

JEREMIAH

Lesson 53

I first met Jeremiah in the early 1970's. Living in Rochester, New York, I rode the bus to school each day. On the bus, a regular event was the singing of one song or another. (Yes, this sounds rather bizarre, but as elementary school children, we thought it quite natural and even "cool"). It was spring of my fifth-grade year when the song that was a bus staple began,

Jeremiah was a bull-frog
Was a good friend of mine...

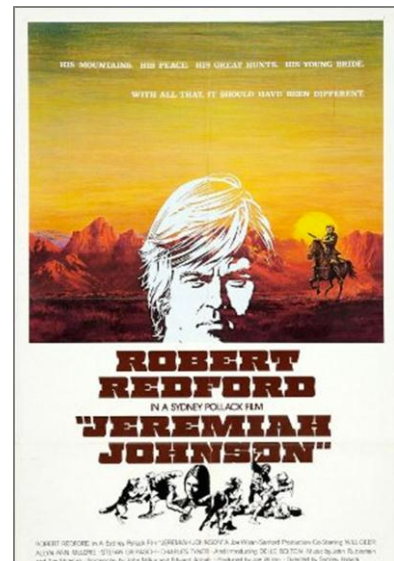
The song did not make much sense to me, but then again, I was only in fifth-grade, and the tune was very catchy! It was not until I read a 2008 interview with lead singer Chuck Negrón that I found out the song was nonsense to the group Three Dog Night as well. Negrón gave a reporter an interview about the line adding,

You know what it is. It's just a silly line. When it started it was "Jeremiah was a prophet," but no one really liked that.¹

If the radio-hit had begun, "Jeremiah was a prophet," I am not certain it would have made any more sense to me.

I next met Jeremiah in 1972, and this time I found out what he looked like! Jeremiah's last name was "Johnson" and he looked uncannily like the Sundance Kid from the Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid movie! Of course, Jeremiah Johnson was not the biblical Jeremiah, and Robert Redford likely bears little resemblance to the Biblical Jeremiah.

It was 1980 before I really spent much time studying the biblical Jeremiah. At this point over thirty years later, he reminds me of a number of my friends! I have spent a good bit of time with him, but not nearly as much as I would like. Jeremiah is possibly my favorite book in the Old Testament. (It is certainly in my top five!)²



¹ Interview with Bainbridge Island Review, Aug. 18, 2008. Available online at <http://www.bainbridgereview.com/entertainment/27111724.html?period=W&mpStartDate=05-15-2010>.

It has so much material, such a depth of character presentation; it is tied closely within its historical setting, yet it maintains a vision of the future. It is a collection of material, not a chronological presentation, so it is ripe for (and demands) thorough and careful study. Its history was a time that is unfolding today in archaeological digs, adding a depth and current flavor to an old familiar book. It is a marvelous book worthy of years of study, and we are going to attempt to consider it within the confines of this one lesson. This lesson, therefore, has little chance to even scratch the surface of the material in Jeremiah. Rather than simply cruise at an altitude of 40,000 feet trying to get a vision of the terrain, we are going to go down for a closer view, looking at the book with two different questions:

- (1) Who was Jeremiah the man?
- (2) What was Jeremiah's core message?

Even on these two points, the material will necessarily be brief; however, we hope to provide a bit of depth along with resources for those who wish to pursue further studies.³

² I am not alone in my appreciation for the book. In antiquity, Jeremiah was appreciated and noted. 2 Chronicles 35:25 spoke of a lament Jeremiah wrote for King Josiah. Then in 36:16-21, the Chronicler cites Jeremiah's prophecies about the restoration of the Jews. Daniel 9:2 cites as authority Jeremiah's prophetic dating of the exile. There is a "letter of Jeremiah" (also known as the "Epistle of Jeremy" that purports to be a letter written by Jeremiah to Jews about to be exiled in Babylon. This letter is in Catholic Bibles as the final chapter in Baruch chapter 6. A fragment of this letter has been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, indicating its usage by the Qumran community approximately 100 BC along with two other apocryphal works ascribed to Jeremiah. (See, Abegg, *et al.*, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (Harper 1999), at 383. The intertestamental book 2 Maccabees records the tradition that Jeremiah hid the "Tent of the Lord's presence and the Covenant Box" in "the mountain where Moses had looked down on the land which God had promised." There, Jeremiah "found a huge cave" and "hid the Tent of the Lord's Presence, the Covenant Box, and the altar of incense. Then he sealed up the entrance" (2 Mac. 2:2-5, Good News Translation). The New Testament has many quotations and references from Jeremiah. Jewish tradition accords Jeremiah as the "Prophet Historian" who compiled the Kings histories. (See *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Thompson Gale 2007, Vol. 11 at 125).

³ A sample of what we miss with this approach is a study of the text that goes behind our Bible translations. We have the Hebrew traditional text handed down through the Middle Ages (called "the Masoretic Text" referencing the Masoretic scribes who copied it for centuries. We also have copies of the Greek Septuagint (Jewish translation(s) of the Old Testament into Greek that pre-date the New Testament) of Jeremiah, as well as Dead Sea Scrolls fragments of much of the book. The Greek text is noticeably shorter than the Masoretic text, leaving out introductory sections (*e.g.*, 2:1-2a, *etc.*), as well as repetitive sections (6:22-24 and 50:41-43), and a number of "Thus says the LORD" phrases. The Septuagint also orders the book differently. At least two major scrolls seem to follow a Hebrew text close to that used by the translators of the Septuagint. Scholars differ on why the texts differ, some thinking the longer Masoretic text has later add-ons

JEREMIAH THE MAN

As we consider the life of Jeremiah, we do so mainly from the text of the book that bears his name. From this book, we can glean a lot of information, as the book is the largest among all the latter prophets.⁴ It contains a wide variety of different types of material including biographical and autobiographical sections, poetic discourses, reports on oral and written sermons, historical narratives, and messages both to individuals and to nations. In the midst of this mass of material, we have the obvious information from the biographical sections, but we also glean insight into Jeremiah in the non-biographical sections.⁵ A good example is in the prophecy of the coming Babylonian conquest as judgment on Judah in Jeremiah 4:5ff. After setting out the coming destruction, Jeremiah proclaims,

My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain!
Oh the walls of my heart!
My heart is beating wildly;
I cannot keep silent,
for I hear the sound of the trumpet,
the alarm of war (Jer. 4:19).

