for you? Who will turn aside to ask about your welfare? 6 You have rejected me, declares the LORD; you keep going backward, so I have stretched out my hand against you and destroyed you—I am weary of relenting. 7 I have winnowed them with a winnowing fork in the gates of the land; I have bereaved them; I have destroyed my people; they did not turn from their ways. 8 I have made their widows more in number than the sand of the seas; I have brought against the mothers of young men a destroyer at noonday; I have made anguish and terror fall upon them suddenly. 9 She who bore seven has grown feeble; she has fainted away; her sun went down while it was yet day; she has been shamed and disgraced. And the rest of them I will give to the sword before their enemies, declares the LORD.”

15:1–9 The Lord responds, concluding this section. (CSB)

15:1 *Moses and Samuel*. Famed for their intercession for sinful Israel (see Ex 32:11–14, 30–34; Nu 14:13–23; Dt 9:18–20, 25–29; 1Sa 7:5–9; 12:19–25; Ps 99:6–8). (CSB)

Great prophets who successfully intervened on behalf of Israel. (TLSB)

*stood before me*. The posture of God’s servants as they are about to pray to him (see Ge 18:22). (CSB)

Their intercession could not save the people from the threatened destruction. (Kretzmann)

*Send them out my sight*. The people are so wicked that God refuses to hear prayers offered on their behalf. They are beyond divine help. (CSB)

Jehovah utterly repudiates His chosen people. (Kretzmann)

15:2 *death*. Probably by plague; see 14:12, where “sword, famine and plague” are God’s three agents of destruction, paralleling the first three here (the Hebrew word for “starvation” here is the same as that for “famine” in 14:12). (CSB)

The Lord’s previous sentence, in which He names three scourges, chap. 14, 12, is here strengthened and intensified in order to bring out the inevitable certainty of the impending destruction. (Kretzmann)

15:3 *four kinds*. Not the same four as in v. 2, but an elaboration of three of the fates awaiting the corpses of those killed by the sword. The seventh-century B.C. vassal treaties of Esarhaddon present similar

curses: “May Ninurta, leader of the gods, fell you with his fierce arrow, fill the plain with your corpses, and give your flesh to the eagles and vultures to feed on ... May dogs and pigs eat your flesh.” (CSB)

*dogs.* See 1Ki 21:23. ““And also concerning Jezebel the LORD says: ‘Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.’ (CSB)

*beasts of the earth.* See Rev 6:8. “I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.” (CSB)

**15:4** *a horror.* The Hebrew for this word is translated “a thing of horror” in the parallel in Dt 28:25. (CSB)

*kingdoms of the earth* – cp. Deut. 28, 25, there being a great many countries making up the Babylonian Empire. (Kretzmann)

*what Manasseh ... did in Jerusalem.* Manasseh, good King Josiah’s grandfather, was the most wicked king in Judah’s long history (see 2Ki 21:1–11, 16). His sins were a primary cause of Judah’s eventual destruction (see 2Ki 21:12–15; 23:26–27; 24:3–4). (CSB)

Wicked king of Judah (cf 2Ki 21:1–18; 2Ch 33:1–20) and grandfather of Josiah, who was the king at this point in Jeremiah’s ministry (1:1–2). (TLSB)

**15:5–9** A poem concerning the forthcoming destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C (see La 1:1, 12, 21; 2:13, 20). (CSB)

**15:5** In a neighborly form of inquiry concerning her welfare. By the dispensation of Jehovah, men were simply ignoring her and her plight, letting her alone in her misery. (Kretzmann)

**15:6** *You keep go backward.* Lit. “You go backward.” (CSB)

*I am weary of relenting* – Since His gracious offers had so often been abused and rejected, He would now no longer show mercy. (Kretzmann)

As at the time of the flood, God would no longer allow His mercy to be abused (cf Gn 6:5-7) (TLSB)

**15:7** *winnowing.* Winnowing as a figure of judgment is found also in 51:2; Pr 20:8, 26; Isa 41:16. (CSB)

Scattered them as worthless chaff carried off by the wind during threshing operations. (TLSB)

*gates of the land.* Or, more simply, “gates of the land” (as in Na 3:13), i.e., the approaches to the land. (CSB)

