

Jeremiah

Chapter 4

“If you return, O Israel, declares the LORD, to me you should return. If you remove your detestable things from my presence, and do not waver, 2 and if you swear, ‘As the LORD lives,’ in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, then nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory.” 3 For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: “Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. 4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds.”

4:1 *you return* – The repetition serving to emphasize the anxious, merciful call of the Lord. (Kretzmann)

4:2 *truth, justice and in righteousness.* The piling up of qualifying words underscores the need for repentance that is sincere and not perfunctory. (CSB)

As surely as the LORD lives. God’s people are admonished to invoke the name of the Lord instead of swearing by false gods, which is idolatry. (TLSB)

nations shall bless themselves in him.† Reflects the language of God’s great promises to Abram (see Ge 12:2–3 and note). (CSB)

In the true God. All the families of the earth were to be blessed by Abraham’s offspring (Gn 12:3). But when they worshiped idols and seemed doomed to extinction for their apostasy, the name of God was profaned before all people (cf Is 52:5; Ezk 36:20–23; Rm 2:24). Still, the Lord would assure the salvation of the nations. (TLSB)

him shall they glory – Becoming partakers of the blessings which were promised in the Messianic prophecies from the time of the patriarchs. The sincere conversion of Judah would have this effect upon the Gentiles, for such an open confession is a powerful argument for the truth. Cp. Luke 22, 32. (Kretzmann)

4:3–4 “God works through this means (i.e., the preaching and hearing of His Word). He breaks our hearts [Jeremiah 4:3–4] and draws us to Him [John 6:44]. Through the preaching of the Law, a person comes to know his sins and God’s wrath. He experiences in his heart true terrors, contrition, and sorrow. Through the preaching of, and reflection on, the Holy Gospel about the gracious forgiveness of sins in Christ, a spark of faith is kindled in him. This faith accepts the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake and comforts itself with the Gospel promise. So the Holy Spirit (who does all this) is sent into the heart [Galatians 4:6]” (FC SD II 54). (TLSB)

4:3 *Break up your fallow ground.* Probably quoted from Hos 10:12. (CSB)

That of their hearts, which is like wild land overgrown with weeds, where cleansing is effected only by deep and repeated plowing, and sow not among thorns, in not removing hypocrisy and other evil growths. (Kretzmann)

sow not among thorns. Plants cannot grow on the hardened surface of uncultivated soil or in places where thorns will choke them. Likewise, no fruit can grow out of a heart encased in the impervious shell

of impenitence and overgrown with the weeds of sinful desires. Ter: “[The Creator] taught them even then to put off the old man and put on the new” (ANF 3:472). (TLSB)

4:4 *circumcise...your hearts.* Consecrate your hearts. (CSB)

Mere outward compliance with the law requiring the physical removal of the foreskin is no insurance against the wrath of God. The sign of the covenant must remove the inborn self-will from their hearts and render them responsive to the Lord. (TLSB)

wrath go forth like fire...none to quench it. That wrath burns like an unquenchable fire, for the only means of putting it out is the gospel. The gospel alone purifies and cleanses the heart with forgiveness and faith. Reject that forgiveness, say no to the gospel, and there is nothing left to turn away the wrath of God. (PBC)

because of the evil of your deeds. Probably quoted from Dt 28:20. (CSB)

Just as the Lord required a circumcision of the heart in those days in addition to the circumcision of the body, so He insists upon the baptism with the Spirit in our days, lest we offend Him by insincerity. (Kretzmann)

3:6–4:4 Judah’s temporary repentance is only superficial—their hearts still stray far from the Lord. Jeremiah offers a glimmer of hope for the northern tribes, revealing God’s plan to rescue a remnant of their people in the future. Even as the Lord disciplines His people, He also shows His grace by rescuing a remnant in order to replant them in the Promised Land and bring a Savior from their descendants. In view of God’s mercy, practice daily repentance. He will grant you the blessings of Abraham through his offspring Jesus Christ. • Father, keep us faithful to You, the only true God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (TLSB)

