

Jeremiah 7-8

Introduction

And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, that the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the LORD, saying, Go up to Hilkiyah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people: And let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD: and let them give it to the doers of the work which is in the house of the LORD, to repair the breaches of the house, Unto carpenters, and builders, and masons, and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house. Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully. (2 Kgs. 22:3-7)

“To repair the breaches of the house,” is the intent of Josiah’s remodel of Solomon’s Temple. There were apparently breaches and blemishes in the walls and furnishings but also in the spiritual sense. The temple had been desecrated. Vessels made for Baal and the gods of the host of heaven had been used in the temple (2 Kgs. 23:4). Asherah, a fertility goddess was worshipped inside the temple walls (2 Kgs. 23:6). The upper rooms of the temple, instead of being reserved for the holiest purposes, contained altars dedicated to idol worship (2 Kgs. 23:12).

Righteous Josiah responded by burning the vessels for Baal and breaking down the altars “which (wicked king) Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the Lord” (2 Kgs. 23:4-12). He placed the ark of the covenant back in Solomon’s temple (2 Chron. 35:3) and sanctified the people (if that were possible) with a special Passover feast (2 Chron. 35).

Jeremiah 7:2 Stand in the gate of the Lord’s house, and proclaim there this word

For purposes of discussion, we presume that Jeremiah is asked to preach in the temple gate *after* Josiah has completed his temple renovation project. This Temple Sermon may have been repeated later during the reign of Jehoiakim (see Jer. 26). Not long before, the gate of the temple was surrounded by wickedness. Women prepared tapestries for idol worship in the houses of sodomites that were right by the temple (2 Kgs. 23:7). Horses and chariots dedicated to the sun god were kept “at the entering in of the house of the Lord” (2 Kgs. 23:11). Josiah had cleaned house, and Jeremiah would now preach the word in the gate of the temple for all to see.

From the gate of the temple, he could be heard by the wicked priests on the inside and the people on the outside. Likely, he was heard by the sodomites whose homes had been broken down, the women who no longer had a place to weave their tapestries, and the men who attended to the horses and chariots—not a likely environment for a receptive audience.

Hugh Nibley

Jeremiah is commanded to preach to them. The Lord says, "I know they won't listen to you, but you are going out to preach to them. I sent my prophets before, and they didn't listen. I knew they wouldn't listen to them." (*Teachings of the Book of Mormon--Semester 1: Transcripts of Lectures Presented to an Honors Book of Mormon Class at Brigham Young University, 1988--1990* [Provo: FARMS] 66)

Jeremiah 7:4 Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord

The temple was the cultural, religious, and symbolic center of Jewish life. Ever since the creation of the tabernacle of Moses, it represented the presence of God among the people protecting them from their enemies. Since Solomon built the temple, the city of Jerusalem had always been protected. For almost four centuries, enemies would attack but they could never break down the walls of Jerusalem. In the minds of the people, it was the temple that was saving them. Hugh Nibley taught, "This was a famous saying; you trust in the temple and everything will be all right." (*Teachings of the Book of Mormon, vol. 1* [Provo: FARMS] 224)

But what good was a temple if the people preferred Baal over Jehovah? Could they offer incense to idol gods one minute and expect the temple to save them the next? Could Josiah's work to rid the land of idolatry and renovate the temple change the hearts and minds of an idolatrous people? Josiah did his best to cleanse the outer vessel but only the people could cleanse the inner vessel, and they chose not to.

In our day, we ask, "Can the temple save you if you violate the covenants made there?" Scholar Sidney B. Sperry noted:

"Latter-day Saints may well take heed of Jeremiah's words. We are the only people in the world who really understand temples and their uses. But these edifices will serve us and help protect us only on conditions of righteousness. If we gratify our sins and make worship a mockery, we, too, can expect God's blessings no longer. Jeremiah was right." (Sidney B. Sperry, *The Voice of Israel's Prophets* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1952], 164)

April 2000 was the first time that the newly constructed Conference Center was used for General Conference. Elder Boyd K. Packer, then acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve, took this opportunity to remind the saints that the building is not as important as what is inside.

