

Covenant means Life or Death

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Preacher: Bob Fyall

[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our Bibles, and Bob is preaching this morning, and we're back therefore in the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah chapter 11 and 12, it's about the middle of your Bibles.

If you have one of our church visitors' Bibles, you should find it, I think, on page 639, page 639. And these two chapters hang together as one section of the prophecy.

And we're going to read together Jeremiah 11 and 12. The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord.

Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. You shall say to them, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Cursed be the man who does not hear the words of this covenant that I commanded your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt from the iron furnace, saying, Listen to my voice and do all that I command you.

So shall you be my people, and I will be your God. That I may confirm the oath that I swore to your fathers to give them a land flowing with milk and honey as it is this day.

[1 : 19] Then I answered, So be it, Lord. And the Lord said to me, Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. Hear the words of this covenant and do them.

For I solemnly warned your fathers when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. Yet they did not obey or incline their ear.

But everyone walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart. Therefore I brought upon them all the words of this covenant which I commanded them to do, but they did not.

Again the Lord said to me, A conspiracy exists among the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers who refused to hear my words.

They have gone after other gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers. Therefore, thus says the Lord, Behold, I am bringing disaster upon them that they cannot escape.

[2 : 25] Though they cry to me, I will not listen to them. And then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry to the gods to whom they make offerings.

But they cannot save them in the time of their trouble. For your gods have become as many as your cities, O Judah, and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars that you have set up to shame, altars to make offerings to Baal.

Therefore, do not pray for this people or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble.

What right has my beloved in my house when she has done many vile deeds? Can even sacrificial flesh avert your doom? Can you then exalt?

The Lord once called you a green olive tree, beautiful with good fruit, but with a roar of a great tempest he will set fire to it and its branches will be consumed.

[3 : 27] The Lord of hosts who planted you has decreed disaster against you because of the evil that the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done, provoking me to anger by making offerings to Baal.

The Lord made it known to me and I knew. Then you showed me their deeds. But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter.

I did not know it was against me they devised their scheme, saying, let us destroy the tree with its fruit. Let us cast him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more. But, O Lord of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.

Therefore, thus says the Lord concerning the men of Anathoth who seek your life and say, do not prophesy in the name of the Lord or you will die by our hand.

Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, behold, I will punish them. The young men shall die by the sword, their sons and their daughters shall die by famine, and none of them shall be left.

[4 : 40] For I will bring disaster upon the men of Anathoth, the year of their punishment. Righteous are you, O Lord, when I complain to you.

Yet I would plead my case before you. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive? Why do you plant them and they take root?

They grow and produce fruit. You are near in their mouth and far from their heart. But you, O Lord, know me. You see me and test my heart towards you.

Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter and set them apart for the day of slaughter. How long will the land mourn and the grass of every field wither? For the evil of those who dwell in it, the beasts and the birds are swept away because they said he will not see our latter end.

If you've raced with men on foot and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? And if in a safe land you are trusting, what will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?

[5 : 48] For even your brothers in the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you. They are in full cry after you. Do not believe them, though they speak friendly words to you.

I have forsaken my house. I have abandoned my heritage. I have given the beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies. My heritage has become to me like a lion in the forest.

She has lifted up her voice against me. Therefore, I hate her. Is my heritage to me like a hyena's lair? Are the birds of prey against her all around?

Go, assemble all the wild beasts. Bring them to devour. Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard. They've trampled down my portion.

They've made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. They've made it a desolation. Desolate it mourns to me. The whole land is made desolate, but no man lays it to heart.

[6 : 51] Upon all the bare heights in the desert, destroyers have come. For the sword of the Lord devours from one end of the land to the other. No flesh has peace.

They have sown wheat and reaped thorns. They've tired the symbols out, but profit nothing. They shall be ashamed of their harvests because of the fierce anger of the Lord.

Thus, says the Lord, concerning all my evil neighbors who touch the heritage that I've given my people Israel to inherit. Behold, I will pluck them up from their land, and I will pluck up the house of Judah from among them.

