

Jeremiah

Chapter 16

Famine, Sword, and Death

The word of the LORD came to me: 2 “You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place. 3 For thus says the LORD concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place, and concerning the mothers who bore them and the fathers who fathered them in this land: 4 They shall die of deadly diseases. They shall not be lamented, nor shall they be buried. They shall be as dung on the surface of the ground. They shall perish by the sword and by famine, and their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth. 5 “For thus says the LORD: Do not enter the house of mourning, or go to lament or grieve for them, for I have taken away my peace from this people, my steadfast love and mercy, declares the LORD. 6 Both great and small shall die in this land. They shall not be buried, and no one shall lament for them or cut himself or make himself bald for them. 7 No one shall break bread for the mourner, to comfort him for the dead, nor shall anyone give him the cup of consolation to drink for his father or his mother. 8 You shall not go into the house of feasting to sit with them, to eat and drink. 9 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will silence in this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride. 10 “And when you tell this people all these words, and they say to you, ‘Why has the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? What is our iniquity? What is the sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?’ 11 then you shall say to them: ‘Because your fathers have forsaken me, declares the LORD, and have gone after other gods and have served and worshiped them, and have forsaken me and have not kept my law, 12 and because you have done worse than your fathers, for behold, every one of you follows his stubborn, evil will, refusing to listen to me. 13 Therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor.’

16:1–17:18 Messages of disaster and comfort, with the note of disaster predominating (16:1–13, 16–18; 16:21–17:6; 17:9–13, 18). The first half of the section is prose (16:1–18), the second half poetry (16:19–17:18). (CSB)

16:1–9 In order to be a living sign of the fearful disaster announced by the spoken word (cf Ezk 24:24), God commands Jeremiah to make three drastic lifestyle changes that ran contrary to the customary patterns of social behavior: (1) forego marriage, because whole families would be wiped out by war and disease; (2) refuse to observe the rituals expected at funerals, because death would be so widespread that no one would survive to perform the customary mourning rites; (3) reject invitations to a house where feasting was going on because there would no longer be any reason for joyous celebrations. (TLSB)

16:2 Jeremiah’s ministry was such that he had to face life alone (see note on 15:17), without the comfort and support a family can provide. (CSB)

You shall not. The Hebrew underlying this phrase is used for the most forceful of negative commands, as, e.g., in the Ten Commandments (see Ex 20:3–4, 7, 13–17). (CSB)

Jeremiah is the only prophet known to have received such a command. (TLSB)

this place. Judah and Jerusalem, especially the latter (see, e.g., Zep 1:4). (CSB)

16:3 *sons...daughters...mothers...fathers* – All the persons belonging to the married estate being included in this enumeration. (Kretzmann)

16:4 *diseases*. The Hebrew for this word is translated “ravages” in 14:18. (CSB)

They would die in a most miserable manner. (Kretzmann)

not be lamented mourned...buried. This was the most disrespect that could be heaped on anyone. It is still a great disgrace in the Middle East and even elsewhere today.

refuse. Lit. “dung.” (CSB)

perish by sword and famine. They would perish in some of the great scourges of the ancient world. (Kretzmann)

food for the birds ... and the beasts. The birds and beasts of prey would devour them where they fell. (Kretzmann)

16:5 *house...mourning* – Where someone had died and where people were giving loud expression to their grief. (Kretzmann)

People of means hired professional mourners. TLSB note has “Refers to pagan Marzeah feasts. (TLSB)

do not go to mourn. See the similar command of God in Eze 24:16–17, 22–23. (CSB)

God was bidding Jeremiah to refrain from every show of sympathy for the fate of the apostate people. (Kretzmann)

16:6 *cut himself... make himself bald*. Actions forbidden in the law, but sometimes practiced by Israelites (see 41:5; Eze 7:18; Mic 1:16). (CSB)

By shaving off a part of their hair, they were doing a token of excessive sorrow and grief in the Orient. (Kretzmann)

Such heathen mourning practices are also mentioned in the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh but are contrary to Mosaic Law. Cf 48:37. (TLSB)

16:7 Food was customarily offered to mourners (see 2Sa 3:35; 12:16–17; Eze 24:17, 22; Hos 9:4). (CSB)

consolation. Lit. “cup of consolation,” in later Judaism a special cup of wine for the chief mourner. (CSB)

The reference is to the custom of sending bread and wine to the house of such as had been bereaved by death in order to refresh and comfort them. (Kretzmann)

At a meal prepared by friends of the bereaved family, the guest drank from a common cup of wine to express their sharing in the grief. (TLSB)

16:8 *you shall not go into the house of feasting*. The present crisis is a time for neither feasting nor mourning (see v. 5). (CSB)

That is, to attend such a mournful feast of survivors in person and to show sympathy in any form whatever. (Kretzmann)

16:9 The Lord here again makes announcement of His intention in a most solemn manner. This is the usual formula for announcing the full sweep of the Lord's wrath. Cp. Is. 24,7.8; Rev. 18,23. (Kretzmann)

16:10 This is being asked with a great show of pretended innocence. The implied assertion being that they were being threatened without a cause, (Kretzmann)

16:12 *have done worse than your fathers.* See 1Ki 14:9. The coming judgment cannot be blamed on the sins of previous generations (see 31:29–30; Eze 18:2–4). (CSB)

follows his stubborn evil. They were obstinately ignoring His Word. (Kretzmann)

16:13 *I will hurl you out.* Into exile (see 7:15; 22:26; Dt 29:28). (CSB)

land neither you nor your fathers have known. Babylonia (see 9:16). (CSB)