We quickly see how personally Jeremiah took the message. This emotional involvement is even more apparent in the Hebrew text. “My anguish, my anguish!” is, in Hebrew, *me‘ay me‘ay*. It literally means, “my intestines, my intestines!” In colloquial English, we could easily translate this, “I am so sick to my stomach, I am hurting!”

So, we carefully look throughout the book to garner insight into Jeremiah the man.

by an editor, while others think that the Septuagint and Dead Sea texts are edited/shortened versions seeking to simplify the text. A detailing of some of many passages along with a theory that the short version was first and the longer second is found in Tov, Emanuel, *The Greek & Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (Brill 1999), at 363ff.

⁴ We know from the text of Jeremiah that others were involved in the writing. His secretary Baruch, for example, took dictation and wrote sections (see Jer. 36:1-4, 32).

⁵ Not surprisingly, scholars differ on how much material is “reliable” for discussing Jeremiah as a person. The spectrum ranges from those who question any reliability in the authenticity of the material to those who find it fully reliable. This is largely determined by the presuppositions of the scholars. We will follow the text in this lesson as a reliable accounting of Jeremiah’s life and ministry.

Basic Background

Jeremiah's name in Hebrew (*yerimyah*) means "YHWH founded" or "May YHWH lift up." Both ideas suit Jeremiah. As Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry, the Word of the LORD came to him, affirming that God had set him apart and consecrated him as a prophet before his conception (Jer. 1:5). So strong is this proclamation in Jeremiah that early rabbinic tradition kept alive a legend that Jeremiah was already circumcised when he was born!⁶

This prophetic word from the LORD came when Jeremiah was "only a youth" (Jer. 1:6). The Hebrew for "youth" is *na'ar*, which does not give us his age, but does affirm Jeremiah as a youth (also translated "boy" and "lad"), still dependent on his family for support.⁷ Not surprisingly, Jeremiah's time of prophetic work spanned many years of Judah's history. The internal evidence indicates that Jeremiah started around 627 BC (the "thirteenth year" of king Josiah's reign, Jer. 1:2). He continued to prophesy through and after the fall of Judah 41 years later in 586 BC.

Jeremiah came from a family of priests. His father was a priest "in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin" (Jer. 1:1). Anathoth was a town given to the Levitical priesthood (Josh. 21:18), and was the town where Solomon banished the priest Abiathar for supporting a rival to the throne (2 Ki. 2:26-27). While we do not know for certain which ruins are those of Anathoth, the early church father Eusebius placed it 3 Roman miles (closer to 4 U.S. miles) from Jerusalem. Scholars believe it to be one of two sites, either of which is relatively small.⁸ For this reason, scholars readily assume that Jeremiah was likely descended from Abiathar.

⁶ This tradition is reported in *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* (more commonly called by its Hebrew name, *Abot de-Rabbi Nathan*). The text reflects the traditions that scholars believe pre-date 300AD, perhaps by 400 to 500 years. Chapter two lists a number of men who were allegedly born already circumcised. Citing Jeremiah, the folklore uses Jer. 1:5 as its authoritative text based on the idea that God would claim to know and sanctify Jeremiah only if he were circumcised:

Jeremiah, too, was born circumcised, for it is said, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee.

Translation from Goldin, Judah, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*, (Yale 1955), at 23.

⁷ See, generally, entry in Brown, Francis, *et al.*, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford 1966).

⁸ Negev, Avraham, and Gibson, Shimon, *Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land* (Continuum 2003), at 33.

There is much to recommend this opinion, since it is unlikely that so small a village could contain several unrelated priestly families.⁹

This placement of Jeremiah in Anathoth of Benjamin also helps explain his “northern roots.” He was attentive in his writings to the people of Israel who had resettled in Judah’s country after the Assyrian conquest of Samaria. Jeremiah also repeatedly refers to issues and history particular to the long defunct Northern Kingdom of Israel. For example, in Jeremiah 2-4, he wrote of Judah’s and Israel’s faithlessness as that of an adulterous wife. Even though the lessons of Israel’s unfaithfulness should have been apparent to Judah, Judah was non-responsive:

[Judah] saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore” (Jer. 3:8).

This language of Israel as an adulterous wife is found in the story of Hosea, the principle prophet out of the Northern Kingdom who had tried to divert the Assyrian disaster with his jolting message of adultery. We might add that Jeremiah himself was single, never marrying. God instructed him that the times were not conducive to him marrying! (Jer. 16:1-4).

It also seems from Jeremiah that, for a time at least, Jeremiah was a man of means. He was able to hire a secretary, Baruch. He also was able to redeem family land with silver when called to do so.

Ministry

Jeremiah preached and proclaimed the word of the LORD for over forty decades. Because the text is not arranged chronologically, it is not always possible to place each proclamation into a historical context. Still, the text does provide a strong historical tie into a key turning point in Jeremiah’s ministry. In 609 or 608 BC (“the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah,” Jer. 26:1), Jeremiah was instructed by God to stand in the court of the temple and proclaim a last message of warning.

