

Jeremiah

Chapter 6

Impending Disaster for Jerusalem

Flee for safety, O people of Benjamin, from the midst of Jerusalem! Blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and raise a signal on Beth-haccherem, for disaster looms out of the north, and great destruction. 2 The lovely and delicately bred I will destroy, the daughter of Zion. 3 Shepherds with their flocks shall come against her; they shall pitch their tents around her; they shall pasture, each in his place. 4 "Prepare war against her; arise, and let us attack at noon! Woe to us, for the day declines, for the shadows of evening lengthen! 5 Arise, and let us attack by night and destroy her palaces!" 6 For thus says the LORD of hosts: "Cut down her trees; cast up a siege mound against Jerusalem. This is the city that must be punished; there is nothing but oppression within her. 7 As a well keeps its water fresh, so she keeps fresh her evil; violence and destruction are heard within her; sickness and wounds are ever before me. 8 Be warned, O Jerusalem, lest I turn from you in disgust, lest I make you a desolation, an uninhabited land." 9 Thus says the LORD of hosts: "They shall glean thoroughly as a vine the remnant of Israel; like a grape gatherer pass your hand again over its branches." 10 To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ears are uncircumcised, they cannot listen; behold, the word of the LORD is to them an object of scorn; they take no pleasure in it. 11 Therefore I am full of the wrath of the LORD; I am weary of holding it in. "Pour it out upon the children in the street, and upon the gatherings of young men, also; both husband and wife shall be taken, the elderly and the very aged. 12 Their houses shall be turned over to others, their fields and wives together, for I will stretch out my hand against the inhabitants of the land," declares the LORD. 13 "For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. 14 They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace. 15 Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown," says the LORD. 16 Thus says the LORD: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.' 17 I set watchmen over you, saying, 'Pay attention to the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, 'We will not pay attention.' 18 Therefore hear, O nations, and know, O congregation, what will happen to them. 19 Hear, O earth; behold, I am bringing disaster upon this people, the fruit of their devices, because they have not paid attention to my words; and as for my law, they have rejected it. 20 What use to me is frankincense that comes from Sheba, or sweet cane from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices pleasing to me. 21 Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will lay before this people stumbling blocks against which they shall stumble; fathers and sons together, neighbor and friend shall perish.'" 22 Thus says the LORD: "Behold, a people is coming from the north country, a great nation is stirring from the farthest parts of the earth. 23 They lay hold on bow and javelin; they are cruel and have no mercy; the sound of them is like the roaring sea; they ride on horses, in array as a man for battle, against you, O daughter of Zion!" 24 We have heard the report of it; our hands fall helpless; anguish has taken hold of us, pain as of a woman in labor. 25 Go not out into the field, nor walk on the road, for the enemy has a sword; terror is on every side. 26 O daughter of my people, put on sackcloth, and roll in ashes; make mourning as for an only son, most bitter lamentation, for suddenly the destroyer will come upon us. 27 "I have made you a tester of metals among my people, that you may know and test their ways. 28 They are all stubbornly rebellious, going about with

slanders; they are bronze and iron; all of them act corruptly. 29 The bellows blow fiercely; the lead is consumed by the fire; in vain the refining goes on, for the wicked are not removed. 30 Rejected silver they are called, for the LORD has rejected them.”

6:1–30 The prophet envisions the future Babylonian attack on Jerusalem. (CSB)

The call to repentance comes at the center of another cycle of indictments and threats of dire consequences. Repetition in prophetic preaching testifies to God’s patience and goodness and to the stubborn perversity of human nature. (TLSB)

6:1 The Lord speaks in vv. 1–3. Verse 1 is strongly reminiscent of 4:6 (see note there). But whereas in 4:6 the command was to seek protection in Jerusalem, in 6:1 the people are to flee from Jerusalem, because no place—not even the holy city itself—will be safe from the invader. (CSB)

Benjamin. The tribal territory bordering Judah north of Jerusalem. Jeremiah himself was from Benjamite territory (see 1:1). (CSB)

The tribes of Judah and Benjamin composed the Southern Kingdom. (TLSB)

blow the trumpet ... Tekoa. In the Hebrew there is a play on these words. Tekoa was the hometown of Amos. (CSB)