This is a form of holy irony: what they willingly did in their own country, they would be obliged to do in the land of their captivity; because they voluntarily forsook the true God at home, they would be prevented from serving Him elsewhere. At the same time the Lord opens up before the eyes of Judah a way of redemption, the thought of which was intended to keep His people from despair. (Kretzmann)

16:1–13 Jeremiah's actions will reinforce his words of judgment and condemnation. Persistent sin can only result in condemnation by God and loss of all joy. God alone will provide strength for Jeremiah in his difficult ministry, just as He provides all we need in Jesus Christ. He is the blessed Bridegroom for His beloved Bride, the Church. • Strengthen us, O Lord, to do Your will, and bring all parts of our lives into harmony with our faith in Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

The LORD Will Restore Israel

14 “Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ **15** but ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.’ For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their fathers. **16** “Behold, I am sending for many fishers, declares the LORD, and they shall catch them. And afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the clefts of the rocks. **17** For my eyes are on all their ways. They are not hidden from me, nor is their iniquity concealed from my eyes. **18** But first I will doubly repay their iniquity and their sin, because they have polluted my land with the carcasses of their detestable idols, and have filled my inheritance with their abominations.” **19** O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in the day of trouble, to you shall the nations come from the ends of the earth and say: “Our fathers have inherited nothing but lies, worthless things in which there is no profit. **20** Can man make for himself gods? Such are not gods!” **21** “Therefore, behold, I will make them know, this once I will make them know my power and my might, and they shall know that my name is the LORD.”

16:14–15† Repeated almost verbatim in 23:7–8. See Isa 43:16–21; 48:20–21; 51:9–11. (CSB)

16:14–15 A brief burst of messianic sunlight breaks through the lowering skies of darkest gloom (cf 3:14, 18–19; 4:27; 5:10, 18; 27:22; 31:31; 33:14). (TLSB)

16:14 *As the LORD lives.* An oath formula. (TLSB)

16:15 *north country.* Babylonia (see note on Isa 41:25). (CSB)

The return from exile would become the new, great example of redemption instead of the exodus from Egypt (v 14). (TLSB)

16:16 *fishers... hunters.* Symbolic of conquerors. (CSB)

The executioners of divine judgment will catch the people as easily as fishers fill their nets, and they will search out any that remain as hunters track down their quarry. (TLSB)

mountain and every hill. To which the people would flee in vain. (CSB)

clefts of the rocks. The phrase occurs outside Jeremiah only in Isa 7:19. The Lord may be recalling here the episode of the ruined linen belt, hidden in a “crevice in the rocks” (13:4). (CSB)

No one can hide anything from the Lord. No one can escape the punishment due because of sin. (PBC)

16:17 *they are not hidden from me.* They are unable to conceal it before His omniscient gaze. (Kretzmann)

16:18 *doubly repay their iniquity.* To the first punishment inflicted on the people in their homeland, the Lord would add a second, unprecedented feature: exile to a foreign land. (TLSB)

polluted my land.† Made the holy land unclean. (CSB)

detestable idols. See Lev 26:30. Idols have no life in them (see Ps 115:4–7; 135:15–17). (CSB)

Idols, as helpless and lifeless as dead bodies, polluted the land in the same way that a person became ceremonially unclean by contact with a corpse (cf Nu 19:11-22). (TLSB)

my inheritance. God’s land. (CSB)

16:19–20 The prophet interjects a few brief words of hope. (CSB)

Looking into the future, Jeremiah rejoiced to see the time coming when all nations would reject their man-made idols and worship the only true God. Jeremiah’s vision was fulfilled in Christ. (TLSB)

16:19 *strength ... stronghold ... refuge in the day of trouble.* Such descriptions of God’s dependability and protecting power are common in the Psalms (see, e.g., Ps 18:1–2; 28:7–8; 59:9, 16–17). (CSB)

16:20 *not gods.* The question has the strength of a most emphatic denial, of a stern rebuke to the men of Judah for their idolatrous ways. Moreover, the Lord expresses His emphatic agreement with this statement of Jeremiah. (Kretzmann)

16:21–17:4 The Lord responds to Jeremiah and continues his solemn warnings that began in v. 1. (CSB)

16:21 *know,,know... know.* The same Hebrew root underlies each of these words. God would “cause them to know,” and then they would surely “know.” (CSB)

them ... they. Probably includes Judah as well as the nations (see Eze 36:23; 37:14). (CSB)

know that my name is the LORD. “Name” often means “person” or “being” in the OT (see note on Ps 5:11). Ezekiel’s equivalent of Jeremiah’s phrase is “know that I am the LORD,” found in his prophecy about 70 times (see note on Eze 6:7). (CSB)

That He alone is God in truth. Cp. Ezek. 12, 15; Ex. 3, 14. Many a person has since that time been brought to a realization of the same truth by similar stern measures of the Lord. (Kretzmann)

The Lord assured Jeremiah that the manifestation of His might and power would bring multitudes to know Him. (TLSB)

16:14–21 God’s grace will be known by all people—both the Judean exiles returning from a foreign land and by heathen nations who turn to the true God. However, the Lord will first deal with their sin of idolatry by destroying the people of Judah and desolating the land. God’s righteousness requires the legal penalty for sin to be paid (cf Rm 6:23a). Yet God delights in mercy. He Himself paid for sin in the cross of Christ and forgives sin through faith in Him (cf Rm 6:23b). • Thank You, heavenly Father, for our Savior Jesus Christ and for Your Holy Spirit, who has brought us to faith and keeps us in the same. Amen (TLSB)