

Today we are starting a sermon series in the Book of Jeremiah. Since it is the second longest book in the Bible, the only book longer is the Psalms, we will take breaks as we go through the book of Jeremiah.

Why study Jeremiah? Because Jeremiah brought words from God at a troubled time in his nation. Jeremiah was called The Weeping Prophet. They said he started to cry the moment he was born. The great and famous artist Michelangelo worked four years - from 1508 to 1512 to paint the ceiling of a worship hall within a small church in Rome that has become famous. It is called the Sistine Chapel, within the Roman Catholic headquarters called the Vatican, in Rome, Italy. Michelangelo painted Jeremiah in a posture of despair. Jeremiah looks like a man who has cried so long, that he has no tears left.

So, back to our question – Why study Jeremiah? We are also going through troubled times in our nation, and so we will resonate with the lessons of this book.

Jeremiah was a prophet. A prophet is a person whose task is to get the listeners to see the real problems beneath the surface.

A prophet nurtured a viewpoint alternate to the viewpoint of the dominant culture around us. How? The prophet preached the words of God. Jeremiah preached to people who had forgotten who and what God is.

The book of Jeremiah is about the unraveling of a nation. What would Jeremiah say if he saw our country today? What does God say, seeing our country? What if Jeremiah came along with me this past week. What if Jeremiah came to the soccer game that I attended? The Christian school that my daughter attends had a soccer game against a team from a private school. The goalie on the other team, a girl's soccer team, was a boy. How does that happen? Because that boy thinks of himself as a girl, that other school let him play soccer on the girls' soccer team against my daughter and her truly all-girls soccer team.

Our culture that has forgotten who and what God is. Jeremiah's culture had done the same, and Jeremiah's job was to remind them.

We study Jeremiah because we have this question: How do Christians live in such a culture?

The book of Jeremiah is relevant for today, in the place where you are living. Jeremiah leads us in this.

It is convenient that today is Father's day, because the way we will get started today is to look at the father of Jeremiah, and the background of Jeremiah to help us understand what he wrote. **The father and background of Jeremiah**

help us understand his words. We will look at the father of Jeremiah, the government under which he lived, and the tragedy that Jeremiah witnessed.

1. The father and family from which Jeremiah came. (v.1)

Verse 1, *“The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiyah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin...”*

It would be easy to hurry past the first three verses. That would be like you saying 13 words about your father, and then moving on. Your father has a lot to do with who you are. Of course we have a Father in heaven, and He gives us our true and lasting identity.

God called Jeremiah to be His prophet, and that gives Jeremiah his true identity. And yet God gave Jeremiah his earthly father, too. Jeremiah’s father was a priest. So, Jeremiah is a preacher’s son.

We need to study what God shows us here about Jeremiah, and keep these things in mind as fundamental to our interpretation of this book.

Jeremiah and his family lived in a town called Anathoth. Anathoth was a small village in easy walking distance from Jerusalem. To start out walking from Jerusalem, you would go Northeast, and would walk about 3 miles. Anathoth was close to the wilderness that led down to the Dead Sea.

We know two things about Anathoth. 1) in the assignment of areas of land, Anathoth was in the land of Benjamin. That is told to us in verse 1. But furthermore, the village of Anathoth was in the area set aside for the Levites. The Levites in the Bible were the priests, and so this area had a number of priests in it. Priests in the Bible could get married, and there were priestly families living in this village of Anathoth. 2) The second thing we know about Anathoth is that it was the previous home of a famous priest named Abiathar. Don’t worry if you don’t remember him. That is part of the point. In the years when King David was ending his reign as King, and King Solomon was starting, Solomon sent Abiathar off to a small town no one ever heard of, while another priestly family remained priests in Jerusalem, the main center.

Where does Jeremiah fit in? Jeremiah was part of this priestly community that had been sent away to live in nowhere’s-ville called Anathoth.

Let me read the important words from King Solomon, right after the death of King David. 1 Kings 2:26-27, when King Solomon said to Abiathar, *‘Go to Anathoth, to your estate, for you deserve death. But I will not at this time put you to death, because you carried the ark of the Lord God before David my father, and because you shared in all my father’s affliction.’* So Solomon expelled Abiathar

from being priest to the LORD, thus fulfilling the word of the LORD that He had spoken concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh.”

Jeremiah seems to come from a family that had been banished, and from a family of priests that were sidelined. Not just Abiathar had lived there, but long before Abiathar, even the priest who spoke against the house of Eli, had lived in Anathoth.

Jeremiah would have been considered a failure by today’s standards of success, but in God’s evaluation, Jeremiah was an outstanding success. God judges us by a different standard than the world’s criteria for success. Remember Jesus was from Nazareth, and that was a place that seemed to be the sidelines. Jeremiah was a success for one reason – he faithfully proclaimed the word of God. Jesus is our Savior because he IS the Word of God. That brings us to our 2nd point.

