

Jeremiah 5:1-31 “My People Love to Have It So: Why Do We Love Lies?” Jan 11, 2015

“My people love to have it so”!

Why do we believe lies?

Often we *know* that they are lies – and we believe them anyway.
But sometimes we are so deceived that we believe a lie –
thinking that it is the truth!

This morning we heard the three temptations of Israel in the wilderness –
warnings that Israel not “say in their hearts” these three things.

Tonight Jeremiah says, “They do not say in their hearts, ‘Let us fear the LORD our God.’” (v24)

If we feared the LORD our God,
then we would not love and believe lies.

This is at the heart of the message that Jeremiah preaches to Jerusalem.

Back in chapter 3, verse 6, we were told that this message came “in the days of King Josiah.”
In chapter 7, verse 1, we will hear a new message.
So chapters 3 through 6 appear to be the basic message that Jeremiah preached
in the days of King Josiah.

This is where I need to introduce a unique feature of the book of Jeremiah!
The book of Jeremiah is the only book of the Bible that exists in two different forms.
There is the Babylonian text – which our Bible follows;
and then there is the Alexandrian text – which the Septuagint follows.
The western church uses the Babylonian text.
The eastern church uses the Alexandrian text.

And we have found ancient Hebrew manuscripts from before Christ
of *both* texts.

Let me say right up front that this is *old news*.
The church has *always* known about these two different texts.
The western church and the eastern church have disagreed about which one to use –
but since there is no theological difference between the texts,
no one has ever thought that it was a big deal!

The reason why I bring it up now is because we have to a place where it matters!
Jeremiah 7, verse 1, reads very differently in the Alexandrian text.
In the Babylonian text (the one you have in front of you)
it clearly marks a new section (*The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD*).
In the Alexandrian text, there is no Jeremiah 7:1!
And there is no reference to standing in the temple and proclaiming this word.

In other words, in the Alexandrian text (followed by the LXX),
chapter 7 simply continues the message of chapter 6.

In the Babylonian text (followed by the Masoretes),
chapter 7 introduces a new message.

I should take some time to explain this –
because it's really helpful for understanding the book of Jeremiah.

Who *wrote* the book of Jeremiah?

Much of the book is written in the first person –

“the word of the LORD came to me” –

but then there are these interesting third person references (like 7:1).

Some of those third person references are also in the Alexandrian version,
but others are not.

Where did they come from?

It's worth noting that the *author* of the book is anonymous.

Jeremiah plainly wrote (or dictated) large portions of the book.

But there are several sections that are plainly written by someone else *about* Jeremiah.

With many books of the Bible, we just don't know the name of the person who wrote them.

Who wrote the book of Kings?

We don't know.

But we *do know* from Jeremiah 36 that Baruch, his scribe, wrote much of the book
at the dictation of Jeremiah,

so Baruch is a likely author for the narrative sections
that speak in the third person .

But there are certain parts of the book of Jeremiah that don't occur in the Alexandrian text.

The Alexandrian text is about 15% shorter than the Babylonian text.

The *content* of the two textual traditions is very much the same.

Through the middle of Jeremiah 25, these two texts are very similar.

After Jeremiah 25, they have mostly the same material – but organized very differently –
and edited somewhat differently.

So it seems clear that Jeremiah 1-25 existed in a coherent form before Jeremiah left Jerusalem,
and that the second half of Jeremiah existed as something of a loose set of papers.

After all, the same *content* is found in both textual traditions –

it is just organized differently, and edited differently –

with two distinct voices doing the editing.

Two editors compiled the papers in different orders.

It is possible that Jeremiah did this himself,
but the text of Jeremiah points in a different direction.

Baruch, the scribe, and his brother, Seraiah.