Disaster From the North

5 Declare in Judah, and proclaim in Jerusalem, and say, “Blow the trumpet through the land; cry aloud and say, ‘Assemble, and let us go into the fortified cities!’ 6 Raise a standard toward Zion, flee for safety, stay not, for I bring disaster from the north, and great destruction. 7 A lion has gone up from his thicket, a destroyer of nations has set out; he has gone out from his place to make your land a waste; your cities will be ruins without inhabitant. 8 For this put on sackcloth, lament and wail, for the fierce anger of the LORD has not turned back from us.” 9 “In that day, declares the LORD, courage shall fail both king and officials. The priests shall be appalled and the prophets astounded.” 10 Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD, surely you have utterly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, ‘It shall be well with you,’ whereas the sword has reached their very life.” 11 At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem, “A hot wind from the bare heights in the desert toward the daughter of my people, not to winnow or cleanse, 12 a wind too full for this comes for me. Now it is I who speak in judgment upon them.” 13 Behold, he comes up like clouds; his chariots like the whirlwind; his horses are swifter than eagles—woe to us, for we are ruined! 14 O Jerusalem, wash your heart from evil, that you may be saved. How long shall your wicked thoughts lodge within you? 15 For a voice declares from Dan and proclaims trouble from Mount Ephraim. 16 Warn the nations that he is coming; announce to Jerusalem, “Besiegers come from a distant land; they shout against the cities of Judah. 17 Like keepers of a field are they against her all around, because she has rebelled against me, declares the LORD. 18 Your ways and your deeds have brought this upon you. This is your doom, and it is bitter; it has reached your very heart.”

4:5–31 The invaders from the north will bring God’s judgment against his unrepentant people (see ch. 6). (CSB)

4:5 *blow the trumpet.* To warn of impending doom. (CSB)

flee into the fortified cities. See v. 6. To avoid capture by hostile troops, people living in the countryside would take refuge in the nearest walled town (see 5:17; 8:14; 34:7; 48:18). (CSB)

4:6 *Raise a standard.* Signpost to guide the refugees as they flee from the open country. (TLSB)

disaster from the north. The Babylonians. (CSB)

4:7 *lion.* A symbol of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar, like an angry lion, leaving his lair, Babylon, with his army of Chaldean soldiers, (Kretzmann)

destroyer. Usually refers to Babylon (6:26; 15:8; 48:8, 32), but in 51:1, 56 it refers to Persia and her allies (see 51:48, 53). (CSB)

4:8 *sackcloth.* Expresses grief or dismay (cf 48:37; Gn 37:34; Is 15:3; 37:1). (TLSB)

anger ... has not turned away. Contrast 2:35. (CSB)

The people who had expected to return to the Lord on the basis of their hypocritical behavior, their feigned repentance, would find themselves sorely disappointed. (Kretzmann)

4:9 *In that day.* The time when this judgment would come upon Judah. (Kretzmann)

king ... officials ... priests ... prophets. The rulers whose position demanded that they devise means of defense would be utterly at a loss in this emergency, unable to provide help. (Kretzmann)

4:10 Jeremiah, not a disinterested spectator of the horrible scene, injects exclamations of horror and pain as he beholds the invasion and destruction of his beloved country. Cf vv 19–21. (TLSB)

utterly deceived. † Because they hardened their hearts, God sent them “a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie” spoken by false prophets. (CSB)

You will have peace. Here the words of false prophets, not of God (see 14:13; 23:17; see also 6:13–14; 8:10–11). (CSB)

throats. The Hebrew for this word is usually translated “soul” or “life,” but originally it had the meaning “throat, neck” (see, e.g., Ps 69:1). (CSB)

If people persist in opposing Him, the Lord finally delivers them to the certain consequences of such opposition and brings their punishment upon them in this manner. (Kretzmann)

4:11 *hot wind.* The sirocco or khamsin, a hot, dry wind that brings sand and dust (see Ps 11:6; Isa 11:15; Jnh 4:8). (CSB)

winnow. The chaff as the threshed grain was winnowed. (Kretzmann)

4:12 *too full for this.* † Neither winnowing (separating grain from chaff) nor cleansing (blowing dust from the grain), God’s judgments will sweep away the entire population. (CSB)

for this. For separating the chaff from the grain on the threshing floor (v 11). God’s judgment will fully overwhelm them. (TLSB)