2. The government under which Jeremiah lived. (v.2)

Verse 2 connects “*the word of the LORD*” with the beginning of verse 1, which says, “*the words of Jeremiah.*” It is not the words of Jeremiah that are important, but rather the word of the LORD that came through Jeremiah, since the LORD Himself commissioned Jeremiah to be a prophet.

When did Jeremiah prophesy for the LORD? We are told in verse 2, in terms of the government leaders under which Jeremiah lived and prophesied. “*in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign.*”

Today, we use years. If we marked time by presidents, we would say that I have been alive during the presidencies of Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden. I preached the Word of God during the last five of those presidents.

What happened in the 13th year of King Josiah? It was the year that God spoke through Jeremiah. God spoke through a man. God spoke through Jeremiah. God intervened in human history!

Our God is a God who takes action in this world, and in real time. God takes action at exactly the time when God sees it best. It was not the 11th year, and it was not the 12th year, it was the 13th year of the reign of King Josiah, when the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet.

So, the 13th year of King Josiah, we would say is the year was 627 BC. Jeremiah then preached the Word of God in that area for 40 years.

There were 3 major kings while Jeremiah preached. These three kings represented extremely good government and extremely bad government. Josiah

the great Reformer, Jehoiakim the despot king, and Zedekiah the puppet King. King Josiah, you might know or remember was the only king to have a consistent record of faithfulness to God's law in the exercise of justice and compassion. But the other two kings both "*did evil in the eyes of the Lord*" according to the book of 2 Kings. Jehoiakim was arrogant and hated Jeremiah and hated the word of God through Jeremiah. And then there was Zedekiah, who was weak. In a time of international threats, Zedekiah was not able to make the needed decisions and take the necessary actions, and so other countries engulfed him and his kingdom.

So, for the Book of Jeremiah to begin by mentioning the reign of kings, already hints to us that the book will deal with government a lot. What we learn from verse 2 is that it was more than that Jeremiah ministered during the years of the reign of these government officials. Jeremiah was in constant interaction with these government officials. From the beginning, Jeremiah's words were controversial. Then, as the years went by, and as domestic turmoil and also international crises grew worse, Jeremiah felt compelled to be a constant thorn in the side of the government. Jeremiah was always talking with the kings about how they were sinning against God.

SI – to demonstrate to you the relevance of our study of Jeremiah to our day, it is fascinating right now to know that the Roman Catholic Church is confronting our current president, who is Catholic, about his view on abortion. If he does not change his public stance, he could be turned away from communion in the Catholic church for being inconsistent. On the one hand, he says he lines up with the Catholic Church in its teachings and beliefs, so much so that he communes by taking the mass, but on the other hand, he seems to say that he can be a public figure and publicly Catholic, yet not hold to the Bible's teachings within his public role. We find ourselves agreeing with the Catholic Church on a good and important point. My point here is that Jeremiah was the voice for God to the governments of his day, and we find this to be relevant to our times.

That brings us to our third point, from verse 3.

3. The tragedy Jeremiah witnessed. (v.3)

Verse 3 suddenly fastforwards 40 years to the end of Jeremiah's ministry. That was the year that the city of Jerusalem was attacked by the Babylonians and the people were taken into captivity.

Verse 3, "*It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, King of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.*"

Let's break this down and understand what is being told to us.

This is an introduction to the whole book of Jeremiah.

In the year 627 BC, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah preached for 40 years.

The word of the LORD kept coming to the people through Jeremiah.

Then something happened. Something terrible.

Before we are told what happened, we are told WHEN it happened.

“...the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, son of Josiah, King of Judah.”

When is that? 587 BC.

What happened in the year 587 BC? It was the when the people of God from the city of Jerusalem were taken as prisoners by the people from Babylon. It happened in the fifth month of that year, to be exact!

Jerusalem was attacked and overtaken!

In 587 BC, Jerusalem fell – the city and the temples of the worship of God that were within that city were all ruined and burned down.

This is the final words of verse 3, *“until the captivity of Jerusalem...”*

It tells us how the story ends. We can jump ahead to the last chapter of this long book - Jeremiah 52, and we can read there in verse 27, *“So Judah was taken into exile out of its land.”*

God wants us to know from the start of the book, the terrible tragedy that lies ahead at the end of the book. When you read a book called Pompeii, you know that it necessarily and eventually ends with a volcano destroying all. In the same way, we don't read the book of Jeremiah without knowing the ending. Verse 3 is a spoiler! God wanted to add this irony as we read it - we watch Jeremiah struggle to alert the people to the danger of their sins. We observe as Jeremiah pleads with them to take proper steps to avert the tragedy.

And this shows the whole book comes from those who lived out the tragedy of verse 3.

Guess who saw the final destruction of Jerusalem? Jeremiah.

Why would God set up the book this way?

It is genius.