It is at least curious that Seraiah is only mentioned in the Babylonian text!
Seraiah is referred to in one passage in Jeremiah –
Jeremiah 51:59-64 – a passage directed towards the Babylonian exiles:

Turn over to Jeremiah 51:59, and you will see:

⁵⁹ *The word that Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, son of Mahseiah, when he went with Zedekiah king of Judah to Babylon, in the fourth year of his reign. Seraiah was the quartermaster. ⁶⁰ Jeremiah wrote in a book all the disaster that should come upon Babylon, all these words that are written concerning Babylon. ⁶¹ And Jeremiah said to Seraiah: “When you come to Babylon, see that you read all these words, ⁶² and say, ‘O LORD, you have said concerning this place that you will cut it off, so that nothing shall dwell in it, neither man nor beast, and it shall be desolate forever.’ ⁶³ When you finish reading this book, tie a stone to it and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates, ⁶⁴ and say, ‘Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more, because of the disaster that I am bringing upon her, and they shall become exhausted.’”*

So, according to the text of Jeremiah,

Seraiah was specially commissioned by Jeremiah to take his message to Babylon
(and while the first task was to drop a copy of the book in the Euphrates river,
one presumes that Seraiah was also supposed to bring Jeremiah’s words
to the Jewish exiles in Babylon!).

Baruch, on the other hand, goes with Jeremiah to Egypt.

So, according to the text of Jeremiah,

we have two brothers – Baruch and Seraiah –
both of whom are closely associated with the ministry of Jeremiah –
and both of whom are responsible for writing down the prophecies of Jeremiah
and bringing his message to two different groups of people –
one in Egypt and one in Babylon.

And we have two texts – the Septuagint text (and the Septuagint was translated in Egypt),
and the Masoretic text (which has strong connections with the Babylonian diaspora).

That’s why I call them the “Babylonian” text and the “Alexandrian” text.
It’s not that one is Hebrew, the other is Greek –
we have *Hebrew* manuscripts of *both* – from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Now, I know that someone is going to ask, “but which one is inspired?!!”

My answer is “both.”

After all, while there is *immense* difference in the *order* of prophecies –
and there is quite a bit of material in the Masoretic text

that is not found in the Septuagint text –
there are no *substantial* differences between them.

Seraiah was commissioned to write down the words of Jeremiah and go to Babylon.
His brother, Baruch, went with Jeremiah to Egypt.

Chapters 1-25 were already in place before the brothers parted.
The brothers then used essentially the same material as they wrote out the rest,
but arranged it in different order.

Think about the gospel writers.

They *plainly* took the words of Jesus and wrote them out in different ways –
and at times for different theological reasons!

So why not Baruch and Seraiah?

Some might say, then why not have 1 and 2 Jeremiah in our Bibles?

Well, I suppose you could – but the differences between 1-2 Jeremiah are *so miniscule*
that it would be a waste of time and paper.

It would be better to say that *whichever* version of Jeremiah you read,
you are reading the Word of God.

But these two different textual traditions

have existed side-by-side for over 2,000 years.

(Anyone who tells you that this is a “new” problem that “suddenly” casts doubt on the scriptures
doesn’t know what they are talking about!

The church has known about these two texts for 2,000 years,
and has *never* thought that it was a problem!)

Indeed, I think that this is a very helpful gift that God has given us –

because it gives us a window into *how* God inspired the scriptures.

It wasn’t through some sort of mechanical dictation by the Holy Spirit.

It was through the very ordinary process of a prophet and his scribes
writing down his sermons and editing them to communicate to a different audience.

We need to remember that the *canon* – the *standard* for our life and doctrine –
is the prophetic word – the apostolic teaching.

When that word is faithfully communicated –

whether in writing or in preaching –

whether in “literal” translation or in faithful paraphrase –

you are hearing (or reading) the Word of God.

Now, if you didn’t fully “get” what I just said –

don’t worry!

The whole “two Jeremiahs” thing will come up over and over throughout our series,
so I’ll explain it again from time to time.

But to come back to our point for tonight!

In the Alexandrian text, chapters 1-10 fit together as a single unit.

What this means is that Jeremiah's message about Jerusalem (chapters 7-10) was probably preached in Josiah's day as a part of his message about the coming judgment on Judah.

But in the Babylonian text, chapters 1-6 are set apart as the introductory message – leaving aside the Jerusalem material in chapters 7-10.

What does that do?