South of Jerusalem, the signal being intended to call the people together for flight. (Kretzmann)

Raise a signal. In the Hebrew there is a play on words, made possible by using a different Hebrew word (found also in Lachish Letter 4:10) for “signal” (caused by the smoke of a fire; see Jdg 20:38, 40) than the one used in 4:6. (CSB)

An important function of fortresses in the Judean hill country was to raise signal fires, by which Jerusalem and other places could be warned about approaching threats. This military practice is mentioned in letters found at Lachish, a major fortress in the Judean hills. The much earlier Mari letters from the Euphrates region (eighteenth century BC) also mention this tactic. (TLSB)

Beth Hakkerem. Mentioned elsewhere only in Ne 3:14. (CSB)

Another village south of Jerusalem, situated on a lofty hill. (Kretzmann)

disaster looms out of the north. With the invading armies of the Chaldeans, **and great destruction.** Since the enemy was approaching from the North, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the surrounding country would naturally flee toward the south. (Kretzmann)

6:2 *destroy.* The Hebrew for this verb is found with the meaning “destroy” also in Hos 4:5. (CSB)

Daughter of Zion. I destroy the daughter of Zion,” laying waste the city and the entire country, as a rich and luxuriant meadow is laid waste by senseless cropping. (Kretzmann)

delicately. Used to describe the city of Babylon in Isa 47:1. (CSB)

Literally, "The comely and delicate one! (Kretzmann)

6:3 *Shepherds with their flocks.* Rulers with their troops. (CSB)

Invading armies, directed by their chiefs, will denude the country as grazing flocks mow a pasture bare. (TLSB)

pitch. The Hebrew for this verb continues the pun on “Tekoa” in v. 1. (CSB)

each in his place. The Hebrew for this phrase is used similarly (“each ... his own place”) in Nu 2:17. (CSB)

Ruthlessly pasturing and treading down the territory which he occupies. The invaders are now pictured as encouraging one another in the attack upon Jerusalem. (Kretzmann)

6:4 The invaders speak in vv. 4–5. (CSB)

Prepare. Lit. “Consecrate” (also in Joel 3:9; Mic 3:5). Since ancient battles had religious connotations, soldiers had to prepare themselves ritually as well as militarily (see Dt 20:2–4; 1Sa 25:28). (CSB)

at noon. To take advantage of the element of surprise, since the usual time of attack was early in the morning. (CSB)

shadows of evening lengthen – Shouts express the besiegers’ disappointment that nightfall is cutting their attack short, though apparently they determine to continue despite the darkness (v. 5). (TLSB)

The besieged people of Jerusalem may have raised this shout as they saw the darkness of disaster engulfing them. (TLSB)

6:5 *at night.* Since attacking soldiers normally retired for the night and resumed siege the following morning, the phrase underscores their eagerness and determination. (CSB)

6:6 The Lord addresses the Babylonian troops. (CSB)

siege mound. To help them bring up battering rams and scale Jerusalem’s walls (see 33:4). (CSB)

oppression. Against its own people. (CSB)

Literally, “she is altogether violence in her inside,” wherefore she is altogether to be punished. (Kretzmann)

6:7 *sickness and wounds.* Jerusalem suffers from spiritual decay and disease (see v. 14), and is not aware of it. (CSB)

6:8 *be warned.* The better part of wisdom (see v. 10; Ps 2:10). (CSB)

turn from. In sorrow, but also in disgust. The Hebrew for this phrase continues the pun on “Tekoa” in v. 1. (CSB)

Wickedness cannot and would not go unpunished. The people of Judah had heaped up un-repentant sin till it overflowed. There was no restraint. All they could do was sin. Such is the nature of the sinful flesh. In this way sin grows until it controls the whole person. This sin, this impenitence must be punished. (PBC)

desolate\ion...uninhabited land.

