

Jeremiah and the Word of the Lord (Jeremiah 1:1–3)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (11/10/2019)

Introduction

1. The *words* or *chronicles* of Jeremiah
 - a. The opening establishes the identification of the prophet, who witnessed the end of the kingdom of Judah (c. 627 to c. 580 B.C.).
 - b. Jeremiah was a contemporary of Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel, Ezekiel.
 - c. Early in his ministry, he proclaimed God’s message to Judah when it was threatened by Assyria and Egypt but later when threatened by Babylon.
 - d. His ministry was in Jerusalem and Egypt before and after Judah’s downfall.
2. Jeremiah was a son of Hilkiah, a priest in Anathoth of Benjamin.
3. The prophet ministered during the reign of five kings of Judah of which only three are mentioned: *Josiah, 18 years; Jehoahaz, 18 months; *Jehoiakim, 11 years; Jehoiachin, 3 months; *Zedekiah, 11 years.
4. The following quote from Lord Macaulay introduces the prophecies of Jeremiah:

“It is difficult to conceive any situation more painful than that of a great man, condemned to watch the lingering agony of an exhausted country, to tend it during the alternate fits of stupefaction and raving which precede its dissolution, and to see the symptoms of vitality disappear one by one, till nothing is left but coldness, darkness, and corruption.”

It is possible that we, like Jeremiah, are ministering to the final generation of a once-great republic.

I. The Times

1. The descent to judgment
 - a. Judah’s awful descent to judgment began with the compromises of Jehoshaphat in the days of Ahab of Israel: (1) Jehoshaphat walked in the way of his godly father, Asa, doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord (2 Chronicles 20:33); (2) because of his compromises with Ahab, his son Jehoram “*walked in the way of the kings of Israel and have enticed Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem into whoredom [Baal worship]*” (21:13); (3) Jehoram married the daughter of Ahab and “*did what was evil in the sight of the Lord*” (21:6); (4) Jehoram’s son, Ahaziah, followed, walking in the ways of the house of Ahab and was put to death in Samaria by Jehu, whom the Lord used to destroy the house of Ahab; (5) After Ahaziah’s death, his mother, Athaliah, the wife of Jehoram, became queen and ruled in Judah, killing all the royal seed except Joash, who was hidden from her. Joash lived for God until the death of Jehoiada the priest, then he forsook the Lord (24:20). His son, Amaziah, “*did right in the eyes of the Lord, but not with a whole heart*” (25:2).
 - b. Judah never recovered her allegiance to Yahweh as evident in Joash’s fall after the death of the godly priest, Jehoiada, who had temporarily kept Joash on the right path (24:20).
2. Doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord, yet not with a whole heart.

God raised up the prophet, Isaiah (740 to 680 B.C.), during the reign of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. A brief period of hope came in the days of Hezekiah when the temple was restored, and the priesthood and temple worship were recovered. Nevertheless, Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah “*did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel*” (33:2). Despite Manasseh’s repentance, his son, Amon, incurred greater guilt by taking up the idolatry his father established and not humbling himself as his father had done. When his servants assassinated the king, the people struck them down and made Josiah, Amon’s son, king in Judah.

 - a. “Revival” under Josiah.

Although the nation descended into a period of terrible corruption in the fifty-plus years that followed Isaiah, the light of truth shined on the nation resulting in “revival” under Josiah. When the temple was cleansed, the

book of the Law was discovered, and reforms followed. The people were moved to reform, not by the stirring of heart for the Lord, but by the popularity of Josiah. Despite Josiah, judgment loomed.

- b. There were three remarkable events that occurred during Jeremiah's ministry.
 - 1) The battle of Carchemish between Judah and Egypt during which Josiah died
 - 2) Another battle at Carchemish between Babylon and Egypt during which Egypt, Judah's ally, fell
 - 3) The fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians
4. The only hope for Judah was a genuine moving of the Spirit of God in real revival of the people. That hope was distant for the prophet Jeremiah. Judah was fully responsible for her sad decline into the abominations that brought her into judgment.

II. The Prophet

1. God raised up the right man for that time in the nation of Judah.
 - a. As with the call of Isaiah, Jeremiah was commissioned by a direct dialogue with God.
 - b. Jeremiah was young, but God assured him that before his mother conceived him, God formed him in the womb and consecrated and appointed him to be His prophet to the nations (Jeremiah 1:9, 10).
2. Jeremiah's call was to deliver a very difficult message.
 - a. His message would not be received by those who needed it most.
Their self-deceived perception of their status as God's people blinded them to their own sinful abandonment of love and loyalty to God.
 - b. Jeremiah would have to preach a message, not of hope and change, but of certain and inevitable judgment.
 - c. The tender heart of the prophet assured that his difficult message from God would be delivered with broken-hearted compassion and many tears (Jeremiah 1:16, 17).
3. God uses men to deliver the truth to those who stubbornly resist the truth.
 - a. The prophet's temptation is to soften the message to please the hearer or evade his harsh reaction.
 - b. The sad situation in many churches today and a real problem preventing the churches' powerful witness against the culture is worldly occupation of the people of God. We need bold and fearless preaching of the truth of the Word of God.

III. The Message

1. The heart of Jeremiah's message to Judah was the disobedience of those who claimed God's favor. The summary of the whole argument is found in chapter 2, verse 13. The focus of the indictment is found in the words, "*My people.*" The indictment points to two *evils*: (1) They forsook the Lord, the fountain of living waters, and (2) they hewed out broken cisterns for themselves that could hold no water.
2. There is an interesting connection between God's sovereign purpose and His pleading with sinners. While sovereign grace is required to awaken dead sinners, the judgment of God aims at the responsibility of personal choices. This is seen in Jeremiah with a phrase used only of God—the Hebrew, *shakam*, translated, "*rising early*" (KJV) and "*persistently*" (ESV). It is a figure of speech showing God as persistently and earnestly seeking the repentance of those to whom His Word is sent with pleadings for repentance (Jeremiah 25:4, 5).

What to Take Away

We stand at a very critical time in our nation's history, and we must recognize the spiritual nature of the enemy that would destroy the "the great experiment." Our great republic is also in grave danger of irrecoverable decline into judgment. As the Lord's people, we must enter this spiritual warfare by first putting on the whole armor of God. We must hold steadfastly to the Word of God and persist in our faith in Christ, no matter what harm may come to us. Second, we must surrender our lives fully to the will of God and pray as we have never prayed. The church must return to wholehearted devotion and obedience to Jesus Christ as the only hope for our nation's return.