Boyd K. Packer

Do you think it possible for those of us who are called upon to speak to draw attention away from this wonderful building long enough to focus on the purpose for which it was built?

Perhaps it can be done with a parable and a poem.

The parable: A merchant man seeking precious jewels found at last the perfect pearl. He had the finest craftsman carve a superb jewel box and line it with blue velvet. He put his pearl of great price on display so others could share his treasure. He watched as people came to see it. Soon he turned away in sorrow. It was the box they admired, not the pearl.

The poem:

*We are all blind, until we see
That in the [universal] plan
Nothing is worth the making if
It does not make the man.*

*Why build these [buildings] glorious,
If man unbuilted goes?
In vain we build the [world], unless
The builder also grows.*
(“The Cloven Tongues of Fire,” *Ensign*, May 2000)

Hugh Nibley

In chapter 7, verse 4: "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these." This is where we have our reference: Church members say, "This is the true church; we have the gospel, etc. We have the temple; that will make us safe." He says, "Don't trust in that." It's repeated three times. (*Teachings of the Book of Mormon--Semester 1: Transcripts of Lectures Presented to an Honors Book of Mormon Class at Brigham Young University, 1988--1990* [Provo: FARMS] 66)

Jeremiah 7:9-10, 20 Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and... come and stand before me in this house... and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?

Have you ever thought about how merciful the Lord is when he kills the wicked? He is actually preventing them from further condemning themselves with more wickedness. He is putting an end to the number of sins they commit, and therefore minimizing their punishment. Conversely, this rhetorical question from the Lord is pretty profound, "Why would I preserve your lives if you're just going to waste your days stealing and murdering?" What's the point? The destruction from the Lord can therefore be seen as more of a mercy killing than the vengeful retribution of an angry God.

Neal A. Maxwell

Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched (Jeremiah 7:20).

Instead, we should think of God in terms of His divine attributes, for He is perfect in His love, mercy, and compassion—as well as in His justice. Only then can we begin to understand why His anger is kindled and to appreciate the loving concern which underlies His wrath. God's love for us is perfect, and His desire for our happiness is so deep that when His anger is kindled this signals much more than we realize. Our God is not preoccupied with other concerns, nor is His ego offended, as are ours. Such narrow views of Him do an injustice to God who is perfect in His justice.

While God's love is pure and perfect, Henry Fairlie has written that our mortal anger is often perverted love, for instance, "the love of justice perverted into the desire for revenge" (*The Seven Deadly Sins Today*, p. 108). God's indignation is quite a different matter.

God's anger is kindled not because we have harmed him but because we have harmed ourselves. We are His children and He is a perfect Father. He does not want us, for instance, to take His name in vain, but this is because of what happens to us when we do. Our profanity cannot diminish from His Godhood, His love, His omnipotence, or His omniscience. But our profanity does damage us and can damage us profoundly. (Sermons Not Spoken [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985], 84, italics added)

Jeremiah 7:11 this house, which is called by my name [is] become a den of robbers

Jeremiah doesn't tell us directly how the temple was a "den of robbers." Indirect evidence suggests that the temple priests stole the temple donations for their personal use. Josiah remodeled the temple using the silver that the people brought to the temple according to the law (Lev. 5:15; 27:32). For years, the collected money was supposed to be used for that purpose (Ex. 30:16). Apparently, it hadn't been or else the temple wouldn't have fallen into such disrepair. For the renovation, the record states, "there was no reckoning made with them (priests collecting offerings) of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully" (2 Kgs. 22:7). Why would the historian say there was "no reckoning made... because they dealt faithfully" if it wasn't unusual? Likely, someone had previously instituted a reckoning procedure because the temple funds were being embezzled by the priests (see also 1 Sam. 2:12-17).

