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JEREMIAH 4: 1 "If you will return, Israel," says the LORD, "if you will return to me, and if you will put away your abominations out of my sight; then you shall not be removed;

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Sequel of the exhortations and promises addressed to Israel in the preceding chapter, Jer 4:1, Jer 4:2. The prophet then addresses the people of Judah and Jerusalem, exhorting to repentance and reformation, that the dreadful visitation with which they were threatened might be averted, Jer 4:3, Jer 4:4. He then sounds the alarm of war, Jer 4:5, Jer 4:6. Nebuchadnezzar, like a fierce lion, is, from the certainty of the prophecy, represented to be on his march; and the disastrous event to have been already declared, Jer 4:7-9. And as the lying prophets had flattered the people with the hopes of peace and safety, they are now introduced, (when their predictions are falsified by the event), excusing themselves; and, with matchless effrontery, laying the blame of the deception upon God, ("And they said," etc., so the text is corrected by Kennicott), Jer 4:10. The prophet immediately resumes his subject; and, in the person of God, denounces again those judgments which were shortly to be inflicted by Nebuchadnezzar, Jer 4:11-18. The approaching desolation of Jerusalem lamented in language amazingly energetic and exquisitely tender, Jer 4:19-21. The incorrigible wickedness of the people the sole cause of these calamities, Jer 4:22. In the remaining verses the prophet describes the sad catastrophe of Jerusalem by such a beautiful assemblage of the most striking and afflictive circumstances as form a picture of a land "swept with the besom of destruction." The earth seems ready to return to its original chaos; every ray of light is extinguished, and succeeded by a frightful gloom; the mountains tremble, and the hills shake, under the dreadful apprehension of the wrath of Jehovah; all is one awful solitude, where not a vestige of the human race is to be seen. Even the fowls of heaven, finding no longer whereon to subsist, are compelled to migrate; the most fruitful places are become a dark and dreary desert, and every city is a ruinous heap. To complete the whole, the dolorous shrieks of Jerusalem, as of a woman in peculiar agony, break through the frightful gloom; and the appalled prophet pauses, leaving the reader to reflect on the dreadful effects of apostasy and idolatry, Jer 4:23-31.

#### Verse 1

Shalt thou not remove - This was spoken before the Babylonish captivity; and here is a promise that if they will return from their idolatry, they shall not be led into captivity. So, even that positively threatened judgment would have been averted had they returned to the Lord.

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JEREMIAH 4: 2 and you shall swear, 'As the LORD lives,' in truth, in justice, and in righteousness. The nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory."

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#### Verse 2

Thou shalt swear, The Lord liveth - Thou shalt not bind thyself by any false god; thou shalt acknowledge Me as the Supreme. Bind thyself By me, and To me; and do this in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness.

The nations shall bless themselves in him - They shall be so fully convinced of the power and goodness of Jehovah in seeing the change wrought on thee, and the mercies heaped upon thee, that their usual mode of benediction shall be, May the God of Israel bless thee!

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JEREMIAH 4: 3 For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem, "Break up your fallow ground, and don't sow among thorns.

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Verse 3

Break up your fallow ground - Fallow ground is either that which, having been once tilled, has lain long uncultivated; or, ground slightly ploughed, in order to be ploughed again previously to its being sown. Ye have been long uncultivated in righteousness; let true repentance break up your fruitless and hardened hearts; and when the seed of the word of life is sown in them, take heed that worldly cares and concerns do not arise, and, like thorns, choke the good seed.

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JEREMIAH 4: 4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go out like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

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Verse 4

Circumcise yourselves - Put away every thing that has a tendency to grieve the Spirit of God, or to render your present holy resolutions unfruitful.

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JEREMIAH 4: 5 Declare in Judah, and publish in Jerusalem; and say, 'Blow the trumpet in the land!' Cry aloud and say, 'Assemble yourselves! Let us go into the fortified cities!'

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Verse 5

Blow ye the trumpet - Give full information to all parts of the land, that the people may assemble together and defend themselves against their invaders.