Even as a man at the opening of a threshing-floor makes use of every gust of wind to remove the chaff from the wheat, so the Lord would stand at the entrance of the land and let its inhabitants pass through a sifting process. (Kretzmann)

*bereaved ... on my people.* The young men will fall in battle, and Judah and Jerusalem will be left childless (see Eze 5:17). (CSB)

*not turn from.* Lit. “not repented of,” reminiscent of the refrain in Am 4:6, 8–11: “yet you have not returned to me,” where the same Hebrew verb is used. (CSB)

**15:8** *widows more in number than the sand of the seas.* A tragic reversal of the covenant promise of innumerable offspring. (CSB)

*At noonday... suddenly.* Military attacks at noon were unexpected. (CSB)

*anguish.* Often associated with labor pangs. (CSB)

**15:9** *seven.* The complete, ideal number of sons —soon to be destroyed. (CSB)

Number used proverbially to express many sons (cf Ruth 4:15). Mothers so blessed would see their sons struck down in the prime of life. (TLSB)

*sun went down while it is still day.* See Am 8:9; cf. Mt 27:45. (CSB)

Her good fortune leaving her just at a time when she should have been at the height of her prosperity. (Kretzmann)

*rest of them.* Lit. “remnant” (see note on 6:9). Even they will be put to the sword (see Mic 6:14). (CSB)

Those still remaining at the time when Jerusalem was taken. (Kretzmann)

*before their enemies* – Cp. Micah 6, 14. Thus the fate of the city was determined upon in every respect, as the Lord proceeded to carry out His sentence upon its inhabitants. (Kretzmann)

**15:1–9** God responds to Jeremiah’s prayer for the people. They have refused to repent and return to Him; therefore, He will destroy them. God is righteous—He keeps His Word—and He will bring down the curses He threatened (Dt 28:15–68). “But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rm 5:8). • Lift up our hearts, O Lord, and fill us with Your Holy Spirit, that we may rejoice in Your salvation and live for You. Amen. (TLSB)

*Jeremiah's Complaint*

**10** Woe is me, my mother, that you bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land! I have not lent, nor have I borrowed, yet all of them curse me. **11** The LORD said, “Have I not set you free for their good? Have I not pleaded for you before the enemy in the time of trouble and in the time of distress? **12** Can one break iron, iron from the north, and bronze? **13** “Your wealth and your treasures I will give as spoil, without price, for all your sins, throughout all your territory. **14** I will make you serve your enemies in a land that you do not know, for in my anger a fire is kindled that shall burn forever.” **15** O LORD, you know; remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In your forbearance take me not away; know that for your sake I bear reproach. **16** Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts. **17** I did not sit in the company of revelers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because your hand was upon me, for you had filled me with indignation. **18** Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail? **19** Therefore thus says the LORD: “If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them. **20** And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight

**against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, declares the LORD. 21 I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.”**

**15:10–21** The third of Jeremiah’s “confessions” (see Introduction: Author and Date), including in this case two responses by the Lord (vv. 11–14, 19–21). (CSB)

Jeremiah bares his troubled soul to God, who reproves and rehabilitates His disenchanted servant. The record of sheer warnings, delivered over and over again to an impenitent audience, helps us understand why the preacher of these ignored sermons went to pieces under the emotional strain of his frustrating assignment. In a delirium of pent-up anger, he utters such strong words against God as to make him liable to the charge of blasphemy. No longer an “iron pillar” (1:18) but a broken reed, he resents God’s way of administering justice. His faith hangs by a thread. Though he rants against God, Jeremiah still turns to Him for an answer to his problem. (TLSB)

**15:10** *woe...bore me*– Job also cursed the day of his birth. (TLSB)

*have not lent nor have I borrowed.* Have not become involved in matters likely to evoke dispute or difference of opinion. (CSB)

Jeremiah’s associates might have had a reason to curse him if he had taken advantage of them in financial transactions. (TLSB)

**15:11–14** The Lord speaks, first to Jeremiah (v. 11), then to the people of Judah (vv. 12–14). (CSB)

**15:11** God encourages Jeremiah. (CSB)

*Have I not set you free for their good?* Or, “Have I not strengthened you for good?” Hbr scribes recognized a spelling problem that affected the clarity of their manuscripts here. Modern translators have made numerous conjectures on the intent of this phrase. (TLSB)