⁹ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 11, at 126. This takes on additional interest in light of the Jewish tradition that Jeremiah was involved in the authorship of Kings, where the history of the Abiathar story is given. (*Baba Bathra*, f. 15, 1). While it seems most dubious that Jeremiah was the full author of Kings (e.g., 2 Kings ends recounting events in Babylon 66 years after Jeremiah’s call to be a prophet while Jeremiah seems to end his days in Egypt), still there are arguments that Jeremiah might have had some involvement as a partial author. Regardless, Jeremiah was very conversant with the history of Israel and Judah, and his writings reflect intimate familiarity.

Thus says the LORD: If you will not listen to me, to walk in my law that I have set before you, and to listen to the words of my servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently, though you have not listened, then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth (Jer. 26:4-6).

Shiloh was the central location of the ark and YHWH worship before construction of the Temple, subsequently lost in the Assyrian conquest of Israel. Jeremiah's equating Jerusalem to this long abandoned and conquered seat of worship was tantamount to treason in the eyes of the people. The response was immediate:

When Jeremiah finished speaking everything the Lord had commanded him to say, the priests, prophets, and all the people grabbed Jeremiah. They said, "You must die! How dare you prophesy in the name of the Lord that this Temple will be destroyed like the one at Shiloh! How dare you say that Jerusalem will become a desert without anyone to live in it!" And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the Temple of the Lord (Jer. 26:8-9).

Jeremiah's life was spared in this instance by an appeal from certain elders of the land to the prophetic words of Micah, who had also predicted the wrath of the Lord on Jerusalem in the days of king Hezekiah (Jer. 26:18-19). While Jeremiah was not put to death at that time, the threats were not hollow. Another prophet named Uriah prophesied "in words like those of Jeremiah" and he was killed by orders of the king! (Jer. 26:20-23).

This was not the only time Jeremiah's life was threatened. Even in his hometown of Anathoth there were men who sought Jeremiah's life, threatening him,

"Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD, or you will die by our hand" (Jer. 11:21).¹⁰

As noted earlier, Anathoth was a small village where many people were likely related to some degree. It is not surprising, therefore, to read God's warning to Jeremiah about his family:

"For even your brothers and the house of your father,
even they have dealt treacherously with you;
they are in full cry after you;
do not believe them,
though they speak friendly words to you" (Jer. 12:6).

¹⁰ Jesus was no doubt versed in Jeremiah and steeped in his history as he proclaimed a prophet was without honor in his hometown (Mt. 13:56-58).

One key thought of the people was the security of the temple. They believed, based upon superstition and affirming words of false prophets that nothing could happen to Jerusalem because God would protect his “house” – the temple. Jeremiah called out such misplaced trust with great sarcasm:

Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD’ (Jer. 7:4).

Not surprisingly, then, the priests of the temple took particular umbrage against Jeremiah and his proclamations. A chief officer in the temple named Pashhur beat Jeremiah, and had him put in stocks overnight, ostensibly to teach him a lesson. Upon release the next day, Jeremiah not only continued his prophetic claims about Jerusalem and the temple, but he also targeted Pashur and his family specifically:

For thus says the LORD ... “You, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house, shall go into captivity. To Babylon you shall go, and there you shall die, and there you shall be buried, you and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied falsely” (Jer. 20:4-6).

Not surprisingly, it was just a matter of time before Jeremiah was banned from going to the temple! At one point, God instructed Jeremiah to “Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you” (Jer. 36:2). Jeremiah dictated the words to Baruch, his secretary. Jeremiah then sent Baruch to read the scroll at the temple explaining,

I am banned from going to the house of the LORD, so you are to go, and on a day of fasting in the hearing of all the people in the LORD’s house you shall read the words of the LORD from the scroll that you have written at my dictation (Jer. 36:5-6).

Baruch did as ordered, and some officials who heard the words and were worried took the scroll to king Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim listened to the reading of the scroll and as every three or four columns were read, the king took his knife, cut off the read portion of the scroll, and dropped it in the fire. After the whole scroll was read and burned, the king put out an arrest warrant on both Jeremiah and Baruch, although the Lord kept them hid during that time. Jeremiah then re-dictated the scroll to Baruch and this second time added a few more choice words about king Jehoiakim! He added:

Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: He shall have none to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night. And I will punish him

and his offspring and his servants for their iniquity. I will bring upon them and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem and upon the people of Judah all the disaster that I have pronounced against them, but they would not hear (Jer. 36:30-31).

Later, when Zedekiah was on the throne in Jerusalem, Jeremiah was prophesying day and night about the need to capitulate to Nebuchadnezzar, rather than dalliance with Egypt hoping for salvation. Nebuchadnezzar's army had encamped against Jerusalem, and on rumors that Egypt's army was coming in to engage, withdrew (likely to the north where Nebuchadnezzar kept camp at Riblah). Following the withdrawal, which proved to be temporary as Jeremiah prophesied, Jeremiah started to leave Jerusalem to head to his home area (perhaps to see the property he had purchased). This meant Jeremiah was also headed north out of Jerusalem, the direction of Nebuchadnezzar's withdrawal. A sentry seized Jeremiah and accused him of defecting to the Babylonians. In spite of Jeremiah's denials, he was arrested, beaten, and imprisoned for a time (Jer. 37:11-15).

Nothing done to Jeremiah ever silenced him. Jeremiah 38 sets out more persecution during this time. Jeremiah continued to say,

Thus says the LORD: He who stays in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, but he who goes out to the Chaldeans shall live. He shall have his life as a prize of war, and live. Thus says the LORD: This city shall surely be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon and be taken" (Jer.38:2-3).

This message was still viewed as treasonous and officials again sought to have Jeremiah executed. Jeremiah 38:1 lists the names of certain protagonists against Jeremiah:

- (1) Shephatiah the son of Mattan,
- (2) Gedaliah the son of Pashhur,
- (3) Jucal (also spelled Jehucal) the son of Shelemiah, and
- (4) Pashhur the son of Malchiah.