And after I've plucked them up, I will again have compassion on them. I will bring them again, each to his heritage and to his land.

And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name as the Lord lives, even as they taught my people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up in the midst of my people.

[8 : 00] But if any nation will not listen, then I will utterly pluck it up and destroy it, declares the Lord.

Amen. May God bless to us this solemn reading of his word. Now, if we could have our Bibles open, please, at the passage that was read.

That's Jeremiah 11 and 12. And let's have a moment of prayer as we ask the Lord's help. God, our Father, we believe you have things to say to us, things that we need to hear, perhaps things we don't want to hear, and therefore we need to hear them all the more.

So we pray, Lord, that you will take my words and all their weakness and imperfection, that you will use them faithfully to unfold the written word. And so lead us to the living word, Christ Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen. When I was a boy, my mother used to make a particularly attractive and nourishing cake, which had three layers in it.

[9 : 38] If I remember rightly, it was chocolate, sponge and coconut. The calorie count must have been horrific. In those days, I didn't care about that. And like any boy I've ever known, of course, I had no interest in how it was made or how it was prepared.

All I wanted was to put in front of me so that I could eat it. One of the things that struck me was how tastes that you would not think went together actually did.

And I noticed as I got older that many other aspects of life, if you put certain things together that didn't seem to gel to begin with, did go very well together.

One of my great delights is listening to music. I've many CDs which have many tracks on them which are similar. Now, the interesting thing I always find is to hear my favorite tunes, not simply on their own, but played along with other tunes, which brings out unexpected aspects.

And I've discovered increasingly, as I've been going through Jeremiah, that Jeremiah's way of presenting his material is rather like that. He's not a therefore, therefore, therefore man.

[10 : 53] He doesn't argue this is true, therefore that follows, and therefore that follows. What he does is he takes pictures, ideas, images, and places them together.

So you not only get the impact of each particular picture, each particular image, you get the blend which brings the whole message out. And it seems to me that's what he's doing again in these chapters that were read.

This is about covenant. Now, specifically, chapter 11 is about covenant. I'm going to suggest the chapter 12 as well is about covenant.

I call this book, I call my series on this book, Jeremiah, the prophet of the costly new covenant. And you don't have to wait till chapter 31 to get the new covenant.

Covenant is the binding thread among all these diverse materials. Hear the words that the Lord, sorry, hear the word that came to Jeremiah.

[11 : 56] Hear the words of this covenant. Now, Josiah ministered during the reign of the good king, Josiah, and during the reigns of his feckless and useless sons, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah.

And he obviously ministered during the time of Josiah's great reformation. We read in 2 Kings 23, King Josiah read the words of the book of the covenant, and he said, keep these commandments.

And he kept them with all his heart and all his soul. The great covenant reformation of Josiah was a calling back of people to the words of Moses.

Everywhere throughout the Old Testament, you hear the words of the great lawgiver. There is no authority, no voice in the Old Testament that supersedes that of Moses.

He's reaffirming the unique authority of Moses. And Moses says in Deuteronomy 30, See, I have set before you today life and death, blessing and cursing.

[13 : 08] Therefore, choose life. In other words, covenant means life or death. Covenant means blessing or cursing. And these chapters are both thoroughly biblical and deeply personal.

Jeremiah is drawing here from Moses. He's drawing from the Psalms. He's drawing from the earlier scriptures. All to make this fundamental point. Covenant means life or death.

That's what it meant for the people of Jeremiah's time. That's what it means for us today as well. Now, we can't look at all the details. The chapters are very rich. But I want us to look at three pictures here, which are all related to covenant.

As I said, these three pictures, side by side, all relate to this basic point. Hear the words of this covenant. And first of all, in chapter 12, we have the broken covenant.

What does it mean to break the covenant? Interesting point in verse 3, You shall say to them, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Cursed be the man who does not hear the words of this covenant.

[14 : 20] This is echoing the great affirmation at the heart of Israel's faith. Hear, O Israel. Yahweh is your God. Yahweh is one. If you choose him, you choose life.

If you reject him, you choose death. And in verses 2 to 5, the great covenant words are used. Listen to my voice. All I command you.