Well, chapters 3-6 are highlighting the relationship between Israel and Judah – even in our own passage tonight,

verse 11 speaks of “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” and verse 20 speaks to “the house of Jacob” and also to Judah.

By dividing chapters 7-10 off and calling it a separate section,

the *focus* of Jeremiah's opening message

is on Judah and Israel – with a *second message* about Jerusalem.

After putting together the outline in the bulletin,

I discovered another structure that seems better!

Notice 5:9 and 5:29.

“Shall I not punish them for these things? declares the LORD, and shall I not avenge myself on a nation such as this?”

Then in 5:10 and 5:19 there is the declaration of coming judgment,

combined with a promise that God will not make a “full end” of them.

And at the center of the passage (verses 14-17) you see God's declaration

that he has made his word “in your mouth a fire” which will consume his people.

So what do you see at the beginning and the end of the passage?

Verse 2 – “Though they say, As the LORD lives, yet they swear falsely”

Verse 31 – “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?”

We saw this a couple weeks ago in chapter 3 –

when we looked at “false repentance” (returning to the LORD in ‘pretense’).

So the passage begins and ends with Jerusalem and her prophets swearing and preaching falsely.

Next God speaks of how he should avenge himself on a nation like this.

And while he will bring destruction – he will not make a full end of them.

And at the center of the text?

The word of the LORD is a fire in Jeremiah's mouth which will consume God's so-called “people.”

Think about that for a minute.

The word of Jeremiah – “my words in your mouth” –
will consume Israel.

Yes, they will die by the sword of Babylon –
but the sword of Babylon is only a servant
of the sword that goes out of the mouth of the LORD.

Jesus said that he came to bring fire on the earth!

Revelation 18-20 speaks of the destruction of Babylon –
by the sword that comes out of the mouth of the Lord Jesus.

1. The Search for a Repentant Man (5:1-5)

a. “Harder Than Rock” – the Impenitence of Jerusalem (v1-3)

*Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem,
look and take note!*

*Search her squares to see
if you can find a man,
one who does justice
and seeks truth,
that I may pardon her.*

² *Though they say, “As the LORD lives,”
yet they swear falsely.*

³ *O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth?*

*You have struck them down,
but they felt no anguish;
you have consumed them,
but they refused to take correction.
They have made their faces harder than rock;
they have refused to repent.*

Verses 1-5 describe Jeremiah’s search for a repentant man in Jerusalem.

Is there one who does justice and seeks truth?

If there was one man who did justice and sought truth,
then God might pardon her.

Remember Sodom and Gomorrah?

Abraham had prayed that God would pardon Sodom if he could find *ten* righteous men.

And God had agreed that he would.

Now, among all of Abraham’s seed,

Jeremiah looks in vain for *one* man who does justice and seeks truth.

But, of course, Jeremiah is out in the streets and squares of the city:

b. “All Alike Had Broken the Yoke” – the Poor and the Great (v4-5)

⁴ Then I said, “These are only the poor;
they have no sense;
for they do not know the way of the LORD,
the justice of their God.

⁵ I will go to the great
and will speak to them,
for they know the way of the LORD,
the justice of their God.”
But they all alike had broken the yoke;
they had burst the bonds.

Again, this is said in the days of king Josiah –
the greatest king Jerusalem ever saw!

Jeremiah cannot find *one man* who does justice and seeks truth –
he cannot find *one man* who repents – who *turns* to the LORD with a whole heart.

The great were no better than the poor.
“All alike had broken the yoke; they had burst the bonds.”

Jeremiah’s message is very much like Paul’s in Romans 3:
“There is no one who seeks after God.”
“All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God.”

Many would say, Oh, but what about you, Jeremiah!
Or how about the young Ezekiel!
Surely there were a few who were faithful!

Doing justice and seeking truth is not about “being a good person.”
After all, the *purpose* of God’s law was so that *righteousness* and justice
would characterize the whole earth.
Jeremiah is looking for that *one man* whose doing justice and seeking truth
will enable God to forgive Jerusalem.

Josiah was a good king – a great Reformer!
He was the best king that the earthly Jerusalem ever had.
But as we saw at the end of chapter 4,
the earthly Jerusalem is a whore.