While these people are not noteworthy in Scripture beyond their efforts to kill Jeremiah, archaeology has made two of them newsworthy in just the last few years. In 2005, Jewish archaeologist Dr. Eilat Mazar was leading a dig in the northern section of the City of David (ancient part of Jerusalem) when her team found a small piece of clay that had been used as a stamp to close or seal a scroll (called a "bulla"). The stamp had a three-line inscription that read: "Belonging to

Jehucal, son of Shelemiah, son of Shovi.” Three years later near the same spot, her team found another clay seal inscribed: “Belonging to Gedaliah, son of Pashhur.”¹¹

This seal is inscribed in Hebrew letters as written at the time of Jeremiah. It is almost half an inch in diameter and was found in debris from the destruction layer of the time of Jeremiah. The inscription reads: *Yehuchal ben Shelemayahu* or Jehucal, son of Shelemiah.



After Jeremiah’s prophetic words rolled into history, and after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, the temple, and the kingdom, carrying off most into exile, Jeremiah’s persecution ended, but only briefly! The Babylonians, aware of Jeremiah’s plea to Jerusalem and Zedekiah to surrender, released Jeremiah. Nebuchadnezzar himself was involved:

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave command concerning Jeremiah through Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, saying, “Take him, look after him well, and do him no harm, but deal with him as he tells you.” (Jer. 39:11-12).

Jeremiah was allowed to return and live and serve under Nebuchadnezzar’s provisional governor Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam (*not* the son of Pashhur!). Even then, however, Jeremiah’s days of peace were short-lived. Gedaliah was soon assassinated and in the melee that followed, Jeremiah was forced to go with a number of Judahites who sought refuge in Egypt (more on that later!). Early church tradition held that Jeremiah died in Egypt.¹²

¹¹ See the release of information by the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs at: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Early+History+-+Archaeology/Unique+biblical+discovery+at+City+of+David+excavation+site+18-Aug-2008.htm>

¹² Tertullian, *Adversus Gnosticos*, Ch. 8; Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, 2:37.

As we conclude our consideration of Jeremiah the man, we note that he determinedly persisted in proclaiming the word of the Lord in spite of the misery he encountered or success he found. It seems in reading the book that only two people in his life walked away from his words persuaded: Baruch and Ebed-Melech. Otherwise, his success came only from obeying God. This set him “against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land” (Jer. 1:18). What a life!

JEREMIAH’S MESSAGE

What was the core message of Jeremiah? Different scholars would no doubt give different answers. For some, it is the challenge to change “religious and political policies in order to avoid imminent destruction.”¹³ The commenters to the ESV study Bible write of “many great themes that stress God’s judgment on covenant infidelity and worldwide sin, as well as God’s determination to restore an international people for himself through the establishing of a new covenant.”¹⁴ Others consider Jeremiah a man on mission to announce to his people God’s judgment upon them for their disloyalty.¹⁵ Many scholars break down the themes of Jeremiah into categories, centering on statements of God, Israel and Judah, sin and repentance, and the future hope.¹⁶ Old Testament scholar Brevard Childs saw Jeremiah organized around principal themes of judgment and deliverance.¹⁷

These are brilliant scholars who have dedicated many hours of study coming to illuminating conclusions, and I certainly have no room to disagree with their assessments. Similarly, I would never presume to have a fresh idea on something so well studied.¹⁸ However, remembering the admonition that fools rush in where angels fear to tread, I suggest a bit of a different model for the message of Jeremiah. In a trial lawyer’s closing summation, I would put forward the key theme as a simple phrase: *the word of the LORD*.

¹³ Carroll, R.P., *Jeremiah* (T&T Clark 2004), at 97.

¹⁴ *ESV Study Bible*, (Crossway 2008), at 1364.

¹⁵ Holladay, William, *Jeremiah*, (Fortress 2006), at 2.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Thompson, J. A., *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Jeremiah*, (Eerdmans 1980), at 170ff.

¹⁷ Childs, B. S., *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, (Fortress 1979), at 342ff.

¹⁸ There are scores of commentaries and books on Jeremiah that likely run in the hundreds. My review has not come even close to all those sources available at the local theological library! So the unifying theme set forward here may well be old hat in some publications.

Some might respond that my suggested theme is typical of every prophetic book. All prophets, after all, were voice pieces for God and were thus speaking “the word of the Lord.” The phrasing, however, is particularly strong in Jeremiah. Jeremiah uses the phrase roughly as frequently as *all the other prophets put together*. Jeremiah’s life was built around *the word of the LORD*. He was commissioned by the word, to deliver the word faithfully and to follow the word. Jeremiah did so, at great personal risk and expense. His life stands in stark contrast to a generation that refused to hear the word of the Lord. He lived among “foolish and senseless people... who have ears, but hear not” (Jer. 5:21). They heard the word of the Lord, but never *heard the word of the Lord!*

In Jeremiah’s calling into a prophetic ministry, we are told that,

Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me,

“Behold, I have put my *words* in your mouth.” (Jer. 1:9).

By touching Jeremiah’s mouth, the Lord sets it apart for his purposes, placing his words into Jeremiah’s mouth. This was language taken straight from the promise God made Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18 (“I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him”). It was then the word of God that Jeremiah dispensed for over forty years as God directed.

As a part of the calling, the “*word of the LORD*” again came to Jeremiah asking Jeremiah what he saw. Jeremiah responded that he saw an almond branch. The Lord then spoke to Jeremiah saying,

“You have seen well, for I am watching over my *word* to perform it” (Jer. 1:12).

There is a play-on-words here that we miss in the English. The Hebrew for “almond” is *shqd*; the Hebrew for “watching” uses the same Hebrew consonants (*shqd*) with the only difference being the first vowel as an o sound rather than an a sound (*shaqed* = almond; *shoqed* = watching). Jeremiah saw the almond branch, which is the early blooming tree, signaling the coming spring. The Lord was watching over his word, which was signaling a coming just as certain! As Jeremiah was in charge of speaking God’s words, he could trust that God was in charge of carrying out his words!