In Jesus' day, the temple robbers were the money changers who overcharged those purchasing doves, sheep, or oxen to offer as sacrifices (Jn. 2:14-16). Others exchanged Roman or Phoenician coinage into the Hebrew shekel that was considered the only acceptable form for donations, but they did so at a profit, which angered Jesus. The result was a culture of profit not worship. The love of God had been exchanged for the love of filthy lucre.

"The circumstance is similar to Jesus' cleansing of the temple (Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-48), and in fact, Christ even quoted Jeremiah's charge of a 'den of robbers' (Jer. 7:11; Matt. 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). Jeremiah faced a hard-hearted and self-righteous people who did not wish to hear his message of repentance.

This people had developed a self-righteous assurance that the Lord would protect and preserve them. It was based on the existence of the temple—the house of the Lord—combined with the recent reforms of Josiah, which succeeded in reforming the external practices of religion to the Mosaic prescriptions. The people were certain that these would preserve them...

“Jeremiah's message reminds us of the message of the Savior in his ministry and the self-righteous hypocrisy of the outwardly religious, which should serve as a solemn reminder to all of the covenant children who are favored in having the temple in their midst. We are reminded of such statements as ‘Woe unto you . . . hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith’ (Matt. 23:23) and of the comparison to ‘whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness’ (Matt. 23:27).” (Kent P. Jackson, ed., *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 4: 1 Kings to Malachi* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1993], 221-222)

Jeremiah 7:14 I will do unto this house... as I have done to Shiloh

Everyone is familiar with Jerusalem as the religious center of the Jews. However, between the time of Joshua and King David—a period of some 500 years, Shiloh was the religious center. Shiloh was *the* place (See Bible Dictionary: “Shiloh”). The Tabernacle of Moses was kept there. The Ark of the Covenant was kept there. The High Priest officiated there. Tragedy struck when the Philistines captured the ark and Shiloh was destroyed (1 Sam. 1-4, Ps. 78:58-66). This event, the destruction of Shiloh, was so vivid in the collective consciousness that it served as a shocking prediction. As Jeremiah repeated it later, it became a point of contention between him and the priests who couldn't conceive of such a terrible calamity, “Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, this house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the Lord.” (Jer. 26:9)

J. Reuben Clark

Between Shechem and Bethel lies Shiloh. It was here that Joshua came with the Tabernacle and Ark after he left Gilgal, and it was here that he cast lots for the division of the Promised Land among the tribes. It was from Shiloh that the Benjamites (following the terrible punishment inflicted upon them by Israel for the abuse of the concubine of the Levite), stole the dancing virgins for wives. Here lived Eli and here was trained Samuel; and to Shiloh came the Philistines, and defeated the sons of Eli and carried off the Ark. (*Behold the Lamb of God* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1991], 144)

Jeremiah 7:15 I will cast you out... as I have cast out all your brethren

If the destruction of Shiloh wasn't a good enough example, the Lord reminds them of the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians. The “seed of Ephraim” was

killed, taken captive, and scattered throughout the world. The Southern Kingdom of Judah could expect the same fate.

Jeremiah 7:18 to make cakes to the queen of heaven

“Their worship of the ‘queen of heaven’ (a pagan fertility goddess), was undoubtedly borrowed from the surrounding nations. There is evidence of such worship among the Canaanites, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Egyptians. Jeremiah's people later returned to this practice while in Egypt (see Jeremiah 44:17).” (Monte S. Nyman, *The Words of Jeremiah* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], 37)

Jeremiah 7:19 do they not provoke themselves

Neal A. Maxwell

God's anger is kindled not because we have harmed him but because we have harmed ourselves. We are His children and He is a perfect Father. He does not want us, for instance, to take His name in vain, but this is because of what happens to us when we do. Our profanity cannot diminish from His Godhood, His love, His omnipotence, or His omniscience. But our profanity does damage us and can damage us profoundly. (Sermons Not Spoken [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985], 84, italics added)

Jeremiah 7:21 Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh

This sentence doesn't make sense. It should probably read, “Put away your burnt offerings and sacrifices, and eat flesh,” meaning you can keep your sacrificial sheep and oxen and eat the meat yourselves. I am sick of all your burnt offerings and sacrifices. That is not what I want from you!