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JEREMIAH 4: 6 Set up a standard toward Zion. Flee for safety! Don't wait; for I will bring evil from the north, and a great destruction."

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Verse 6

I will bring evil from the north - From the land of Chaldea.

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JEREMIAH 4: 7 A lion has gone up from his thicket, and a destroyer of nations; he is on his way, he has gone out from his place, to make your land desolate, that your cities be laid waste, without inhabitant.

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Verse 7

The lion is come up - Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. "The king (Nebuchadnezzar) is come up from his tower." - Targum.

The destroyer of the Gentiles - Of the nations: of all the people who resisted his authority. He destroyed them all.

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JEREMIAH 4: 8 For this clothe yourself with sackcloth, lament and wail; for the fierce anger of the LORD hasn't turned back from us.

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Verse 8

Lament and howl - הילילו heililu. The aboriginal Irish had a funeral song called the Caoinian, still continued among their descendants, one part of which is termed the ulaloo: this is sung responsively or alternately, and is accompanied with a full chorus of sighs and groans. It has been thought that Ireland was originally peopled by the Phoenicians: if so, this will account for the similarity of many words and customs among both these people.

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JEREMIAH 4: 9 "It shall happen at that day," says the LORD, "that the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; and the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder."

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Verse 9

The heart of the king shall perish - Shall lose all courage.

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JEREMIAH 4: 10 Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Surely you have greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, 'You shall have peace;' whereas the sword reaches to the heart."

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Verse 10

Ah, Lord God! surely thou hast greatly deceived this people - The Targum paraphrases this verse thus: "And I said, Receive my supplication, O Lord God; for, behold, the false prophets deceive this people and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace." The prophet could not reconcile this devastation of the country with the promises already made; and he appears to ask the question, Hast thou not then deceived this people in saying there shall be peace, i.e., prosperity?

Whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul - That is, the life; the people being generally destroyed.

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JEREMIAH 4: 11 At that time shall it be said to this people and to Jerusalem, "A hot wind from the bare heights in the wilderness toward the daughter of my people, not to winnow, nor to cleanse;

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## Verse 11

A dry wind - a fall wind - as clouds - as a whirlwind - All these expressions appear to refer to the pestilential winds, suffocating vapors, and clouds and pillars of sand collected by whirlwinds, which are so common and destructive in the east, (see on Isa 21:1 (note)); and these images are employed here to show the overwhelming effect of the invasion of the land by the Chaldeans.

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JEREMIAH 4: 12 a full wind from these shall come for me. Now I will also utter judgements against them.”

JEREMIAH 4: 13 Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots shall be as the whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us! For we are ruined.

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## Verse 13

Wo unto us! - The people, deeply affected with these threatened judgments, interrupt the prophet with the lamentation - Wo unto us, for we are spoiled! The prophet then resumes: -

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JEREMIAH 4: 14 Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?

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## Verse 14

O Jerusalem, wash thine heart - Why do ye not put away your wickedness, that ye may be saved from these tremendous judgments? How long shall thy vain thoughts of safety and prosperity lodge within thee? Whilst thou continuest a rebel against God, and provokest him daily by thy abominations!

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JEREMIAH 4: 15 For a voice declares from Dan, and publishes evil from the hills of Ephraim:

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## Verse 15

For a voice declareth from Dan - Dan was a city in the tribe of Dan, north of Jerusalem; the first city in Palestine, which occurs in the way from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Affliction from Mount Ephraim - Between Dan and Jerusalem are the mountains of Ephraim. These would be the first places attacked by the Chaldeans; and the rumor from thence would show that the land was invaded.

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JEREMIAH 4: 16 “Tell the nations; behold, publish against Jerusalem, ‘Watchers come from a far country, and raise their voice against the cities of Judah.

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Verse 16

Watchers come from a far country - Persons to besiege fortified places.

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JEREMIAH 4: 17 As keepers of a field, they are against her all around, because she has been rebellious against me," says the LORD.