Literally, “I confirm thee for good,” namely, that his tribulations would finally turn out to his benefit. (Kretzmann)

*have I not pleaded for before the enemy.* Fulfilled, e.g., in 21:1–2; 37:3; 38:14–26; 42:1–3. (CSB)

“Have I not caused an attack on you?” Either the Lord is comforting Jeremiah because He is supporting him amid troubles, or He is causing these troubles to accomplish a greater good through the prophet. Cf 21:1–2; 37:3; 42:1–2 for requests by Jeremiah’s enemies to intercede for them. (TLSB)

That is, the enemy would, when trouble came upon him, turn to the prophet with an imploring appeal, believing that the intercession of Jeremiah would have much weight in the eyes of Jehovah. (Kretzmann)

**15:12** A rhetorical question assuming a negative answer. (CSB)

*iron.* Symbolic of great strength (see 28:13). (CSB)

Literally, “Will then iron,” that is, the ordinary iron used in Palestine, “break iron from the north and brass?” for the steel of Syria and of various parts of Asia Minor was noted for its excellence. The meaning evidently is that the people of Judah could not withstand the armies of the great northern empire which would soon be sent against them. (Kretzmann)

*from the north.* From Babylonia. (CSB)

**15:13–14** Repeated in large part in 17:3–4. (CSB)

**15:13** Fulfilled in 52:17–23. (CSB)

*without price.* Cf. Isa 55:1. People and plunder alike would be free for the taking. (CSB)

The material wealth throughout the country would be taken away on account of the sins of the people. (Kretzmann)

**15:14** *I will make you serve your enemies* – Literally, "I let them," the treasures, "pass over into a land unknown to thee, as the booty of the enemy."

*for my anger is kindled that shall burn forever.* Quoted verbatim from Dt 32:22, where the Hebrew is translated "For a fire has been kindled by my wrath." (CSB)

**15:15–21** God has sent drought on Judah for her iniquities (Jer 14:1–6), and Jeremiah the prophet has attempted to intercede for them (14:7–9, 13, 19–22). But God refused to relent and commanded Jeremiah not to pray for the people (14:10–11, 14–18; 15:1–9). Jeremiah, in dark despair at God's refusal, lamented his birth and the contempt that the whole land has for him (15:10). God's reply was to repeat his judgment on Judah (15:11–14). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

**15:15** *You know.* The Lord is aware of what Jeremiah has suffered (see v. 10). (CSB)

"You" is emphatic: "You yourself know." The verb is repeated in the imperative at the end of the verse, *da'*. Jeremiah has accepted God's judgment and now prays to God to remember and visit him and to do as he has said to those who reject him as prophet. "In your forbearance," that is, "for slowness of anger" (*'al-le'erek 'apka*) toward those who despise God's Word, "take me not away." "Know that for your sake I bear reproach." Jeremiah endures the reproach of Christ as a preacher of the Word of God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

*remember.* Express concern for. (CSB)

This is not Jeremiah "venting," but taking his case to his Lord. Jeremiah implores God's active intervention with "remember" which implies action as well as remembrance and care. This combination appears also in 14:10b and Ps 106:4. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

*your forbearance* – Do not take me away. Another view is this understanding: "Do not, in the postponement of your anger, take me away." The prophet complains that God is being too patient with his opponents. If God waits any longer, Jeremiah might perish. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

**15:16** *your words ... I ate them.* I digested them, I assimilated them, I made them a part of me (see Eze 2:8–3:3; Rev 10:9–10). (CSB)

As food is assimilated by the body, so God's words permeated Jeremiah's innermost being, bringing him joy and delight. (TLSB)

Jeremiah protests his innocence by referring to his call, when God put his Word in the prophet's mouth (1:9). Jeremiah was delighted to receive such a gift (compare Ezek 2:8-3:3 and see Deut 8:3; Is 55:1-11) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