4:13 *comes up like the clouds.* Cf. Eze 38:16. (CSB)

The enemy with his army, shall come up as clouds, those of sand and dust blown up by the tempest. (Kretzmann)

horses are swifter than eagles. See Hab 1:8, where the Babylonians (Hab 1:6) use horses that are “swifter than leopards” and employ cavalry that “fly like a vulture” (the Hebrew word for “vulture” is translated “eagle” in 4:13; see Dt 28:49). (CSB)

ruined. The exclamations of the despairing Israelites are recorded. But the Lord has still another emblem of the expected judgment, which He proceeds to hold before the eyes of Judah and Jerusalem. (Kretzmann)

4:14 *wash.* A mere outward change of behavior is not sufficient, heart and mind and soul must undergo a complete transformation. (Kretzmann)

4:15 *Dan.* Far away, close to the northern border of Israel (see 8:16). (CSB)

Ephraim. A few miles north of Jerusalem. The enemy, in the mind’s eye of the prophet, is making fearfully rapid progress toward the holy city. (CSB)

The invading foe has advanced southward from Israel’s northernmost city to the hills on Judah’s border, c 10 mi N of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

4:16 *distant land.* Babylon. (CSB)

shout against. The Hebrew underlying this phrase is translated “growled” in 2:15. (CSB)

In a shout of triumph or derision. (Kretzmann)

4:17 *all around.* As watchers who have surrounded a harmful animal and are making ready to dispatch it. (Kretzmann)

4:18 *reached your very heart.* A fatal blow. (TLSB)

Inflicting deadly wounds. Such is ever the result of sin: sweet and attractive as it seems at first, it strikes deadly wounds, as the sinner usually finds out to his great regret. (Kretzmann)

4:5–18 Through Jeremiah, God pronounces judgment against His people and warns them of an irresistible enemy advancing quickly from the north. Like a hurricane-force wind, Babylon’s armies will sweep Judah away, leaving only a few survivors. God had sent prophet after prophet to warn His people and call them to repentance because He loved them and wanted them back. Today, He calls you so that you may receive His gracious salvation. • Father, turn us from our foolish ways to walk by faith in Your Word, through Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

Anguish over Judah's Desolation

19 My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent, for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. 20 Crash follows hard on crash; the whole land is laid waste. Suddenly my tents are laid waste, my curtains in a moment. 21 How long must I see the standard and hear the sound of the trumpet? 22 “For my people are foolish; they know me not; they are stupid children; they have no understanding. They are ‘wise’—in doing evil! But how to do good they know not.” 23 I looked on the earth, and behold, it was without form and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light. 24 I looked on the mountains, and behold, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro. 25 I looked, and behold, there was no man, and all the birds of the air had fled. 26 I looked, and behold, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger. 27 For thus says the LORD, “The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end. 28 “For this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above be dark; for I have spoken; I have purposed; I have not relented, nor will I turn back.” 29 At the noise of horseman and archer every city takes to flight; they enter thickets; they climb among rocks; all the cities are forsaken, and no man dwells in them. 30 And you, O desolate one, what do you mean that you dress in scarlet, that you adorn yourself with ornaments of gold, that you enlarge your eyes with paint? In vain you beautify yourself. Your lovers despise you; they seek your life. 31 For I heard a cry as of a woman in labor, anguish as of one giving birth to her first child, the cry of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands, “Woe is me! I am fainting before murderers.”

4:19–26† Jeremiah voices his agony at the approaching destruction of his beloved land and its people. (CSB)

Jeremiah felt the pain of his people. He knew the word he proclaimed was the truth. The burden of this preaching tore him up. He wished he could preach another message; but as long as the nation refused to repent he had to preach God’s message of law and judgment. Judah’s continued impenitence was all the more reason to preach. The people of Judah had to be made to listen. Jeremiah could not keep silent. (PBC)

4:19–21 As the sights and sounds of war and destruction fall on the land and the people he loves, Jeremiah cannot refrain from expressing heartfelt pain. (TLSB)

4:19 *anguish*. Often associated with labor pangs, as here (see 6:24; 49:24; 50:43). (CSB)