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Verse 17

As keepers of a field - In the eastern countries grain is often sown in the open country; and, when nearly ripe, guards are placed at different distances round about it to preserve it from being plundered. Jerusalem was watched, like one of these fields, by guards all round about it; so that none could enter to give assistance, and none who wished to escape were permitted to go out.

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JEREMIAH 4: 18 "Your way and your doings have brought these things to you. This is your wickedness; for it is bitter, for it reaches to your heart."

JEREMIAH 4: 19 My anguish, my anguish! I am pained at my very heart; my heart is disquieted in me; I can't hold my peace; because you have heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.

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Verse 19

My bowels - From this to the twenty-ninth verse the prophet describes the ruin of Jerusalem and the desolation of Judea by the Chaldeans in language and imagery scarcely paralleled in the whole Bible. At the sight of misery the bowels are first affected; pain is next felt by a sort of stricture in the pericardium; and then, the heart becoming strongly affected by irregular palpitations, a gush of tears, accompanied with wailings, is the issue. - "My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart, (the walls of my heart); my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace." Here is nature, and fact also.

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JEREMIAH 4: 20 Destruction upon destruction is cried; for the whole land is laid waste: suddenly are my tents destroyed, and my curtains in a moment.

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Verse 20

Destruction upon destruction - Cities burnt, and their inhabitants destroyed.

My tents spoiled - Even the solitary dwellings in the fields and open country do not escape.

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JEREMIAH 4: 21 How long shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet?

JEREMIAH 4: 22 “For my people are foolish, they don’t know me. They are foolish children, and they have no understanding. They are skilful in doing evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.”

JEREMIAH 4: 23 I saw the earth, and, behold, it was waste and void; and the heavens, and they had no light.

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Verse 23

I beheld the earth, (the land), and lo it was without form and void - ובהו ובהו tohu vabohu; the very words used in Genesis to denote the formless state of the chaotic mass before God had brought it into order.

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JEREMIAH 4: 24 I saw the mountains, and behold, they trembled, and all the hills moved back and forth.

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Verse 24

The mountains - hills - Princes, rulers, etc., were astonished and fled.

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JEREMIAH 4: 25 I saw, and behold, there was no man, and all the birds of the sky had fled.

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Verse 25

The birds of the heavens were fled - The land was so desolated that even the fowls of heaven could not find meat, and therefore fled away to another region. How powerfully energetic is this description!

See Zep 1:3.

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JEREMIAH 4: 26 I saw, and behold, the fruitful field was a wilderness, and all its cities were broken down at the presence of the LORD, before his fierce anger.

JEREMIAH 4: 27 For thus says the LORD, “The whole land shall be a desolation; yet will I not make a full end.

JEREMIAH 4: 28 For this the earth will mourn, and the heavens above be black; because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and I have not repented, neither will I turn back from it.”

JEREMIAH 4: 29 Every city flees for the noise of the horsemen and archers; they go into the thickets, and climb up on the rocks: every city is forsaken, and not a man dwells therein.

JEREMIAH 4: 30 You, when you are made desolate, what will you do? Though you clothe yourself with scarlet, though you deck you with ornaments of gold, though you enlarge your eyes with paint, in vain do you make yourself beautiful; your lovers despise you, they seek your life.

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## Verse 30

Though thou rentest thy face with painting - This probably refers to the custom of introducing stibium a preparation of antimony, between the eye and the lids, in order to produce a fine lustre, which occasions a distension of the eye-lid in the time of the operation. In order to heighten the effect from this some may have introduced a more than ordinary quantity, so as nearly to rend the eye-lid itself. Though thou make use of every means of address, of cunning, and of sollicitation, to get assistance from the neighboring states, it will be all in vain. Reference is here particularly made to the practice of harlots to allure men.

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JEREMIAH 4: 31 For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, the anguish as of her who gives birth to her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion, who gasps for breath, who spreads her hands, saying, "Woe is me now! For my soul faints before the murderers."

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## Verse 31

Bringeth forth her first child - In such a case the fear, danger, and pain were naturally the greatest.

Spreadeth her hands - The gesture indicated by nature to signify distress, and implore help. We have met with this figure in other parts, and among the classic writers it is frequent.