

# Jeremiah

## Chapter 8

**At that time, declares the LORD, the bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of its officials, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be brought out of their tombs. 2 And they shall be spread before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven, which they have loved and served, which they have gone after, and which they have sought and worshiped. And they shall not be gathered or buried. They shall be as dung on the surface of the ground. 3 Death shall be preferred to life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family in all the places where I have driven them, declares the LORD of hosts.**

**8:1–3** The desecrated skeletons of Judah's leaders and citizens bear ironic testimony to the folly of having worshiped astral deities (cf 7:18). (TLSB)

**8:1** *bones ... brought out of their tombs.* A gross indignity and sacrilege. (CSB)

Stated five times in this verse, like the tolling of the nation's death knell. (TLSB)

*kings ... officials ... priests ... prophets.* Of all the rulers and leaders of the people, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem out of their graves, the Babylonians defiling even the resting-places of the dead in carrying out the judgment upon. (Kretzmann)

**8:2** *exposed to the sun ... moon ... stars.* To hasten their disintegration, and perhaps also to demonstrate that the heavenly bodies, which had been worshiped by some of Judah's kings (see 2Ki 21:3, 5; 23:11), among others, were powerless to help. (CSB)

*loved and served ... worshiped.* Acts of homage and adoration that should have been given to God alone. (CSB)

*They.* The bones. (CSB)

*not be gathered up or buried.* Contrast 2Sa 21:13–14. (CSB)

**8:3** *remnant.* Literally, "shall prefer death to life in all places of the survivors whither I have driven them, saith Jehovah Sabaoth," the people in exile and captivity among the heathen being thus called to repentance even now. (Kretzmann)

**7:30–8:3** God condemns His people for worshiping false gods, even in the temple compound, and for offering their children as burnt offerings to idols. Sin may start small, but it often grows until it takes over a person's life, leading even to such obvious evils as child sacrifice (consider today the abuse and neglect of children, who may be sacrificed to selfish interests). God still wants to save His people, calling them to repentance before the terrible events of His judgment become reality. His own dear Son bravely laid down His life to atone for all our sins. • Help us, Father, to recognize sin in its early stages and turn to You for strength and forgiveness. Amen. (TLSB)

*Sin and Treachery*

**4** “You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD: When men fall, do they not rise again? If one turns away, does he not return? **5** Why then has this people turned away in perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit; they refuse to return. **6** I have paid attention and listened, but they have not spoken rightly; no man relents of his evil, saying, ‘What have I done?’ Everyone turns to his own course, like a horse plunging headlong into battle. **7** Even the stork in the heavens knows her times, and the turtledove, swallow, and crane keep the time of their coming, but my people know not the rules of the LORD. **8** “How can you say, ‘We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us’? But behold, the lying pen of the scribes has made it into a lie. **9** The wise men shall be put to shame; they shall be dismayed and taken; behold, they have rejected the word of the LORD, so what wisdom is in them? **10** Therefore I will give their wives to others and their fields to conquerors, because from the least to the greatest everyone is greedy for unjust gain; from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. **11** They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace. **12** 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 the fallen; when I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says the LORD. **13** When I would gather them, declares the LORD, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them.” **14** Why do we sit still? Gather together; let us go into the fortified cities and perish there, for the LORD our God has doomed us to perish and has given us poisoned water to drink, because we have sinned against the LORD. **15** We looked for peace, but no good came; for a time of healing, but behold, terror. **16** “The snorting of their horses is heard from Dan; at the sound of the neighing of their stallions the whole land quakes. They come and devour the land and all that fills it, the city and those who dwell in it. **17** For behold, I am sending among you serpents, adders that cannot be charmed, and they shall bite you,” declares the LORD.