Jeremiah 7:22-23 I spake not... in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices

Some commandments are more important than others. The Lord is saying, “What is the first thing I asked when I brought you out of Egypt? Didn't I command you to be obedient? (Ex. 19:15) The first thing on the list was *not* burnt offerings and sacrifice; it was obedience! Yet you have imagined to yourselves that obedience is unnecessary—that all you need to do to please God is kill some sheep and goats, all the while living according to your own will and pleasure.”

It was a form of Zoramite religion. Just as the Zoramites prayed once a week then did whatever they wanted, “never speaking of their God again” (Alma 31:23), the Jews were sure that animal sacrifice was enough religion to save them.

Jeremiah 7:25-26 I have sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them

There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:

And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.

And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.

But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.

But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.

When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?

They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. (Matt. 21:33-41)

Jeremiah 7:30-31 they have set their abominations in the house which is called by my name

Jeremiah was born during the latter years of the reign of Manasseh, who restored the Baal cult among the Jews. By the time Jeremiah became a prophet, idolatry, hill worship and heathen practices were rampant. The people 'set their abominations' or heathen idols in the temple. (Jer. 32:34.) They sacrificed children to Baal-Moloch. (Jer. 7:31.) They invoked Baal as the usual heathen deity, and worshipped the 'queen of heaven.' (Jer. 7:18.) Apostasy was everywhere. Jeremiah continually testified against immorality and unrighteousness, and the neglect of the poor.

"Jeremiah's mission was to testify to a sinful and stubborn people who had been misled by false prophets and to witness their doom. He was ridiculed, rejected, beaten and imprisoned, even by the people of his hometown, as well as those of Jerusalem." ("Prophet's Mission Was To Testify To Sinful People," *LDS Church News*, 08/04/90)

Jeremiah 7:31 they have built the high places... to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire

If the Lord is not happy with the Jews offering animal sacrifice to the true and living God, then He must have been furious that they would offer human sacrifice to a pagan god! Idol worship in special secret groves in the high places was rampant. Burning incense to false gods is one thing, burning your children in the fire of Molech is quite another. It is truly hard to imagine the depravity of a people who once knew the Lord!

James E. Talmage

The worship of Moloch is generally cited as an example of the cruelest and most abhorrent idolatry known to man. Moloch, called also Molech, Malcham, Milcom, Baal-melech, etc., was an Ammonite idol: it is mentioned in scripture in connection with its cruel rites (Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5; see also 1 Kings 11:5, 7, 33; 2 Kings 23:10, 13; Amos 5:26; Zeph. 1:5; Jer. 32:35). Keil and Delitzsch describe the idol as being "represented by a brazen statue which was hollow, and capable of being heated, and formed with a bull's head, and with arms stretched out to receive the children to be sacrificed." While the worship of this idol did not invariably include human sacrifice, it is certain that such hideous rites were characteristic of this abominable shrine. The authors last quoted say: "From the time of Ahaz, children were slain at Jerusalem in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, and then sacrificed by being laid in the heated arms and burned" (2 Kings 23:10; 16:3; 17:17; 21:6; Jer. 32:35; Ezek. 16:20, 20:31; compare Ps. 106:37, 38). Many authorities state that the sacrifice of children to this hideous monster long antedated the time of Ahaz. "The offering of living victims was probably the climax of enormity in connection with this system, and it is said that Tophet, where it was to be witnessed, was so named from the beating of drums to drown the shrieks and groans of those who were burned to death. The same place was called the Valley of Hinnom, and the horrible associations connected with it led to both Tophet and Gehenna ('valley of Hinnom') being adopted as names and symbols of future torment." (*Articles of Faith* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981], 419, footnote 8)