And the promise. The land flowing with milk and honey. So what does it mean to break the covenant? And first of all, it means persistent unfaithfulness. Verses 2 to 12.

Ingratitude for past blessings. This is not something this age invented. This is something that they have. This is the default mechanism, if you like.

It's much easier to disobey the covenant than to obey it. It's much easier to disobey the word of God than to obey it. The discipline of daily reading.

[15 : 19] The discipline of daily obedience. The discipline of daily listening to the words of the covenant. To the words of the Lord. And he reminds them.

I brought them out of the land of Egypt from the iron furnace. Why do you obey the covenant? Because the Lord has rescued us. The Lord has brought us out of Egypt.

Brought us out of worse slavery than Egypt. And disobeying the covenant is not really just disbelieving doctrines.

It's abandoning a relationship. It's not just saying, I don't really believe that any longer. It's actually abandoning the relationship. Because make no mistake.

Once these doctrines of the gospel don't grip our hearts. We'll soon stop believing them. Once these great truths of the Lord and his salvation.

[16 : 15] Are simply ideas that we hold. We won't hold them for very long. And they certainly won't hold us. So the whole language is the language of covenant relationship.

The language of heart. The language of commitment. Not just the language of believing. In verse 6. The Lord said to me, proclaim in these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem.

Interesting. The word proclaim is plural. In other words, this is not just a task for Jeremiah. This is a task for all the Lord's people, as it still is. Proclaim these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem.

Hear the words of the covenant and do them. So it's been persistent disobedience. Once again, this is echoing Deuteronomy 6.

Listen to these words. Repeat them. When you rise up. When you go about your business. When you're walking in the street. Teach your children them. In other words, make this your heartland.

[17 : 19] Make this the way you bring up your children. Make this the way you govern your lives. That is why so many people abandon the faith.

Because they regard the faith, the gospel, as something for Sunday. And having no real relationship to their everyday life. When that happens, of course, it becomes boring.

It becomes irrelevant. It must be the mainspring of everything. There's persistent unfaithfulness, first of all. Turning our back on the Lord and his word.

Turning away from the great lover. And that's the second thing, verses 9 to 17. Persistent retreat into unreality.

Baal. Baal. There's three times in the reading Baal is mentioned. Verses 13 and 17. Offerings to Baal.

[18 : 16] And then at the very end, 12, 16. Swearing by Baal. Now, who was Baal? Baal, of course, is simply a general word meaning lord or master. Named for a whole multitude of gods.

The point about Baal worship was it combined two things. And when you put them together in the same package, it's a very, very potent and a very, very attractive package.

First of all, the sense of the other. The sense of vastness and immensity. And then also, the other thing combined with that was hedonism.

The desire to enjoy ourselves. In the texts that have been discovered about Baal, there are no Ten Commandments. You can believe in Baal. You can believe all, if you like, all the theology about Baal.

It makes no difference to your life. And you see, that's always going to be a very popular religion, isn't it? You have your sense of the other, your sense of something beyond you satisfied.

[19 : 19] And you also can just live any way you like. And that's what's happening. Of course, it's a retreat into unreality. Because once we abandon the living God, as G.K. Chesterton is reputed to have said.

I've never discovered, actually, where he did say. But it sounds like the kind of thing he would have said. When people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing. They believe in anything.

They believe in unreality. And I think this has shown so much in what we call reality television. Dysfunctional people sitting around on a sofa talking nonsense and platitudes to each other.

And we call that reality television. Orwell got it wrong, didn't he? Big Brother is not watching us. We watch Big Brother in our millions. More of us watch Big Brother than vote in elections.

And then we complain that we don't get the politicians we want. You see, that's what happens when we abandon the living God. A wholesale run into reality.

[20 : 25] A pick and mix religion. You see, Josiah's reformation, the king was utterly sincere. That's very clear if you read Kings and Chronicles. But it's also very clear that the people's commitment was skin deep.

Immediately, Josiah was gone. They turned back to their old ways. They turned back, verse 12, to the gods who cannot save them in their time of trouble.

