

In 586BCE Jerusalem was destroyed, it was wiped out entirely. The great Temple of Solomon was torn down, and much of the city was burned to the ground, folks lost their homes, and their farmlands, it was all catastrophically destroyed. All those who made up the governing classes, the folks who held society together, the Temple priests, the leaders, the land and business owners, they were all hauled off into exile, and the 'ordinary' folks were left behind to figure out how to survive in the smoldering rubble. The total destruction, the burning of Jerusalem, the Babylonian exile, the violence and the killing, this is the great, collective biblical trauma that shifted Jewish theology. Established life, as it had been lived for hundreds of years, was over, it was all gone. And this was the time that was experienced first-hand by the prophet Jeremiah.

This week, it's hard to read Jeremiah's words without also thinking about what's going on, right now, in the Holy Land. The pictures and the testimony coming out of Gaza are heart-rending. Much of the north, especially, has been laid waste. After last week's ceasefire, folks, who'd been displaced by the war to live in camps in the south, started to return, to go back to the neighborhoods where they used to live, and they've been met with unimaginable destruction.¹ Huge swaths of the north have been completely flattened. And it's not just buildings that are gone, and lives that have been lost, the rubble and the destruction also signal that the shared, common life of a community has also been wiped out.

It's brutal.

¹ <https://apnews.com/article/gaza-israel-palestinians-drone-footage-destruction-ceasefire-4a03097279002889573791ecd0112df8>

Not everyone in Israel, by any means, agrees with the military action in Gaza, the punishing extent of what's happened there following the terrorist attacks on Israel by Hamas on October 7, back in 2023. There are a wide range of responses in the Israeli press to the devastation and the killing. But, given this week's reading from Jeremiah, one article struck me, particularly. It said:

"Victory will come when the enemy internalizes its defeat."²

And there's a truth here, albeit a horrendously violent one, that things really only do change when we take 'into ourselves' a knowing – tragically, through much of history, this *internalizing* is the result of trauma, human-inflicted trauma.

The intergenerational trauma of antisemitic violence, that reached its most pronounced and horrifying apex in the holocaust, has most definitely been internalized – the trauma of the holocaust *internalized*, embodied, has actually changed the dna of the descendants of holocaust-survivors.³

Attempted complete destruction, of people, place, language and culture is a most terrible deliberate violence that humans inflict on one another to 'internalize' the power difference between groups. It's a tested and proven tactic of conquest, and colonization, and it's been used with devastating effect on populations across the planet all through history. The internalization of defeat, of horror, fear, pain, powerlessness, this is the goal of every aggressor, so that it can effectively wield power over the defeated 'other.'

² <https://www.israelhayom.com/2024/11/25/israel-must-retain-full-control-of-the-gaza-strip/>

³ for example:

https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/09/160901102207.htm?utm_source=chatgpt.com#google_vignette

Surviving, when everything you've always known has been destroyed, surely leaves many, in Jeremiah's time and today, asking "where is God in all this?" – the prophet Jeremiah offers wisdom in his expression of hope for a future that's ordained by God.

In today's reading, Jeremiah prophesies to the survivors about a future they will play a role in bringing about. He speaks of a time when God will make a new covenant with the people, a time when God's law will be *within*, it will be internalized, in the hearts of the people; and the people will know God. This future, this healed future, can only happen if they survive, if they continue on. The survivors are the builders of God's ordained future, they are the foundation for a new way of being: losing everything opens the way to possibility and new life.

What Jeremiah's saying in today's reading isn't really about a new covenant, a new idea, Jeremiah is actually affirming a very old idea, one that Moses shared with the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness many, many generations before. In those earliest of times, Moses made it clear to the people that, " ... the word is very near to you; [he said] it is in your mouth and in your heart."⁴

Jeremiah's 'new covenant' is *the covenant*, and the prophet is pointing to a future time when it will, surely, finally, be experienced and lived; God's law will be *renewed* as it's experienced and lived through connection with God within, *internalized*. Love of God and a commitment to live in faithfulness is to be embodied.

⁴ Deuteronomy 30:14

And, for us, as Christians, we see what this looks like in the personhood of Jesus – the ‘new’ covenant, is the covenant fully alive, fully embodied.

The time prophesied by Jeremiah is still in the future, we humans continue to do bad, terrible things to one another.

And bad, terrible things can just happen in life; and when they do, our own personal ‘world’ can similarly be utterly destroyed. There can be times when we feel like we’re standing in the rubble of what used to be our life, when everything that we’ve known and loved, everything familiar and expected is ripped away; all the stuff we’ve grown to depend on, people or places, losing what has been our life can be traumatic. When what we’ve had is gone, for whatever reason, what’s left is actually what’s been there all the time, but can so easily be unknown or unnoticed for an entire lifetime.

Our inherent connectedness to God is what’s there, within, and so it’s especially in the absolute hardest of times, when all other possible distractions are taken away, that we can finally come to realize that and trust it. It’s in those times that the fierce drive for life and regeneration, the impulse to restore and rebuild, the clarity of possibility, and the courage to be creative and to do things differently - it can be in the ruins of what was the life we’d always known, that this can become most clear.

Tragically, a traumatic break from the continuity of the familiar can be revelatory:

a complete severing of the present moment from an expected future can be the catalyst for a courageous newness. Being forced into the tortuous space between 'no longer' and 'not yet' can be the thing that propels us forward, despite lack of certainty or any guarantee, pressing on into an unknown future.

When nothing else remains, there can be hope, and hope, true hope, is the internalized connection/inseparability that we have, always, with the immense power and promise of a life lived by, with, and for God.

Hope is in the assurance that we can and will begin again, and hope is dependent on our participation - true hope and action can't be separated, hope is not passive. Within each of us is the life-driven capacity for renewal, the impulse to respond and to create and to build.

Traumatic events might reveal the presence and power of hope, but hope is not dependent on traumatic events. We always have the capacity to break with our current present moment and create something new. Always.

Every time we speak and act we set in motion a chain of events with far reaching consequences. Our thought, speech, and action, all of it, is new-world-building, and will be part of our shared future. Every violence, however seemingly trivial, of thought, speech, or action, keeps violence alive in the world; and every act of healing and repair makes a difference to the future world we will all share.

The time to connect with hope is right now. And we can do this by taking seriously our need to internalize our faith, our love of God. Hope needn't lay dormant until trauma or catastrophe wake it up.

Truly internalizing our one-ness with God is possible right now, and internalizing that, *that* will be the victory, the victory ordained by God.