Jeremiah 8:1-2 they shall bring out the bones of the kings... his princes... the priests, and... the prophets

Beth-el means literally "house of God," but when the ten tribes split from Judah and Benjamin, they chose Beth-el to build an altar and a high place for idol worship. Josiah's work to destroy idolatry included a visit to this site. He broke down the altar, and "burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove" (2 Kgs. 23:15). Next, he partially fulfilled a prophecy of Jeremiah regarding the bones of the priests and false prophets.

And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount, and sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres and burned them upon the altar, and polluted it according to the word of the Lord...

And he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men's bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 23:16, 20).

Jeremiah 8:2 they shall spread them before the sun, and the moon, and all the host of heaven

The fulfillment of this part of the prophecy is not included in the Bible. There was barely anyone left to record the event. Apparently, the Babylonians spoiled the sepulchres of the kings and princes as a show of strength and disdain, leaving their bones strewn in the open like dung. "The Hebrews considered that one of the worst possible curses was for dead bodies to be violated and not to receive proper burial. In 8:1-2 it is said that

even the bodies of the leaders will be dishonored.” (*The Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. by G. A. Buttrick et al [New York, Abingdon Press, 1952] vol. 5, p. 879)

And the slain of the Lord shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth: they shall not be lamented neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung upon the ground (Jer. 25:33).

Jeremiah 8:3 death shall be chosen rather than life

Lehi said it best, “men are free... to choose liberty and eternal life... or to choose captivity and death.” (2 Ne 2:27) The Jews had chosen death.

Brigham Young

Now we have the truth. We know whence it comes, from God himself, and that brings a tremendous responsibility to rest upon every one of us... He has placed life and death before his children, and it is for them to choose. If they choose life, they receive a blessing of life. If they choose death, they must abide the penalty. This is the law which has always existed from all eternity and will continue to exist throughout all the eternities to come. Every intelligent being must have the power of choice. (John A. Widtsoe, *Conference Report*, April 1947, Second Day—Morning Meeting 74)

Brigham Young

By obeying the ordinances of God, mankind glorify God, but if they do not obey Him, they do not detract one particle from His glory and power. Although all His children should wander from the holy commandments, God will be glorified, for they are left to choose for themselves, to choose death instead of life, darkness instead of light, pain instead of ease, delight, and comfort. This liberty all beings enjoy who are created after the likeness and image of God, and thus they become accountable for their own actions. (*Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. [London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-1886], 12: 126)

Brigham Young

"We offer you life; will you receive it?" "No," some will say. "Then you are at perfect liberty to choose death: the Lord does not, neither will we control you in the least in the exercise of your agency. We place the principles of life before you. Do as you please, and we will protect you in your rights, though you will learn that the system you have chosen to follow brings you to dissolution." (*Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. [London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-1886], 6: 346)

Jeremiah 8:8 How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us?

The wicked like to imagine that they are actually righteous; it soothes the conflict of conscience. Apparently, the politically correct sentiment in Jerusalem was to imagine that the Lord would continue to save them. Laman and Lemuel were experts, “we know that the people who were in the land of Jerusalem were a righteous people; for they kept the statutes and judgments of the Lord, and all his commandments, according to

the law of Moses; wherefore, we know that they are a righteous people.” Really? They are burning their children in human sacrifices to an idol of the Ammonites! They are polluting the temple with altars for their idols! They are neglecting the poor and digging a pit for their neighbor! Yet Laman and Lemuel thought they were righteous.

Nephi set them straight, “this people had rejected every word of God, and they were ripe in iniquity; and the fullness of the wrath of God was upon them; and the Lord did curse the land against them... unto their destruction” (1 Ne. 17:35).