Jeremiah's confession here is also true for every Christian. God's words were found not by Jeremiah but by God's initiative. God put his words in Jeremiah's mouth (1:9). Although Jeremiah struggled to accept the words God gave him to speak (1:1-9), he has eaten and inwardly digested them. God's words are joy and delight to his heart, in particular because Jeremiah is called by God's name. The Gospel brings joy to those who hear with faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

*delight of my heart.* See Ps 1:2. (CSB)

*I am called by your name.* I belong to you. (CSB)

**15:17** *company of revelers* – The reference could be to carousers in general, in which case Jeremiah is stating that he has been about God's work, not his own pleasure. Or the reference could be to Jeremiah's prophetic opponents, those who were saying that repentance was not necessary and destruction was not coming (5:12; 7:4; 8:11). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

Jeremiah has not joined the counsel of revelers. His prophetic ministry has often been characterized by God's warnings and threats and is a lonely calling. His prophecies have not come by his own choice (2 Pet 1:21), but because God's hand was on him. The words of God's indignation have filled Jeremiah with indignation also. The prophetic office has proven heavy to bear. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

*li sat alone.* Jeremiah never married (see 16:1), and he attracted only a few friends. (CSB)

*your hand.* Divine constraint (see 2Ki 3:15; Isa 8:11 and note; Eze 1:3; 3:14, 22; 37:1; 40:1). (CSB)

Jeremiah's message was not of his own concoction but was impelled by divine commission and authority. Cf Is 8:11; Ezk 3:14; 8:1. (TLSB)

*indignation.* At the sins of Judah (see 6:11). (CSB)

**15:18** Two rhetorical questions used by Jeremiah to express his nagging doubts about himself, his mission and God's faithfulness. (CSB)

God does not answer the questions. His children "walk by faith, not by sight" (2Co 5:7). (TLSB)

The burden and suffering that belong to the preacher of the Gospel now come on Jeremiah (see 2 Cor 11:23-12:10). He shares in the sufferings of Christ (Col 1:24) and thereby exhibits Christ to the world in his own body. His "pain" (*ke'evi*) denotes extreme suffering that is unrelenting and perpetual (*netsach*), a wound from God's blow that will not heal. In his suffering, he cries out against God, because it appears that God has not kept his word (cf. Ps 22:1). His accusation is emphatic: "You will surely be (*hayo thihyeh*) to me a deceiver." He compares God to a waterway that fails when needed most. But God does not answer his question and challenge directly. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

*why* – What Christian has not asked this question with Jeremiah? We often assume that when God calls us to do his work, all will go smoothly. Jeremiah may have assumed that since he was a prophet of the Lord, the people would listen; and if the people did not listen, then certainly the Lord would promptly punish them. Since neither has happened (yet), Jeremiah is severely wounded and finds no healing. So

Jeremiah questions God's integrity. The construction of infinitive and indicative emphasizes the intensity of the prophet's thoughts. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

*pain unceasing... wound incurable.* Jerusalem is similarly described in 30:12–15, together with God's promise of healing in 30:17. (CSB)

*Will you be to me ... ?* See Ps 22:1; Mt 27:46. (CSB)

*deceitful brook.*† See Mic 1:14, where also “deceptive” probably refers to the kind of intermittent streams described in Job 6:15–20. Tired and disillusioned like Elijah (1Ki 19:4), Jeremiah here accuses God of being undependable, in contrast to the Lord's own earlier description of himself as a “spring of living water.” (CSB)

Jeremiah is tempted to think that “the fountain of living waters” (2:13; 17:13) has become as “treacherous as a torrent-bed” (Jb 6:15), which quickly runs dry. (TLSB)

A watercourse that rushes with water when it rains, but dries up soon thereafter. Is the Lord one who gives water in the rainy season, then withholds it when it is needed most? Is he a failed spring, one who promises life but does not follow through? So it seems to Jeremiah, and often to us and our hearers. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

**15:19–21** The Lord commands Jeremiah to repent, then encourages him and renews his call. (CSB)

God does not fail to come to the rescue of His blustering spokesman. Without explaining the mystery of divine providence, the Lord beckons Jeremiah to return from the wasteland of doubt to an implicit trust in Him and in the promises He made to the prophet when He called him. It will not be a life of ease, for evil men will continue to fight against him. Yet the Lord will save and deliver him. (TLSB)