This warning being repeated here once more, in order to cause her to return to her senses. An appeal of this kind may often be a means of preventing the misery and ruin of a sinful people. (Kretzmann)

6:9 *glean*. Not hastily nor superficially, but with the greatest thoroughness, as the divine judgment is ever executed. (Kretzmann)

thoroughly. Stopping just short of complete destruction (see 4:27; 5:10, 18; 30:11; 46:28). (CSB)

Going back to the vines again and again in order to get even the last of the berries, said of the repeated invasions of the Chaldeans, at each of which they carried away captives to Babylon. (Kretzmann)

vine. Symbolic of Israel. (CSB)

6:10 Jeremiah speaks. (CSB)

give warning. The prophet now voices his objection. (Kretzmann)

ears...may not hear. The imagery of uncircumcised ears is found elsewhere only in Ac 7:51. (CSB)

Of what use is all remonstrance under such circumstances? (Kretzmann)

6:11 The prophet speaks, then the Lord resumes his speech (through v. 23). (CSB)

full of the wrath. When the Lord's wrath inundates the city, all its inhabitants—from the children to the very aged—will become war casualties (cf Is 13:16. (TLSB)

children ... young men ... husband and wife ... old. All will be judged, from youngest to oldest (see v. 13). (CSB)

in the street. Where children play (see 9:21; Zec 8:5). (CSB)

Thus the sentence of the Lord would strike all classes of people and every age without exception, the whole nation being included in the outpouring of His wrath. (Kretzmann)

6:12–15 Repeated almost verbatim in 8:10–12. (CSB)

6:12 *turned over to others*. As Dt 28:30 warned—one of the covenant curses. (CSB)

Transferred to them as the spoils of war. (Kretzmann)

stretch out my hand against. To destroy (see 15:6). (CSB)

6:13 *least to the greatest* – All classes of people, those of no influence as well as the powerful and mighty. (Kretzmann)

greedy for unjust gain – The love of money suppressing every good intention, every laudable purpose. (Kretzmann)

6:14 *wound*. The false prophets refused to tell the people how sick they were. Claiming all was well, they put a bandage on the nation’s cancerous wound. (TLSB)

Touching upon the faults and transgressions of the body politic in a superficial manner only. (Kretzmann)

Peace ... when there is no peace. A common message of false and greedy prophets (see Eze 13:10; Mic 3:5). The wicked, in any case, cannot expect to enjoy peace (Isa 48:22; 57:21). (CSB)

Denotes more than absence of war. Its wider meaning is reflected when translated “welfare” or “prosperity,” as in 29:11; 33:9.

6:15 *not at all ashamed* – They were devoid of all sense of decency, of all feeling of shame. (Kretzmann)

shall fall among you – Words having proved unavailing, the Lord will now execute His vengeance in deeds which will bring home the lessons which He intended to convey. The false leaders of any Church will deceive only themselves if they hope to escape the wrath which will strike the people under their care due to their own defection in attending to their duty. (Kretzmann)

6:16 *ancient paths*. The tried and true ways of Judah’s godly ancestors (see 18:15; Dt 32:7). (CSB)

Arriving at a crossroads, travelers must decide which direction to take: “the good way” or “the way...that leads to destruction (Mt. 7:13). (TLSB)

walk in it. See Isa 30:21. (CSB)

rest for your souls. Quoted by Jesus in Mt 11:29 (see Isa 28:12; cf. Ps 119:165). (CSB)

The picture is taken from the predicament of travelers who have lost the right road and are now anxiously inquiring for the path from which they have wandered. (Kretzmann)

6:17 *watchmen*. True prophets (see Eze 3:17; 33:7; Hab 2:1). (CSB)

sound of the trumpet. To warn of approaching danger. (CSB)

This was blown for the purpose of rallying the children of Israel around the banner of the true God. (Kretzmann)

we will not pay attention – Rejecting in the most stubborn fashion even the last warning of Jehovah. (Kretzmann)

6:18 *hear, O nations*. See Mic 1:2. (CSB)

The Gentile people everywhere. (Kretzmann)

congregation – Either the entire assembly of the nations which are here summoned, or the faithful few in Israel who still formed the Church of Jehovah. (Kretzmann)

will happen to them – What punishment the Lord is about to inflict. And the prophet now addresses himself to a still greater circle of witnesses. (Kretzmann)

6:19 *law they have rejected*. † They did not listen to God’s word (see 8:8–9). (CSB)