**8:4–9:26** In contrast to 7:1–8:3, this section is almost completely in poetic form. Jeremiah resumes his extended commentary on the inevitability of divine judgment against sinners. (CSB)

**8:4** *Say to them.* Connects this section with the previous (see 7:28). (CSB)

*turns away ... return.* The Hebrew for these two verbs is identical, forming a play on words. (CSB)

Bas: “Do not despair of salvation. Recall your recollection of how it is written in the Scriptures that he who is falling rises and he who turns away returns; the wounded is healed, the prey of beasts escapes; he who owns his sin is not rejected” (NPNF 2 8:147). (TLSB)

“Shall a man fall and not get up again? Shall one wander off and not return to the right path?” It is a natural instinct and inclination of men to get up after a fall, to search for the right path if one has lost his way. (Kretzmann)

**8:5** The general truths stated in v. 4 are routinely and perversely violated by the people of Jerusalem. (CSB)

*turned away ... turn away ... return.* Continuing the wordplay of v. 4. (CSB)

*perpetual backsliding?* Behavior contrary to human experience and common sense. (TLSB)

*hold fast to deceit* – Jeremiah’s audience is behaving unnaturally. This people is acting like some other people than reborn people of God. They have firmly grabbed hold of (hardened themselves; the

Hebrew is literally “make strong”) a contrary *mispah*. The “deceit” is primarily vertical (toward God), though interpersonal relations cannot but be affected too. (Kretzmann)

**8:6 I.** The Lord. (CSB)

The Lord waited in vain for the people to repent (cf Ps 14:2). (TLSB)

*have paid attention* – Even though they are at a point of no return, God has still been listening attentively. (Kretzmann)

*his own course*. And therefore evil (see 23:10). (CSB)

*horse plunging headlong into battle* – This is similar to the pigs in Matthew 8. (Kretzmann)

**8:7** See Isa 1:3. Although migratory birds obey their God-given instincts, God’s rebellious people refuse to obey his laws. (CSB)

Even migratory birds, acting purely by divinely implanted instinct, are more responsive to their Maker than His rational creatures. (TLSB)

*stork*. Linked also in Isa 38:14. (CSB)

**8:8–9** *law of the LORD... word of the LORD*.† What God communicated to Moses and his servants the prophets. (CSB)

**8:8** *lying pen*. Symbolizes mistreatment of the written law. (CSB)

*scribes*. The earliest mention of them as a recognizable group. They were apparently organized on the basis of families (see 1Ch 2:55; 2Ch 34:13). (CSB)

Those capable of writing and responsible for the preservation and exposition of the Law. (TLSB)

*made it into a lie*. Also translated “deals falsely” (v 10; 6:13). The scribes are not accused of falsifying the content of the documents but of perverting the revealed truth. On the lies of the false prophets. False doctrine about the relationship between God and His people inevitably undermines social stability. (TLSB)

The false teachers, who spread their lies with word of mouth and pen, were spreading falsehood, even while they professed to be zealous for the truth. Their false pen converted the Law of God into a lie, just as the false teachers of all times have done. (Kretzmann)

**8:9** *rejected ... wisdom*. Contrast Dt 4:5–6. (CSB)

Having despised and set aside the only norm of doctrine and life, the only source of true wisdom, they could not lay claim to any kind of knowledge and understanding any more, they were fools in the sight of God. (Kretzmann)

**8:12** *I will punish them* – The punishment of the Lord will ever strike the false teachers, if not here in time, then at the Last Judgment. (Kretzmann)

**8:13–9:24** This section is read aloud in synagogues every year on the ninth of Ab, the day the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. and by the Romans in A.D. 70. (CSB)

**8:13** *gather*. Called to repentance and faith. (TLSB)

*grapes ... figs*. Symbolic of individual people also in Mic 7:1; see ch. 24. (CSB)

*leaves are withered*. As it had been at the time of Isaiah, Is. 5, 2, and as it later was at the time of Christ, Matt. 21, 19, so it was emphatically stated of Israel in the last years before the Chaldean invasion that the Lord was deeply disappointed in the fruit which He expected of the people as such. (Kretzmann)

*what I gave them has passed away*. God will deprive them of the bodily sustenance and inheritance He has provided for them in the past. (TLSB)

Rather, "I will give them to those who shall overrun them," overwhelming and subduing them in the invasion which was here predicted. (Kretzmann)

**8:14–16** On behalf of the people the prophet speaks, envisioning the Babylonian invasion. (CSB)

**8:14–15** So inevitable is the threatened retribution for their wickedness that Jeremiah already hears the victims of the invasion calling to one another in a vain search for a place of safety. The people realize the error of remaining complacent in their sins rather than returning to the Lord. But it is too late; God has declared His judgment. (TLSB)

**8:14** *Gather together!* The Hebrew for this phrase forms a wordplay with the Hebrew for "take away" and "harvest" in v. 13. (CSB)