They turned to the gods who gave them no future. And this is shown powerfully in that metaphor in verse 16. The Lord once called you a green olive tree, beautiful with good fruit.

It's going to be consumed. Some of you will remember Paul picks up this image of the olive tree in Romans 11. The whole history of the falling away of Israel.

And the whole history of the abandonment of the covenant. So you see what's happening here. There is an abandoning, persistent abandoning of the Lord.

[21 : 31] And a persistent wholesale gathering rush into unreality. But then, in verses 18 to 23, there's a third element in breaking the covenant.

The vicious attack on the messenger of the covenant. The vicious attack on the prophet himself. And this vicious attack is all the more terrifying.

Verse 21, therefore thus says the Lord, concerning the man of Anathoth, who seek your life. Anathoth was Jeremiah's own hometown.

His own people had turned against him. One of the things we're going to see as we go through this book is how deeply Jeremiah entered into the fellowship of his Lord's sufferings.

Few people entered so deeply into the suffering of the Lord himself as Jeremiah did. Verse 19, I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter.

[22 : 32] Echoing Isaiah 53, verse 7. Of course, led like a lamb to the slaughter. Sheep before her shearers is dumb. And ultimately pointing to the lamb of God, who would take away the sin of the world.

Now, we don't know how the Lord made known to him this. Probably, possibly a sympathetic relative or friend. Rather, as Paul's nephew in Acts 23 told the centurion about the plot against the life of Paul.

Fascinating, actually, to see sometimes useful study throughout Scripture to notice how many things happened because an unknown individual happened to be in the right place that God wanted them to be at the right time.

Now, why are they criticizing him? They're criticizing him because he's not saying what they want them to say. Do not prophesy, verse 21, in the name of the Lord, or you will die by our hand.

Now, the problem about that is that Jeremiah could not see anything other than he had been given to see. Jeremiah knew that the only remedy that could heal their disease was the remedy that they were rejecting.

[23 : 55] We'll come back to that in a few moments. And he pleads, and he's going to come later, we'll come to this in a moment or two, he's going to plead for justice.

He's going to plead for retribution. Isn't it so terrifying that those who reject the message of the gospel, often on the grounds that it's illiberal, often on the grounds that it's harsh, often on the grounds that it's divisive, become themselves so totally illiberal, become themselves so hard, so loveless, so cynical, and so mocking.

If the Lord himself is the source of love, and truth, and kindness, and compassion, then those who reject him are also rejecting love, truth, kindness, and compassion.

When people trample on the covenant, you don't get a liberal, kind, generous society. You get a suspicious, politically correct, niggling, critical society.

That's what happened in Jeremiah's time, and that's what's happening in our day. The broken covenant, you see, the first relationship that goes wrong is the one with the Lord.

[25 : 18] They turn against the Lord. Then they turn to unreality, and then they turn on the prophets of the Lord. And that's what the Lord Jesus Christ said, isn't it?

They persecuted the prophets. They put them to death. They rejected them. And they'll reject you as well. So send I you, as the Father has sent me.

So send I you to labor unrewarded, to do these tasks without thanks and without understanding. And that brings us to the second point.

Given all this, Jeremiah, remember, is a very sensitive individual. I've said this over and over again, because the caricature of Jeremiah is that he is a harsh, unfeeling, brutal, and insensitive man.

He's the very opposite. And so the second picture is the picture of the questioning prophet in chapters 12, 1 to 13. How is Jeremiah going to handle this?

[26 : 22] The covenant has been broken. Just as Moses smashed, literally, the tablets of the covenant, so these people have again smashed the covenant, and it's all it stands for.

And here we have what some of the commentators call one of his confessions. It's not a very good word, because he's not confessing sin. He's much more pouring out his heart.

Jeremiah, it's righteous of you, O Lord, when I complain to you. This is very like many of the lament psalms. It sounds like 77 and 88, where the psalmist pours out his heart and says, Lord, I believe in you.

I really believe in you. But why are things like this? Now, there's a kind of silly superficial Christianity. It tells you, if you believe in the Lord, you will always rejoice.