Ninety-eight times, Jeremiah writes of the word of the LORD. This count does not include the many times God simply says, “Speak, thus says the LORD ...” From

these many occurrences, we single out a few to demonstrate the power of this coherent thread in the Jeremiah collation of materials.

Hard Words of Judgment

Among the many times we read the word of the Lord coming to Jeremiah, we read harsh words of impending judgment and doom. As God placed his words in the mouth of Jeremiah, he put them there for a purpose:

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” (Jer. 5:14).

Jeremiah 13 sets out multiple strong examples of these hard words from the Lord. At the chapter’s beginning, the LORD told Jeremiah to buy a linen loincloth and wear it without washing it. Then, Jeremiah was instructed to take it off and hide it near the Euphrates.¹⁹ Many days later God told Jeremiah to retrieve the loincloth, and Jeremiah found it spoiled and “good for nothing” (Jer. 13:7). The word of the Lord came with the message for the people:

Then the word of the LORD came to me: “Thus says the LORD: Even so will I spoil the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own heart and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing. For as the loincloth clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the LORD, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory, but they would not listen (Jer. 13:8-11).

This is followed by another word from the Lord illustrating God’s plans for Judah:

You shall speak to them this word: ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, “Every jar shall be filled with wine.”’ And they will say to you, ‘Do we not indeed know that every jar will be filled with wine?’ Then you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD: Behold, I will fill with drunkenness all the inhabitants of this land: the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will dash them one against another, fathers and sons together, declares the LORD. I will not pity or spare or have compassion, that I should not destroy them’ (Jer. 13:12-14).

¹⁹ Some scholars believe the river referenced was one closer by.

Here, God says that the people who are smashed on wine are going to be smashed like pottery! These are hard words. There is no pity, no compassion, no sparing – just destruction. These words were proclaimed over and over again:

You shall say, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing such disaster upon this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle’ (Jer. 19:3).

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, behold, I am bringing upon this city and upon all its towns all the disaster that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their neck, refusing to hear my words (Jer. 19:15).

These hard sayings are repeated over and over, chapter after chapter, as God instructed Jeremiah to go proclaim the “word of the LORD.”

The True Word of the Lord

Jeremiah frequently contrasts the word of the Lord he has received, which God promised to oversee, with the false prophetic words given to the people. When Judah was enduring a drought, the “word of the LORD” came to Jeremiah exposing the drought as judgment. Rather than hear the peoples cries for water, God acts on their iniquities:

The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah concerning the drought... Thus says the LORD concerning this people: “They have loved to wander thus; they have not restrained their feet; therefore the LORD does not accept them; now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins” (Jer. 14:1, 10).

In contrast to Jeremiah’s faithful proclamation of God’s word (which God faithfully oversees to a true conclusion), there were false prophets beguiling the people with lies:

Then I said: “Ah, Lord GOD, behold, the prophets say to them, ‘You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.’” And the LORD said to me: “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds (Jer. 14:13-14).

God then spoke another word to Jeremiah proclaiming the terrible end of those who spoke false words of God:

Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who prophesy in my name although I did not send them, and who say, ‘Sword and famine shall not come upon this land’: By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed (Jer. 14:15).

Creation reversed?

Much of Jeremiah unfolds a reversal of fortune of Judah. It is as if Judah is going backwards rather than forward. Consider: God had called Israel out from bondage in a foreign land through his prophet Moses. God delivered his words at Sinai and entered into a covenant with the people. God fought Israel’s battles and gave them the Promised Land. In Jeremiah, we see God moving Judah out of the Promised Land. The enemy is fighting God’s battle *against* Judah. Judah ignores God’s covenant from Sinai, and ignores the word of God delivered through the prophets. God is sending his people into foreign lands in bondage (many of them choosing to return to Egypt instead!) Everything unravels and goes backward!

In the midst of Jeremiah delivering the word of the Lord about the coming doom, the Lord delivers a vision that puts the reversal back to Genesis chapter one!

I looked on the earth, and behold, it was without form and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light. I looked on the mountains, and behold, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro. I looked, and behold, there was no man, and all the birds of the air had fled. I looked, and behold, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger (Jer. 4:23-26).

The words “without form and void” are direct Hebrew quotations from Genesis 1:2 as the state of things at the dawn of creation. The heavens are without light, which was their status before the word of the Lord declared, “let there be light” (Gen 1:3). There is an absence of life, no man, no birds and no plants. These were all creations spoken into existence by the word of the Lord, yet the coming desolation was so complete that Jeremiah sees it as a deconstruction of creation. It is the final reversal of all that the first five books of Moses put forth.²⁰

²⁰ The text contains many other allusions to the stories in the Pentateuch. For example, in Jeremiah 5:1, we read instructions from God that closely mirror the Gen. 18, 19 story of Sodom and Gomorrah, where Abraham negotiated with God whether he might save the cities if ten righteous could be found:

Responses to the word of the Lord

In the life of Jeremiah, we see a model response to the word of the Lord. In the lives and actions of those around him, we see harmful responses. We consider first the effect of the word of the Lord on Jeremiah.

Jeremiah's Godly Response:

(1) He heard and discerned the word of the Lord.

Repeatedly in Jeremiah, we read the phrase, "the word of the LORD came to me, saying..." (See, e.g., Jer. 1:4, 11, 13; 2:1; 13:3, 8; 16:1; 18:5; 24:4; 32:6). Jeremiah was attentive to the word, knowing it for what it was. Usually, the text does not indicate in what precise way the word came. Frequently, we read that the LORD spoke" the words, but how he did so is not detailed. There is at least one indication that some of the words came in dreams. In Jeremiah 30-31, there is an extended "word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD." This was one where "the LORD spoke" (Jer. 30:1, 4). Over the next two chapters, Jeremiah reproduces those words of the Lord. Then, toward the end of chapter 31 we have verse 26:

At this I awoke and looked, and my sleep was pleasant.