6:20 *Sheba*. Located in southwestern Arabia, it was the center of the spice trade. (CSB)

frankincense. The Hebrew for this word is translated “cane” in Ex 30:23; calamus, which probably came from India, was an ingredient in the sacred anointing oil (Ex 30:25). (CSB)

sweet cane. Used in preparing incense. (TLSB)

burnt offerings are not acceptable. † Without the proper attitude of one’s heart and the manner of one’s life the ritual of sacrifice is an abomination to the Lord (see note on Isa 1:11–15). (CSB)

Ceremonies that do not express commitment of the heart are an abomination to the Lord. (TLSB)

The temple was a busy place. The pilgrims and worshipers crowded in. To all appearances religion was on the upswing. But the Lord found no pleasure in what they were doing, for their hearts were not clean. Their hearts were full of unbelief. (PBC)

6:21 *stumbling blocks*. The Babylonian invaders (see v. 22). (CSB)

God will see to it that the road of rebellious self-willed ends in disaster (cf Is 8:14; Ez 14:3-4, 7) (TLSB)

6:22–24 Repeated almost verbatim in 50:41–43. (CSB)

6:22 *land of the north*. Babylonia (see 4:6; Isa 41:25 and notes). (CSB)

from the farthest parts of the earth. Babylon was far removed from Israel. (TLSB)

6:23 *javelin*. † As weapons of offense, of powerful attack. (Kretzmann)

like the roaring sea. In their angry or triumphant battle-cry. (Kretzmann)

Daughter of Zion. A personification of Jerusalem and its inhabitants (see v. 2; 4:31). (CSB)

6:24–26 The prophet speaks to, and on behalf of, the people of Judah. (CSB)

6:24 *hands fall helpless*. Courage will fail (see Isa 13:7). (CSB)

6:25 *terror on every side*. A favorite expression of Jeremiah (20:10; 46:5; 49:29). The Hebrew for this phrase is used once as a proper name, “Magor-Missabib.”

6:26 *only son*. A father’s most precious possession (see Ge 22:12, 16; Am 8:10; Zec 12:10; Ro 8:32). (CSB)

6:27–30 The Lord speaks to Jeremiah and appoints him to test the people of Judah as a refiner tests metals (see 9:7; Isa 1:25; Mal 3:2–3). (CSB)

The Lord authorizes Jeremiah to expose the pervasive nature of Israel’s wickedness. The people are like a piece of ore from which no precious metal can be smelted because it is composed of nothing but bronze and iron. (TLSB)

6:27 *tester of metals*. See Job 23:10. (CSB)

Literally, "as a prover," or explorer, and an assayer, one who separates the metal from the dross. (Kretzmann)

6:28 *going about with slanders.* Contrary to Lev 19:16. (CSB)

Deliberately seeking opportunities to indulge in slandering and reviling others. (Kretzmann)

bronze and iron. Base metals when compared to gold and silver. (CSB)

Debased and hardened in their opposition to the Lord. (Kretzmann)

act corruptly. See Dt 31:29; Isa 1:4. (CSB)

Having only destruction in mind. (Kretzmann)

6:29 In ancient times, lead was added to silver ore in the refining process. When the crucible was heated, the lead oxidized and acted as a flux to remove the alloys. Here the process fails because the ore is not pure enough (cf. Eze 24:11–13). (CSB)

bellows blow. To fan the fire that smelts the ore in the refining process. (TLSB)

lead. Used to separate the silver from the base metals. (TLSB)

in vain. Israel has resisted purification; it remains a solid block of refuse, not worth saving. Cf Eze 22:18–22. (TLSB)

6:30 *The Lord has rejected them.* The “hardened rebels” (v. 28), the “wicked” (v. 29), have failed to pass the Lord’s test. Nothing worthwhile can be made of them. (CSB)

Ch 6 Because they have rejected God’s Word and spurned His prophets, the Lord will send a foreign army against Jerusalem to destroy it and lay waste to the land. God rejects sacrifices offered without faith; He is not satisfied with token compliance. Instead, He calls us to repent and to live our faith in all we say and do. In spite of our faithless acts, God continues to be faithful through His Son, Jesus, our Savior. • Open our eyes, Father, and send us Your Spirit, that we live our lives for You, avoiding sin and helping others. In Jesus’ name. Amen. (TLSB)