Now, if you believe that, you're very soon going to be disillusioned, because the Lord, in his providence, and in his grace, allows circumstances to happen, to make us the kind of people he wants us to be.

[27 : 33] Here he is wrestling with God, as Jacob did literally, and as Job did. A sensitive human being, struggling with a call that's become almost unbearable.

unbearable. Remember, he's called back in chapter 1, and he's called to preach this unpalatable message. And his grief at the hostility and misunderstanding is becoming almost unbearable.

And he reaches his lowest point in chapter 20, which we'll come to in due course. One of the great things about passages like this is that this shows us we can speak this way to God.

God's not going to be like great Aunt Matilda and tut, tut, and say you can't see that. God is going to listen. God is going to engage with this.

And he uses words, once again echoing some of the Psalms. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? 12 verse 1. Why do all the treacherous thrive?

[28 : 35] You plant them, they take root, they grow and produce fruit. You are near in their mouth, and far from their heart. Now you can say, if you like, this is an exaggeration. Not all the wicked prosper.

But the point is, at this low state, in his experience, it appears like that. These are the words of the psalmist in Psalm 73. Why do the wicked prosper?

Now remember, Jeremiah is not whinging here. In Psalm 95, there is a, and we sang a version, a part of that psalm a few moments ago, how sure the scriptures are.

In Psalm 95, God and other psalms, God's people are condemned for moaning, for murmuring, for complaining. This is not moaning.

This is not moaning about the weather, or complaining that you've missed the bus, or that things are a bit tough. This is deep heart sorrow. He believes in God's sovereignty, and yet, he cannot understand his ways.

[29 : 42] That is the point. That's the huge difference between lament, and complaining. It's unfortunate, perhaps, the ESB uses the word, when I complain to you, because complain to us, does suggest whinging, doesn't it, and moaning, and continually, and continually finding something, to make a fuss about.

That's not what's happening here. Lord, you've promised certain things. They're not happening. In fact, the opposite is happening. So, he believes in God's sovereignty, without understanding their ways.

And, you'll notice, you'll notice in particular, he is, he's saying, in verse 2, a very, very significant verse, verse 2, you are near in their mouth, and far from their heart.

His opponents are full of pious talk. How often you notice this in Scripture, that those whose hearts have departed from God, find it easy to fill their mouths, with pious talk.

How often, when people are going against the Lord, and against his people, they will use pious talk. That's what the Lord Jesus Christ said, isn't it?

[31 : 04] The time will come, when those who oppose you will think, they are doing God a service. How easily religious talk flows from their mouth. Their mouths, they are near in their mouth, and far in their heart.

Generally speaking, those who are near in heart, are very sparing, in the use of pious language. In my experience, anyway. Talking the talk, is always very, very easy, and usually, it's very, very empty, and fruitless.

And they're going to be judged. Verse 4, This is a judgment, like the flood.

That's what's going to happen. Now, it has to be said, the Lord's answer is not immediately reassuring. Verse 5, begins the Lord's answer.

The Lord doesn't say, Jeremiah has been tough, but it's going to get better. The Lord says, Jeremiah, if you think this is bad, you ain't seen nothing yet.

[32 : 17] If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will they compete with horses? In a safe land, you are so trusting. Meaning, you trusted your friends and family back in Anathoth.

What will you do in the thicket of the Jordan, a kind of jungle area around the Jordan at that time? The haunt of bandits, on to wolves, and lions as well, at that time.

Jeremiah says, the Lord, you're not paranoid. They actually are out to get you. And I think this is very important, because the Lord is taking Jeremiah's complaint seriously.

He's not saying, it will be just fine. He is saying, Jeremiah, it's tough, and it's going to get tougher. As one of the Narnia characters were told, I think it's in the silver chair.

The only reward for successfully completing a task is to be given another and more difficult one. That's what the Lord is saying to Jeremiah.

[33 : 15] You have done well. Jeremiah, it's been tough. Jeremiah, it's going to get tougher. But there's more than that.

Obviously, if that was all the Lord said, it would really be a despairing situation. But the whole point about verse 7, I have forsaken my house.