From this we might assume that God spoke in Jeremiah's dreams. Prophetic dreams were as old in Hebrew tradition as the patriarchs. Joseph's prophetic dreams are well explored in Genesis. It does not seem fair to say that all of Jeremiah's interactions with the word of the Lord were from dreams; however, some seem to have been. The key here is to see that, however God spoke to him, Jeremiah was sensitive and heard the word, discerning that it was, in fact, from the Lord. This leads naturally to Jeremiah's next response we catalogue:

(2) He obeyed the word of the Lord.

Time after time when the word of the Lord instructed Jeremiah to do something, he did it. When Jeremiah was told to speak, he spoke (Jer. 2:1, 4ff). When Jeremiah was told to buy linen underwear and hide it, he bought linen underwear and hid it (Jer. 13:1-11). When the word of the Lord asked Jeremiah questions, he answered them (Jer. 1:11, 13). When the word of the Lord told Jeremiah where to stand, he stood there (Jer. 7:1ff). When the word of the Lord told Jeremiah to "make yourself straps and yoke-bars, and put them on your neck," Jeremiah made

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.

To equate Jerusalem with Sodom and Gomorrah no doubt inflamed the people!

straps and yoke-bars and put them on his neck. In a way, it is not surprising that Jeremiah would be so careful in his obedience. After all, much of Jeremiah's message centered on Judah's and Israel's failure to obey God's words. Jeremiah said as much when Jehoiakim was on the throne:

For twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, to this day, the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened. You have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear, although the LORD persistently sent to you all his servants the prophets, saying, 'Turn now, every one of you, from his evil way and evil deeds, and dwell upon the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers from of old and forever. Do not go after other gods to serve and worship them, or provoke me to anger with the work of your hands. Then I will do you no harm.' Yet you have not listened to me, declares the LORD, that you might provoke me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm. Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north (Jer. 25:1-9).

Jeremiah's obedience to God's word included following instructions to write the words. A key example of this is found in the Jeremiah 30 and 31 passages referenced earlier as a possible dream. In 30:1-3, we read the instructions to write as well as the reason for writing:

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you. For behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the LORD, and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it."

Over the next two chapters, Jeremiah relates the promise that God would not abandon his people to captivity and exile. God would bring the people back into the Promised Land, ever faithful to his promises generations before. Jeremiah's obedience to this word provided the written record that the Hebrews would maintain in hopes of God's ultimate deliverance. In the prior chapter, Jeremiah sent the word of the Lord in letterform to the Hebrews who had already commenced their exile in Babylon. In that letter, he delivered God's instructions about their lives in exile. The letter contained instructions and inspiration that are still one of the most cited parts of Jeremiah:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in

them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the LORD.

For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile (Jer. 29:4-14).

Jeremiah's faithfulness to obey the word of the Lord set him apart, and delivered for millennia, messages affirming God's faithfulness, provision, and fulfilled promise. Thank God for Jeremiah's obedience!

(3) He did not always like the word of the Lord.

We should not confuse Jeremiah's obedience with a quiet acquiescence. There were times where Jeremiah was not happy with what was happening. We noted earlier in the lesson Jeremiah's anguish over the results of God's promises ("My anguish, my anguish!" Jer. 4:19). Jeremiah was not heartlessly proclaiming God's judgment. He did so with grief and sadness:

My joy is gone; grief is upon me;
my heart is sick within me (Jer. 8:18).

Jeremiah intervened on behalf of the people before God seeking God to change his mind and bring healing to the people and the land. In chapter 14, while hearing the "word of the Lord" about a drought in the land, Jeremiah was moved to intercede on behalf of his people. God's response was certainly not what Jeremiah wanted to hear:

The LORD said to me: “Do not pray for the welfare of this people. Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence” (Jer. 14:11-12).

Surely Jeremiah did not take God’s refusal to intervene too personally. The Lord was emphatic that it was not because Jeremiah was inadequate as an intercessor:

Then the LORD said to me, “Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people. Send them out of my sight, and let them go! (Jer. 15:1).

There were other times where Jeremiah was complaining to God because he perceived God *did not* bring proper retribution upon the evil. These were times where Jeremiah was calling down God’s judgment,

Righteous are you, O LORD,
when I complain to you;
yet I would plead my case before you.
Why does the way of the wicked prosper?
Why do all who are treacherous thrive?
You plant them, and they take root;
they grow and produce fruit;
you are near in their mouth
and far from their heart (Jer. 12:1-2).

Jeremiah’s complaining to the Lord included the treatment Jeremiah received from others due to his obedience in proclaiming the hard words of the Lord to the people. Jeremiah discusses these complaints with the Lord in Jeremiah 15:10ff, beginning,

Woe is me, my mother, that you bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land! I have not lent, nor have I borrowed, yet all of them curse me.

Jeremiah knew even in this misery where his hope must reside. We can read a sample of Jeremiah’s prayers in this regard in 17:14-18:

Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed;
save me, and I shall be saved,
for you are my praise.
Behold, they say to me,
“Where is the word of the LORD?”

Let it come!”
I have not run away from being your shepherd,
nor have I desired the day of sickness.
You know what came out of my lips;
it was before your face.
Be not a terror to me;
you are my refuge in the day of disaster.
Let those be put to shame who persecute me,
but let me not be put to shame;
let them be dismayed,
but let me not be dismayed;
bring upon them the day of disaster;
destroy them with double destruction!

From this sample, we can affirm that while Jeremiah heard, discerned, and proclaimed the word of the Lord, he did not always like it! While Jeremiah obeyed the word of the Lord, he was not always happy about it. Jeremiah’s response sets in direct opposition to the responses of others we read of in the book. Next, we consider the ungodly responses.