And even Josiah wasn’t good enough.

What would Josiah have thought if he had heard Jeremiah’s sermon?
Well, if Josiah was as good a king as the Bible says (and we should believe the Bible!)
then Josiah would have responded to this sermon
by saying, “Yeah, I know what you mean.
I keep trying to do my best to do justice and seek truth –

but trying to reform Jerusalem – trying to establish righteousness in Judah,
is like trying to herd cats.
Everyone pays lip service to my reforms –
but the high places keep coming back –
and after I’m gone, I’m not so sure about my sons...
And even more, if we’re barely making headway among the people of Judah –
how are we ever
supposed to bring the good news of the kingdom to the nations?

c. Therefore a Lion Shall Strike Them Down Because of Their Apostasies (v6)

⁶ *Therefore a lion from the forest shall strike them down;
a wolf from the desert shall devastate them.
A leopard is watching their cities;
everyone who goes out of them shall be torn in pieces,
because their transgressions are many,
their apostasies are great.*

In verses 7-13, God then explains why he cannot forgive Jerusalem.

2. How Can God Pardon Impenitent Apostates? (5:7-13)

a. Apostasy Is Like Adultery (v7-9)

⁷ *“How can I pardon you?
Your children have forsaken me
and have sworn by those who are no gods.
When I fed them to the full,
they committed adultery
and trooped to the houses of whores.
⁸ They were well-fed, lusty stallions,
each neighing for his neighbor's wife.
⁹ Shall I not punish them for these things?
declares the LORD;
and shall I not avenge myself
on a nation such as this?*

Apostasy is like adultery.

The children of Zion have worshiped other gods.
When God provided all that they needed,
they reacted by turning away from him and serving other gods.

And God is like a jilted husband who will avenge himself on his faithless people.

b. Prophets Becoming Wind: The Treachery of Israel and Judah (v10-13)

¹⁰ *“Go up through her vine rows and destroy,
but make not a full end;
strip away her branches,
for they are not the LORD's.*

¹¹ *For the house of Israel and the house of Judah
have been utterly treacherous to me,
declares the LORD.*

¹² *They have spoken falsely of the LORD
and have said, 'He will do nothing;
no disaster will come upon us,
nor shall we see sword or famine.*

¹³ *The prophets will become wind;
the word is not in them.
Thus shall it be done to them!'”*

And so God will destroy the house of Judah (like he did the house of Israel).

It's fascinating to hear how the people speak of the prophets:

“The prophets will become wind [ruach]; the word is not in them.”

The word “ruach” can be translated either spirit, wind, or breath.

They think that the prophets are just empty wind!

But listen to God's response in verses 14-17!

3. “A Fire in Your Mouth” – Jeremiah's Proclamation of the Coming Judgment (5:14-17)

¹⁴ *Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of hosts:*

*“Because you have spoken this word,
behold, I am making my words in your mouth a fire,
and this people wood, and the fire shall consume them.*

This is the heart of chapter 5 –

and perhaps even the heart of Jeremiah's calling as a prophet.

My words are a fire in your mouth –

a fire that will consume the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

Think back to what God told Elijah –

Elijah was to anoint Jehu as king of Israel, Hazael as king of Syria, and Elisha as prophet:
all three were to destroy Israel!

“And the one who escapes for the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death,
and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death.”

(1 Kings 19:17)

Of course, Elisha never killed anyone!

But the word that Elisha proclaimed was the Word of the LORD
that announced the end of the northern kingdom of Israel.
And that word was accomplished.

In the same way, the word of Jeremiah never burnt anyone!