*poisoned water*. The phrase is unique to the prophet Jeremiah (see 9:15; 23:15; cf. 25:15). (CSB)

A realization which came to them when it was too late. (Kretzmann)

**8:15** Repeated almost verbatim in 14:19. (CSB)

*peace*. Under the circumstances, a false hope. (CSB)

Perhaps a popular saying expressing the disillusionment of trust in a false security. (TLSB)

*healing*. So all the promises of the false prophets upon which the people had depended were found to be vain. (Kretzmann)

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

*stallions*. Lit. "mighty ones"; the Hebrew word is translated "stallions" again in 50:11, "steeds" in 47:3. (CSB)

On the extreme northern border of Canaan, the prophet here seeing the Chaldean hordes advancing to subdue the country. (Kretzmann)

**8:17** *serpents, adders*. Babylonians. (TLSB)

The Chaldeans are here represented as cruel and destructive enemies, whose power no means could counteract. With this fate of his beloved nation before his eyes, the prophet breaks forth in a bitter lamentation. (Kretzmann)

**8:4–17** God’s people still do not repent and turn back to Him in faith, so His judgment will fall upon them with full force. Possession of God’s Word cannot save them because their teachers have misrepresented it. Today, God gives us His Word to reveal His Son, our Savior, and to lead us in all righteousness. Through the study of His Word, He blesses us with repentance and life. • O Lord, grant us sound teachers, and keep us steadfast in Your Word. Amen. (TLSB)

*Jeremiah Grieves for His People*

**18 My joy is gone; grief is upon me; my heart is sick within me. 19 Behold, the cry of the daughter of my people from the length and breadth of the land: “Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not in her?” “Why have they provoked me to anger with their carved images and with their foreign idols?” 20 “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.” 21 For the wound of the daughter of my people is my heart wounded; I mourn, and dismay has taken hold on me. 22 Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored?**

**8:18–22** The vision of the coming calamity is so vivid that Jeremiah is filled with grief. Israel’s self-inflicted wound is incurable. The best balm and the ablest physician cannot heal the fatal malignancy. The end is at hand because the Lord’s anger is coming upon His unfaithful people. (TLSB)

**8:18** The prophet speaks. (CSB)

*my heart is sick.* Literally, "O my exhilaration in sorrow! My heart very ill!" His sorrow was so great that he despaired of finding consolation. He hears the bitter complaint of his people. (Kretzmann)

**8:19** The prophet speaks in the first part of the verse, the Lord in the last part. (CSB)

*my people from the length and breadth of land.* Judah in Babylonian exile (see Ps 137:1–4) as Jeremiah envisions the future. (CSB)

*Is the LORD not in Zion?* Cf. Mic 3:11. The people are perplexed at their fate, still wondering how God could have permitted the destruction of his land and temple. (CSB)

*King.* God (CSB)

*provoked me to anger.* But the divine justice asks in turn. **Why have they provoked Me to anger with their graven images and with strange vanities,** with foreign gods? so that He was compelled, as it were, to carry out His punishment upon them. (Kretzmann)

**8:20** The people speak from the hopelessness of their exile. (CSB)

Apparently a proverbial saying; Jeremiah hears the people in exile apply it to their situation when they despair of deliverance. (TLSB)

*we are not saved.* We have been captured by the enemy. (CSB)

As the farmer who expects a good harvest and is disappointed sees only failure and ruin before his eyes, so Israel despaired of deliverance. (Kretzmann)

**8:21** Jeremiah identifies himself with his exiled countrymen. (CSB)

**8:22** *balm in Gilead*. See 46:11; 51:8. The territory of Gilead was an important source of spices and medicinal herbs (see note on Ge 37:25). (CSB)

The territory east of the Jordan was famous for producing and exporting a tree gum, or spice, prized for its healing qualities (cf Dt 2:36; Ezk 27:17). (TLSB)

Reference being to a balsam which was in wide use in the Orient for the cooling and healing of wounds. (Kretzmann)

*health...not been restored*. Because this balsam, found chiefly in the country east of Jordan, drawn from the terebinth-tree and similar plants, was considered so very healthful, many persons established themselves in that territory and practiced the profession of physician. But for the wound of the daughter of Zion no physician of the body was sufficient. (Kretzmann)

Why could not the healing of her illness proceed? For the wounds of the soul, for the illness of sin, there is no healing except by the Word of God's grace. (Kretzmann)