I have abandoned my heritage. I have given the beloved of my soul into the hands of her enemies. See what the Lord is saying? The Lord is saying, Jeremiah, your tragedy is an echo of my own tragedy.

Jeremiah, what you're suffering is what I'm suffering. What's happening to you is what's already happened to me. Therefore, Jeremiah, you can be totally honest with me.

I'm not plotting against you. I'm not going to retreat into unreality. I'm not going to tell you sentimental nonsense. And here, he is showing us that the prophet has entered deeply into the suffering of the Lord himself by using these tender words like heritage and the beloved of my soul.

[34 : 32] And verse 10, many shepherds have destroyed my vineyards. Some of the commentators say that these are foreign nations. That's probably true, but even more so, it's the false leaders, the bad, the, those who have led the people into unbelief and into idolatry and into unreality.

And even the fact that he's announcing judgment shows that the judgment is not just going to be one of those things that happens. It's not just one of, it's not just, it's not a ghastly accident.

He is in control. He is the author of the exile. Daniel 1 verse 1, the Lord gave Jehoiakim into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. The Lord says to Habakkuk, much of what he says to Jeremiah here as well, I'm sending an evil nation against my own nation and they will be punished as well.

Much earlier, Isaiah had said that about the Assyrians. So we have the broken covenant and the questioning prophet. Jeremiah, the reality is dreadful and it's going to get worse.

That's why verses 14 to 17, the third point briefly, is so important. Verse 15, I will have compassion, the broken covenant, the questioning prophet, and finally, the compassionate Lord.

[36 : 04] word. Jeremiah is being saved from two errors here. One is cheap grace. The idea, everything will be just fine. But the other is total despair.

Because the words that the Lord used, I will pluck up, I will pluck up, verse 14 and 17, these have been the original commission given to Jeremiah.

The Lord is saying to Jeremiah, the word I have given you is a true word. I haven't been false to you. Trust me. It's not an easy message, this, is it?

Jeremiah, I mean, Jeremiah wouldn't have done very well on Facebook, would he? Jeremiah shared this on Facebook. I don't know about you guys, I find the Facebook world, nobody on Facebook ever preaches a bad sermon.

Nobody on Facebook has anything other than a wonderful, supportive congregation. Nobody on Facebook is doing other than walking with the Lord. Well, well, well, that's not the world of Jeremiah.

[37 : 09] Anyway, there are two things that are promised. First of all, restoration for Judah, verse 15. After I have plucked them up, I will again have compassion on them, moving once again towards the new covenant.

and I will bring them again each to his heritage and each to his land. But there's also hope for the nations. Verse 16, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, if they will become disciples, then they will be saved as well.

You see, the night is dark, Jeremiah. It's going to get darker. But, I haven't finished with these people. I haven't finished with the world.

I'm going to sing in a minute, I cannot tell how he will win the nations, how he will claim his earthly heritage. And Jeremiah didn't know either.

But Jeremiah saw what was happening. So, you see, the broken covenant, over against that we have the questioning, perplexed prophet who is suffering the way the Lord himself is suffering.

[38 : 27] And in the darkness, the Lord gives him, reminds him, that I will have compassion. And compassion, of course, is a covenant word.

the covenant, the covenant will not be broken on my side. It may be broken on theirs, it won't be broken on mine.

So, I say, Jeremiah's mission, however unsuccessful it might be in celebrity terms, was totally successful. What he said happened, and thousands of years later, we are gaining instruction from his words.

Covenant is about relationship, not just about believing certain things, but commitment to them. And Jeremiah has a worldwide vision.

Jeremiah's vision takes us forward to Revelation 7. I saw a great multitude from every tribe and language and nation before the throne of God and the Lamb.

[39 : 30] That is a gospel to proclaim, and it is good news for everyone throughout the earth. Amen. Let's pray. Father, help us to listen to your word even when you'd rather run away from it.

Help us to believe your word when we'd rather not. Open our eyes to reality, open our hearts to your compassion, and give to us encouragement in these days that you will reign and your kingdom will come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.