But the fire that proceeded from the mouth of Jeremiah

consumed Jerusalem and all Judah:

¹⁵ *Behold, I am bringing against you
a nation from afar, O house of Israel,
declares the LORD.
It is an enduring nation;
it is an ancient nation,
a nation whose language you do not know,
nor can you understand what they say.*
¹⁶ *Their quiver is like an open tomb;
they are all mighty warriors.*
¹⁷ *They shall eat up your harvest and your food;
they shall eat up your sons and your daughters;
they shall eat up your flocks and your herds;
they shall eat up your vines and your fig trees;
your fortified cities in which you trust
they shall beat down with the sword.”*

4. “Not...a Full End” – the Purpose of the Exile (5:18-31)

¹⁸ *“But even in those days, declares the LORD, I will not make a full end of you. ¹⁹ And when your people say, ‘Why has the LORD our God done all these things to us?’ you shall say to them, ‘As you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve foreigners in a land that is not yours.’”*

But God promises in verse 18 that he will not make a full end of Jerusalem.

He will destroy – but not utterly.

There is a reason for all of this – there is a purpose which Jerusalem must learn from.

You must learn to worship and serve the LORD – and him only!

And verses 20-28 provide two basic lessons –

first, learn from the patterns of creation – and second, learn from the patterns of history!

a. “Do You Not Fear Me?” – Learn from the Patterns of Creation (v20-25)

²⁰ *Declare this in the house of Jacob;
proclaim it in Judah:*
²¹ *“Hear this, O foolish and senseless people,
who have eyes, but see not,
who have ears, but hear not.*
²² *Do you not fear me? declares the LORD.
Do you not tremble before me?
I placed the sand as the boundary for the sea,
a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass;
though the waves toss, they cannot prevail;
though they roar, they cannot pass over it.*
²³ *But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart;
they have turned aside and gone away.*

²⁴ *They do not say in their hearts,
‘Let us fear the LORD our God,
who gives the rain in its season,
the autumn rain and the spring rain,
and keeps for us
the weeks appointed for the harvest.’*
²⁵ *Your iniquities have turned these away,
and your sins have kept good from you.*

In verses 20-25, you are called to learn from the patterns of creation.

Just look around you:

God has placed the sand as a boundary for the sea.
God has ordered creation as a place for freedom within boundaries.

The “sea” often is used as a picture of the nations.
Jeremiah wants Jerusalem to see that the raging of the nations
is like the raging of the sea.
Sure, it’s noisy and a little scary!
The sea is wild and untameable!

But God has ordered creation (and history) in such a way
that all things work together for good to those who love God,
for those who are called according to his purpose.

Learn to say in your *heart*, “Let us fear the LORD our God.”
He is faithful in the patterns of creation.

And also, learn from the vengeance of God in history (v26-29):

b. “Like a Cage Full of Birds” – Learn from the Vengeance of God (v26-29)

²⁶ *For wicked men are found among my people;
they lurk like fowlers lying in wait.^[a]
They set a trap;
they catch men.*
²⁷ *Like a cage full of birds,
their houses are full of deceit;
therefore they have become great and rich;*
²⁸ *they have grown fat and sleek.
They know no bounds in deeds of evil;
they judge not with justice
the cause of the fatherless, to make it prosper,
and they do not defend the rights of the needy.*

The wicked are not just “out there” in the “world.”
They are also “found among my people” –
those who lurk in wait for the innocent –

who grow fat and sleek by devouring the helpless.
The prophets generally start by going after the idolatry of God's people –
but idolatry invariably leads to violations of the rest of God's commands.

Jeremiah had started chapter 5 asking whether there was a man who did justice and sought truth.
The chapter concludes that *no* there is no justice.

And so God asks:

²⁹ *Shall I not punish them for these things?
declares the LORD,
and shall I not avenge myself
on a nation such as this?"*

Jeremiah repeats verse 9.

Just as verses 6-8 used the adultery and idolatry theme
in order to show how the LORD is like a jealous husband,
now verses 26-28 use the injustice and oppression theme
in order to show how the LORD must bring vengeance
against those who continually squash God's people.

Vengeance is mine, says the Lord, I will repay!

Conclusion: "My People Love to Have It So" (5:30-31)

³⁰ *An appalling and horrible thing
has happened in the land:
³¹ the prophets prophesy falsely,
and the priests rule at their direction;
my people love to have it so,
but what will you do when the end comes?*

We love to hear the prophets and priests conspire together to tell us what we want to hear.

But what will you do when the end comes?