The Ungodly Responses:

(1) Some ignored it.

For many, Jeremiah’s declarations of the word of the Lord fell on deaf ears. They neither listened carefully nor cared for what they heard. The Lord explained it to Jeremiah:

To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ears are uncircumcised, they cannot listen; behold, the word of the LORD is to them an object of scorn; they take no pleasure in it (Jer. 6:10).

Repeatedly, we read of the people rejecting God’s word. This was not out of simple ignorance or error. These were often the “wise” people who, no doubt, thought they knew better:

“How can you say, ‘We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us’?
But behold, the lying pen of the scribes has made it into a lie. The wise men shall be put to shame; they shall be dismayed and taken; behold, they have rejected the word of the LORD, so what wisdom is in them? (Jer. 8:8-9).

These were people who knew the word of the Lord as delivered in *Torah*, but were able to manipulate it and read it in ways that amounted to outright rejection.

(2) Some actively fought against it.

As we noted in the biographical discussion of Jeremiah earlier in the lesson, King Jehoiakim heard the word of the Lord as dictated from Jeremiah and written by Baruch on a scroll. The king's reaction to the word was hostile rejection. The king cut the scroll every three or four columns and made a show of burning it. This bothered several of the king's officials enough to where they urged him not to burn the scroll. He not only continued to burn it, but then issued his arrest warrants on Jeremiah and Baruch (Jer. 36:25-26).

(3) Some selectively sought it.

A later king, Zedekiah, selectively sought the word of the Lord. The story relates that Zedekiah was not so much interested in what the Lord would actually say, unless the word was affirming to what Zedekiah wanted. Zedekiah's approach was, "give me some good news," and when the news was not good, he had no interest in it. Zedekiah secretly sent for Jeremiah and met him at a lesser-frequented temple entrance. The story is interesting in its nuanced statements:

The king said to Jeremiah, "I will ask you a question; hide nothing from me." Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I tell you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you counsel, you will not listen to me." Then King Zedekiah swore secretly to Jeremiah, "As the LORD lives, who made our souls, I will not put you to death or deliver you into the hand of these men who seek your life" (Jer. 38:14-16).

After seeking Jeremiah out, the king had a question. Jeremiah responded with *two* concerns. First, Jeremiah worried that if the king did not like what was said, he would have Jeremiah killed. Second, Jeremiah believed that the king would not follow the word of the Lord and Jeremiah's counsel, hence making the whole conversation a dangerous risk with nothing good to come from it. The king's response addressed only the first of Jeremiah's concerns. The king promised not to have Jeremiah killed. The king never addressed the second concern. Indeed, the story goes on to show that Jeremiah was right. The king *did not* listen to the word of the Lord and did not heed Jeremiah's counsel.

A similar response is found toward the end of Jeremiah's life and is covered in the next section.

(4) Some would follow it when it is what they wanted to hear.

After the final fall of Jerusalem, with the town smoldering in ruins and dust, the governor Nebuchadnezzar appointed was assassinated. A posse formed of people seeking destruction of the group responsible. After dealing with the murderers, the posse came to Jeremiah with a major concern. The people feared that once Nebuchadnezzar heard about the death of the governor, he would come in swift judgment and everyone would suffer. The question they brought to Jeremiah was simple:

Then all the commanders of the forces... came near and said to Jeremiah the prophet, "Let our plea for mercy come before you, and pray to the LORD your God for us, for all this remnant—because we are left with but a few, as your eyes see us— that the LORD your God may show us the way we should go, and the thing that we should do" (Jer. 42:1-3).

Jeremiah agreed to seek the word of the Lord and tell it to the people, holding nothing back. The people emphasized their apparent sincerity and willingness to follow the word of the Lord:

Then they said to Jeremiah, "May the LORD be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act according to all the word with which the LORD your God sends you to us. Whether it is good or bad, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God to whom we are sending you, that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the LORD our God" (Jer. 42:5-6).

It took ten days, but the word of the Lord then came to Jeremiah and clearly gave instructions what to do. The people were to stay in Judah and not fear the king of Babylon. God would be with them, would deliver them, and would show them mercy. The word went further and told the people that if they violated God's word and went to Egypt, then they would suffer there and die:

For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: As my anger and my wrath were poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so my wrath will be poured out on you when you go to Egypt. You shall become an execration, a horror, a curse, and a taunt. You shall see this place no more. The LORD has said to you, O remnant of Judah, 'Do not go to Egypt.' Know for a certainty that I have warned you this day (Jer. 42:18-19).

It truly is hard to get more direct and specific than that! The problem was this message was not what the people wanted to hear. They thought the thing to do was to go to Egypt, so when the word came, they responded in anger and disobedience:

Azariah the son of Hoshai and Johanan the son of Kareah and all the insolent men said to Jeremiah, “You are telling a lie. The LORD our God did not send you to say, ‘Do not go to Egypt to live there,’ but Baruch the son of Neriah has set you against us, to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they may kill us or take us into exile in Babylon” (Jer. 43:2-3).

The people then left for Egypt, kidnapping Jeremiah and forcing him to go with them.

Before leaving the responses to the word of the Lord in Jeremiah, we should add one more consideration. The New Testament writers and Jesus were clearly familiar with the word of the Lord in Jeremiah, and they had a response worth considering.

The New Testament Response:

Jeremiah’s prophetic words were confirmed in history. The promise that God would restore the Israelites to the land, bringing an end to the Babylonian reign happened just as Jeremiah prophesied. His seventy-year prediction was dead on (so much so that many scholars consider it a later add by others after the fact, as if God could never truly speak so clearly in advance). This reliability affirmed Jeremiah and made him of interest for study by many as referenced early in the lesson. In the New Testament, we read of a number of phrasings and ideas that are carried out of Jeremiah into these later pages of Scripture.