Jeremiah 8:10 every one of them from the least even unto the greatest is given to covetousness

Brigham Young

Those who are covetous and greedy, anxious to grasp the whole world, are all the time uneasy, and are constantly laying their plans and contriving how to obtain this, that, and the other.

Men are greedy for the vain things of this world. In their hearts they are covetous. It is true that the things of this world are designed to make us comfortable, and they make some people as happy as they can be here; but riches can never make the Latter-day Saints happy. Riches of themselves cannot produce permanent happiness; only the Spirit that comes from above can do that. (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, selected and arranged by John A. Widtsoe [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1954], 306)

Gordon B. Hinckley

Well has the Lord said, “Thou shalt not covet.” Let not selfishness canker our relationships. Let not covetousness destroy our happiness. Let not greed for that which we do not need and cannot get with honesty and integrity bring us down to ruin and despair. (“Thou Shalt Not Covet,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1990, 6)

Joseph B. Wirthlin

First, one of today’s evils is the sin of covetousness. Inordinate desire for material possessions can become an obsession that consumes our thoughts, drains our resources, and leads to unhappiness. Some members of the Church are increasingly burdened with unnecessary debt because of this sin. **President Heber J. Grant** said: “If there is any one thing that will bring peace and contentment into the human heart, and into the family, it is to live within our means. And if there is any one thing that is grinding and discouraging and disheartening, it is to have debts and obligations that one cannot meet.” (“Inspired Church Welfare,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 7)

Jeremiah 8:11 they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly

Big wounds require big bandages. Things were bad, but the priests and false prophets were proclaiming peace! They were putting a Band-Aid on a gaping wound. **Spencer W. Kimball** taught, “The Lord has indicated that the bandage must be the size of the sore.” (*Faith Precedes the Miracle*, 178) The priests and prophets, the protectors of the

people should have recognized “the hurt of the daughter of my people.” Their patient was in the intensive care unit and they were saying, “Don’t worry; you’ll be fine.”

Jeremiah 8:16 The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan

The tribe of Dan settled north of the other tribes. The reference means that the army and cavalry of Babylon will come from the north.

Jeremiah 8:20 The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.

Gordon B. Hickley

I think of such a man I once knew, not a member of the Church. He was a graduate of a great university. His potential was unlimited. As a young man with an excellent education and a tremendous opportunity, he dreamed of the stars and moved in that direction. In the company which employed him in those early years, he was promoted from one responsibility to another, each with improved opportunity over the last. Before many years had passed, he was in the top echelon of his company. But those promotions brought him into the cocktail circuit. He could not handle it, as so many others cannot. He became an alcoholic, the victim of an appetite he could not control. He sought help but was too proud to discipline himself in the regimen imposed upon him by those who tried to assist him.

He went down like a falling star, tragically burning out and disappearing in the night. I made inquiry of one friend after another and finally learned the truth of his tragic end. He, who had begun with such high aim and impressive talent, had died on skid row in one of our large cities. He had felt certain of his strength and of his capacity to live up to his potential. But he had denied that capacity; and I am confident that as the shadows of his failure closed around him, he must have gone out and wept bitterly.

I think of another. I knew him well. He joined the Church when long ago I was a missionary in the British Isles. He had a smoking habit. He prayed for strength in that springtime of his Church membership, and the Lord answered his prayer and gave him power to overcome his habit. He looked to God and lived with a joy he never had previously known. But something happened. Family and social pressures were brought against him. He lowered his vision and gave way to his appetite. The smell of burning tobacco seduced him. I saw him some years later. We talked together of the old and better days he had known. He wept bitterly. He blamed this and he blamed that, and as he did so, I was inclined to repeat the words of Cassius—

*The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.*

(William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, act 1, sc. 2, lines 140–41)