**15:19** *therefore* - “Therefore,” *laken*. In answer to Jeremiah's complaint, God calls him to repentance and gives him instruction. The first of two conditions, introduced by *'im*, has two imperfect verbs in the protasis, indicating possible or probable fulfillment. “If you turn and I turn you, you shall stand before me.” Later the Lord hears Ephraim's lament, “Turn me and I shall be turned” (31:18). The apodosis contains the promise “You shall stand before me.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

*return ... restore ... turn ... turn.* The Hebrew root is the same for all four words. (CSB)

The response to the prophet is the same message Jeremiah is to speak to Judah: Repent. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

*if you utter what is precious*– If you will now speak worthy things instead of the rubbish you have just spoken about me, then you will be my voice. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

In the second condition, also with imperfect verbs, God addresses Jeremiah's prophetic office: “If you bring out (*totsi*) the precious instead of the worthless, as my mouth (*kephi*) you shall be.” God commands Jeremiah to be like the householder at the end of Jesus' parables (Mt 13:52), speaking the precious treasures of God's Word, not the “philosophy and empty deceit” (Col 2:8) and “cleverly devised myths” (2 Pet 1:16) of the world, nor the “different doctrine” of false teachers in the Church (1 Tim 1:3). The apodosis gives the promise that Jeremiah will be God's mouth to Judah (cf. Ex 4:16; Lk 10:16). Jeremiah speaks in God's stead and by his command. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

*you shall be as my mouth.* Lit. “mouth.” (CSB)

He is to continue but this time with confidence in God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

*they shall turn to you* – Pointed rebuke, not total rejection, is God’s way of dealing with his people, calling them back into a right relationship. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

God instructs Jeremiah that as he speaks with God’s authority, he must not yield to the pressures to join the ways of wayward Judah. Instead, Judah must turn to Jeremiah, for true repentance is a return to God’s Word. Like Jeremiah in the first condition of this verse, they, too, must be turned by God in repentance. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

**15:20** *make you...a fortified wall* – The vocabulary is similar to Jeremiah’s call (1:18-19), so that God is affirming Jeremiah in his position. Therefore the verse is akin to Jesus affirming Peter three times after the resurrection. God promises to be with Jeremiah, to save him and to deliver him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

God repeats the promise he made to Jeremiah in 1:18–19. The prophet is an impregnable, fortified city against the opponents of God’s Word. The promise given to every prophet and preacher is repeated, “For I am with you” (*ki-’itka ’ani*; cf. Ex 3:12; Mt 28:20). God promises to save (*lehoshi’aka*) and deliver (*ulehatsileka*) Jeremiah. The promise is established by divine declaration (*ne’um-yehwah*). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

**15:21** *deliver you out...the wicked*. While the hand of the Lord seemed to be the cause of Jeremiah’s incurable wounds (V. 17), it is now God who will deliver Jeremiah from the “hand of the wicked.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

*redeem you* – Means to ransom, to buy back. God ransoms or redeems Israel from Egypt (Deut 7:8), from exile (Jer 31:11), and from iniquity (Ps. 130:8), acting on the basis of his unfailing love (Ps 130:7). God responds to Jeremiah’s “why” with an overwhelming proclamation of his gracious, saving acts that will prevail ultimately, regardless of the current situation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 3)

God repeats this promise with the same verb, *wehitsaltika*, “I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked.” The second line repeats in parallelism, “and redeem you (*uphedhithika*) from the grasp of the ruthless.” God’s spokesman need not fear Christ’s enemies, because he has God’s promise of deliverance and redemption in Christ (Mt 10:22, 26). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

**15:10–21** Jeremiah complains that everyone stands against him because of his negative message. He comes close to accusing God of deceiving him into thinking that his job as prophet was going to be easier than it has been. God calls Jeremiah to repentance for his doubt and promises to strengthen him for the work ahead. We, too, are often weak and afraid to proclaim God’s Word boldly, fearing the reprisals we might suffer. God’s grace is sufficient for our weakness, and His Holy Spirit empowers us to share His Word faithfully. • Grant us repentance and courage, Lord, and strengthen us to do Your work in joy and confidence, through Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)