Before considering the New Testament references, we do well to know that the title “New Testament” itself is a phrase out of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was prophesying about the future days where God would again produce a covenant for his people, but one that contrasted with the covenant on Sinai:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:31-34).

This is the only reference in the Old Testament to a “new covenant.” It is a phrase and realization seized upon in the New Testament as multiple writers wrote of it:

- Jesus explained the new covenant in Luke 22:20 – “And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the **new covenant** in my blood.”
- Paul reminded the Corinthians of this in 1 Corinthians 11:25 – “In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the **new covenant** in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”
- In 2 Corinthians 3:6, Paul writes of his role as a minister of “a **new covenant**.”
- The writer of Hebrews goes directly to Jeremiah and quotes him explaining the need for the new covenant in Christ in Hebrews 8:7-9 – “For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.”
- Then in Hebrews 9:15 and 12:24, Jesus is referred to as the mediator of a “new covenant.”

The early church father Tertullian, who wrote in Latin, used the Latin phrasing of “new covenant” (*novum testamentum*) and applied it to the group of writings we today call the New Testament.

Before leaving this section, we add a small sampling of other phrasings and ideas from Jeremiah that are borne forth in the New Testament:

- **Den of robbers** – In Jeremiah 7:11, the word of the Lord proclaims that his temple had “become a den of robbers.” Jesus found the same true in his day noting, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers” (Mt. 21:13).
- **Good Shepherd** – In Jeremiah 23:1-6, Jeremiah writes of bad shepherds who destroy and scatter God’s sheep. God then promises to gather his sheep back together and set shepherds who will care for them, keeping the

flock intact and free from fear. In John 10, Jesus contrasts his role as a good shepherd who knows his sheep and protects them from those who steal or scatter the sheep.

- **Weeping in Ramah** – In Jeremiah 31:15, the Lord proclaimed, “A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.” Matthew 2:18 quoted this passage as fulfilled in Herod’s killing of the innocent children in an effort to ensure no Messiah would live, “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”
- **Israel as an olive tree** – In Jeremiah 11:16, God refers to Israel/Judah as once “a green olive tree, beautiful with good fruit” that had become rotten with branches destined to “be consumed.” Paul used this analogy and language in Romans 11, explaining, “some of the branches were broken off” and the gentiles were branches of a wild olive tree that were “grafted” into a “cultivated olive tree” sharing the “root” as support.
- **A New Jerusalem and kingdom** – Jeremiah 33 contained strong prophetic proclamations that while God had “hidden” his face from Jerusalem “because of all their evil,” it would not always be so. God said,

I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security. I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them.

This prophecy was likely in the mind of Jesus’s apostles during the time of his ascension. (We should add here, that this is *before* Pentecost and the dispensation of God’s Spirit, which brought clarity to the apostles on what God was doing.) The apostles asked Jesus before his ascension, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Jesus responded in Jeremiah’s terms as well, noting that once the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, they would take testimony from Jerusalem as witnesses in “all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

- **Boast in the Lord** – In one of my favorite passages of Jeremiah (9:23-24), we read, “Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his

riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.” Paul echoes this in 1 Corinthians 1:30-31, “And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’” Paul does so again in 2 Corinthians 10:17.

CONCLUSION

Obviously, the book of Jeremiah is much too long, and much too deep to even scratch the surface in one lesson. Hopefully, this lesson will spur on greater personal study and consideration. At least the next time the radio plays, “*Jeremiah was a bullfrog*,” you will remember there was much more to Jeremiah than that!

POINTS FOR HOME

- (1) “*I am watching over my word to perform it*” (Jer. 1:12).

So much of Jeremiah focuses on the word of the Lord. That word is not simply found in Jeremiah; it is in the whole of Scripture. In the New Testament, we then get the bold understanding that Jesus Messiah was “the” Word of God. The Word made flesh. Here, we have not only the ultimate manifestation of God’s Word, but we have one to whom we must respond. Will our response be one of hearing, discerning, and obeying? Or do we ignore, explain away, adjust, maneuver, take portions we like, and disregard the rest? We have the assurance that God watches over his word to perform it. His promises, both in Scripture and in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, are *fait accompli*. They are as certain as certain can be. The question for me this week is simple: What do I do with the word of the Lord?

- (2) “*...they have not obeyed my voice...but stubbornly followed their own hearts*” (Jer. 9:13-14).

When I ask the question in the first point for home about what I do with the word of the Lord, I need to carefully guard my response. The lessons from Eden onward teach how selfish we are. Our strong tendency is to look for our own good and act out of our own desires. When the word of God sets a direction, my decision point is to walk in that direction, even though my

heart might lead me otherwise. May God strengthen our resolve to walk in the power of his Spirit as his Spirit leads and gives direction – regardless of the consequences!

- (3) *“I knew that this was the word of the Lord”* (Jer. 32:8).

An interesting set of events happened in Jeremiah 32. Jeremiah heard a word of the Lord that one of his relatives would come to him offering an opportunity to redeem a family field (an ancient Hebrew legal practice similar to buying it out of an estate to keep it in the family). The relative did indeed come and did make the offer. Jeremiah then noted, “Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord.” Here we have a career prophet, one who for decades heard and proclaimed the word of the Lord. Still he tested and measured what he heard, verifying what was rightly from God. As we contemplate this lesson that emphasizes the word of the Lord, we do so with care. Just as important as it is to follow the word, it is important to weigh it and make sure of what we are following. I suggest that dreams are not always reliable, audible voices are rare, and even the counsel of others is not necessarily from God. Circumstances might seem to dictate one thing or another, but again, I would not lightly say that God has spoken there either. A certainty is that God has spoken through his prophets and Scripture. Here is a rock that is reliable and constant, proven through the ages and the authority of the church. This means as I seek the word of the Lord to follow and obey, I will commit to more time than ever before reading and studying his Scriptures, confident that they are God’s words.