And so I might continue telling you of those who begin with noble objectives but then slow down, or of those who are strong starters and weak finishers. So many in the game of life get to first base, or second, or even third, but then fail to score. They are

inclined to live unto themselves, denying their generous instincts, grasping for possessions and, in their self-centered, uninspired living, sharing neither talent nor faith with others. Of them the Lord has said: "And this shall be your lamentation in the day of visitation, and of judgment, and of indignation: The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and my soul is not saved!" (D&C 56:16.) ("And Peter Went Out and Wept Bitterly," *Ensign*, Mar. 1995, 4–5)

George Q. Cannon

Make good use of the time you have. Now is the time of your probation; now is the time of harvest; now is the summer of your days. Let it not be said, "the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and my soul is not saved." But let us bear in mind that now is the probation that God has given us. Let us make use of it by doing the works of righteousness, by keeping the commandments of God, by having our eye on the mark of our high calling in Christ Jesus. (*Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1987], 19)

Jeremiah 8:22 is there no balm in Gilead?



Boyd K. Packer

Some years ago, I spoke at this pulpit and entitled my talk "The Balm of Gilead." The response was surprising. That very day two lawsuits were settled. One or both of the litigants decided that what they might gain materially was not worth the cost spiritually.

I wish to repeat much of what I said then.

In ancient times there came from Gilead, beyond the Jordan, an ointment made from the gum of a tree. It was a major commodity in trade. The Ishmaelite traders who purchased Joseph from his brothers were carrying this balm of Gilead to Egypt (see Gen. 37:25).

It became symbolic for the power to soothe and to heal.

*There is a Balm in Gilead,
To make the wounded whole,
There is a Balm in Gilead,
To heal the sin sick soul.*

(*Recreational Songs*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1949, p. 130)

My message was then, and is now, an appeal to those who are not at peace, those whose lives are touched with bitterness, with hostility, or with resentment. It is a plea to those who anxiously struggle with worry, or with grief or disappointment, with guilt, or with shame.

We see so much unnecessary suffering, so many who cripple themselves spiritually carrying burdens which could be put down. Many suffer from real misfortune and injustice. Sadly, some only imagine that they do. In either case, self-inflicted penalties soon become cruel and unusual punishment. (“Balm of Gilead,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 16)

Alexander B. Morrison

The greatest miracle of all is not the finding of those who are lost. Rather, it is the ability of the Savior’s love to heal and make whole, to apply a balm of Gilead to sin-sick souls, to restore to full understanding precious truths long since hidden by the cares of the world and the wiles of the wicked. (“Fire Where Once Were Ashes,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1990, 8)

Thomas S. Monson

When the pathway of life takes a cruel turn, there is the temptation to ask the question “Why me?” Self-incrimination is a common practice, even when we may have had no control over our difficulty. At times there appears to be no light at the tunnel’s end, no dawn to break the night’s darkness. We feel surrounded by the pain of broken hearts, the disappointment of shattered dreams, and the despair of vanished hopes. We join in uttering the biblical plea “Is there no balm in Gilead?”⁷ We feel abandoned, heartbroken, alone.

To all who so despair, may I offer the assurance found in the psalm “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”⁸

Whenever we are inclined to feel burdened down with the blows of life, let us remember that others have passed the same way, have endured, and then have overcome. (“Look to God and Live,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 52)

Thomas S. Monson

As of old, the heartbroken frequently and silently repeat the ancient question: “Is there no balm in Gilead?” “Why me; why now?” The words of a beautiful hymn provide a partial answer:

*Where can I turn for peace? Where is my solace
When other sources cease to make me whole?
When with a wounded heart, anger, or malice,
I draw myself apart, Searching my soul? ...
He answers privately, Reaches my reaching
In my Gethsemane, Savior and Friend.*

Gentle the peace he finds for my beseeching.

Constant he is and kind, Love without end.

("The Fatherless and the Widows—Beloved of God," *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 69)