KJV uses “bowels” the whole inner part of the man quaking with terror. (Kretzmann)

heart is beating wildly. See Job 37:1; Ps 38:10; Hab 3:16. (CSB)

Moaning with the severity of the affliction. (Kretzmann)

sound of the trumpet. The shout of battle, as the enemy advances to subdue the land of Israel. (Kretzmann)

4:20 *tents*. Usually made of goat hair (see Ex 26:7) and therefore strong enough to protect from cold and rain (see 10:20). (CSB)

Destruction of the nation’s towns and villages is a personal blow to Jeremiah. He is as a nomad whose shelter is swept away. (Kretzmann)

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4:21 *standard ... sound of the trumpet.* How long would this state of things continue? When would the reports of calamities and disasters cease? (Kretzmann)

4:22 The Lord speaks. (CSB)

The Lord reminds Jeremiah that the people deserve the decreed punishment. (TLSB)

stupid. Without the right knowledge of God. (Kretzmann)

know me not. See 2:8. Leaders and people alike had committed the ultimate sin (see Isa 1:3; Hos 4:1). (CSB)

no understanding. They have no discernment. (Kretzmann)

4:23–26 The striking repetition of “I looked” at the beginning of each verse ties this poem together and underscores its visionary character, as the prophet sees his beloved land in ruins after the Babylonian onslaught. Creation, as it were, has been reversed. (CSB)

4:23 *without form and void.* The phrase occurs elsewhere only in Ge 1:2 (see note there). In Jeremiah's vision, the primeval chaos has returned. (CSB)

Contemplating the desolation to come, Jeremiah is horrified to see how complete it is. To him, the earth looks the way it might have before God changed the primordial chaos into a habitable world. (TLSB)

had no light. The heavens were black and silent, the town empty. (PBC)

4:25 *there was no man.* The Hebrew underlying this phrase occurs elsewhere only in Ge 2:5, where it is translated “there was no man.” Again, uncreation has replaced creation. (CSB)

4:27 *not destroy it completely.* See 5:10, 18; 30:11; 46:28. God's mercy tempers the total judgment envisioned by Jeremiah in vv. 23–26. (CSB)

A ray of Gospel light: God will not let His chosen people become extinct or lose their national identity by being absorbed into other nations. A remnant will survive, and the people will again become His instruments to bless all races. (TLSB)

4:28 *not make a full end.* Unless his people repent (see 18:7–8). (CSB)

4:29–31 Judah will discover too late how useless it is to romance foreign nations. Her false paramours will only despise her and seek to kill her. (TLSB)

4:29 *archer.* Babylon's evil deeds against Judah will someday recoil on her (see 50:29). (CSB)

takes to flight. See Jdg 6:2; 1Sa 13:6; Isa 2:19, 21. Even people living in fortified towns feel unsafe. (CSB)

4:30 *paint.* Antimony, a black powder used to enlarge the eyes and make them more attractive (see 2Ki 9:30; Eze 23:40). (CSB)

lovers. The Hebrew root underlying this word is found elsewhere only in Eze 23:5, 7, 9, 12, 16, 20, where it is used of Samaria and Jerusalem, the adulterous sisters (see notes on 2:20; 3:7) who “lusted” after foreign nations and their gods. (CSB)

seek your life. They are intent only on murdering you (see v. 31). (CSB)

4:31 *Daughter of Zion*. A personification of Jerusalem and its inhabitants (see 6:2, 23). (CSB)

stretching out her hands. In prayer for help (see Job 11:13). (CSB)

As one who yields to murderers, unable to withstand any longer. Such is the usual fate of men who disregard the warnings and pleadings of the Lord: when it is too late, they begin to mourn and lament, bewailing their fate. But as far as God is concerned, love is still with Him even in the might of His anger. (Kretzmann)

4:19–31 Jeremiah grieves for Judah and its people, lamenting their imminent destruction. The same God who created the world by His powerful Word has pronounced judgment upon His sinful and rebellious people. Even in the midst of his grief, Jeremiah voices a note of hope—all is not lost. God is faithful to His promise of salvation. Today, He also remains faithful to you, even in the midst of grief and despair. • Help us to see the consequence of our sins, O Lord, and turn to You each day for forgiveness and wisdom. In Jesus’ name. Amen. (TLSB)