

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY – SATURDAY, 2ND AUGUST, 2025
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Good morning.

Have you ever agreed to something in haste and then wondered what you've signed yourself up for? It happened to me when I said I'd give a paper on the Prophet Jeremiah at an academic conference. Not an easy task: Jeremiah's name is a byword for doom and gloom, but even so, on first reading I was appalled by the lurid pessimism of the text. What could it say to a modern audience?

Yet as I read and reflected, my perspective changed. I could see Jeremiah railed against the false prophets of his time, those who spoke of peace when there was no peace. He was persecuted because nobody wanted to hear his dire warnings about how their betrayal of divinely ordained principles of justice and truth would result in social and environmental catastrophe. I believe he has a message for us today.

Prophecy is not about crystal-ball gazing. It's a capacity to see deeply into the nature of things, and to become attentive to the interconnectedness of creation. We enjoy a freedom and a power over nature that have been given to no other creature, and we are responsible for how we use this freedom. We can channel our energies into the flourishing of life for all, but we're also free to engage in destructive and violent behaviour that drags us into chaos. This afflicts not only humankind but the whole natural order. Jeremiah speaks of the earth in mourning and desolation.

Jeremiah interpreted this in terms of divine reward and punishment. Today, we use the language of politics and policies, science and ecology, but the underlying message is the same. The healing of the natural world depends upon the transformation of human behaviour. This requires a collective commitment to seek dignity, justice, and compassion in our communities and nations.

Political commentators speak of the threatened breakdown of the international order, which has sought to preserve a fragile peace after the horrors of two world wars and the Holocaust. This is a warning as dire as any given by the ancient biblical prophets. When the false gods of violence, injustice and tyranny run amok amongst us, we unleash the forces of catastrophe.

Jeremiah spoke an unwelcome truth because he laid the burden of responsibility, not on an interventionist God but on the people themselves. 'Deal justly with each other' he says, 'do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood'. He tells us that God's promise of peace is dependent on us changing our ways and our actions. We must heed the prophets of doom before it's too late.