We read it with double listening. The first listening we do is the original listeners to Jeremiah's live preaching, before the terrible fall of the city. The second listening we need to do is we need to sit with the exiles who got not the preaching of Jeremiah, but the book of Jeremiah. After the fall of Jerusalem, the exiles were prisoners in a foreign land. As they read the book of Jeremiah as prisoners of war, it sums up for them the previous four decades of refusing to heed

the Word of God. They live with shame and regret, because the calamity could have been avoided if they had listened and repented.

Our first listening is sitting with those hearing Jeremiah's preaching, who thought that the destruction of God for sins was a future and unthinkable impossibility. Yeah, yeah, that is just the preacher going on about God's wrath. We'll be alright! No, we need to take a pause!

Our second listening is sitting with those reading Jeremiah's book, who now live the real and unfathomable fact of their own recent past. To live with such a scene makes them wonder – is there hope? Yes, there is hope. Hope is built from understanding how they had gone astray, and seeking God from there.

Jeremiah wrote this down not to say I told you so, but rather with tears in his eyes, and with hope in his tone, I told you why. It was sin needing repentance. It was seen needing wrath. It was sinners needing a Savior.

Conclusion: The more our culture declines, the more we need to pay attention to the Word of God, which is Jesus, and build up our hope.

The book of Jeremiah is not a biography of Jeremiah. It is not the official history of the kings of Judah. It is a book about the Word of God. What did God say, and what impact did God's message have on the kings the priests and the prophets? This book is the words of a man named Jeremiah, but it is simultaneously the Word of the Lord. At the end, every king, every priest, and every prophet will die, but the Word of God will keep on standing and the Word of the Lord will reign supreme. None of these governments, kings, queens, prime ministers or presidents could abolish what the Word of God says is true. Jeremiah was persistent, because the Word of God is unchanging. History moves according to the Word of God, not according to the will of kings and government leaders.

The Lord God Himself is the ruler over the kings of the earth and the nations of the earth, and the peoples of the earth.

What will be fascinating about our study of Jeremiah is how the kingdom of God intersects with the kingdoms of this world.

Six sub points. Six things to remember, as we close for today.

- 1) Remember the context of verses 1-3, and keep that in mind as we study the book. Remember the three points of today – the father and background of Jeremiah, the governments under which Jeremiah lived, and the tragedy Jeremiah witnessed.
- 2) Remember that the God takes action in every nation. The God of the Bible is not remote, not distant, not some religious idea that church people sing about, and

theologians lecture about. The God of the Bible is the God who takes action during the unfolding of human history in every nation.

- 3) Remember that preaching comes before judgment. Jeremiah preached before the wrath of God came. Jeremiah did not come along AFTER the destruction, and tell the people how to interpret it. Jeremiah came along 40 YEARS BEFORE the destruction, and told the people what to do to AVOID the destruction. It was that way with Noah. It was that way with Jesus. It is that way today. The preaching of the Word of God comes before the wrath of God comes. Now is the time to listen.
- 4) Remember that God's predictions come true. The true preaching of the Word of the LORD is tied to the later judgment of God coming true. When God speaks of judgment through the mouth of Jeremiah, and later that judgment becomes a reality, it should have a profound impact upon us. One of the criteria for a true prophet, that God through Moses told the people in Deuteronomy, chapter 18, was that when a prophet of God predicts that something is going to happen, it always happens. If that prediction does not come true, then that prophet is not a true prophet of God. Jeremiah's predictions came true, and so Jeremiah is a true prophet. What does that mean? It means that when Jeremiah preaches, He preaches the word of the LORD Himself.
- 5) Remember that Jeremiah was a prophet to the nations. What is true about the Word of God for one nation, is true for all nations and all peoples. Jeremiah was originally just a prophet for a little country called Israel, but Israel was surrounded by 3 big countries. Babylon to the East, and Egypt to the south, and Assyria to the North. Jeremiah lived and preached in a time much like our own, when people no longer think God matters for daily life. Public life is increasingly dominated by pagan ideas and even pagan rituals. Some people still meet their brand of religious obligations, but they do so out of duty, rather than heart devotion. Jeremiah was a prophet to every nation, because his message is timeless. Jeremiah is relevant to us in our nation today. In one way, this encourages us, to have the perspective of history – that the same problems were faced by Jeremiah 2,500 years ago! In another way, the ministry of Jeremiah is discouraging, because Jeremiah has a message of judgment from God. God's grace will win against God's judgment.
- 6) Remember how the story ended. Hint: Jesus. Jeremiah preached during the dark days of the decline of the people of God. Jeremiah preached and wept right up to the time when the people of God were deported to Babylon. Jeremiah was himself deported to Egypt, where he died. That is not how the story ended, though! The

death of Jeremiah only sends us searching for the God whose words Jeremiah preached. The loss of Jeremiah points us forward to the Lord's next prophet and the next prophet. Eventually, God sent His own Son as the messenger to the people of God, and we killed the Son of God. Jesus said in John 2:19, "*Destroy this temple (which refers to the body of Jesus), and in three days I will raise it up.*" Not only was Jerusalem destroyed, and Jeremiah died, but later in the same place, the very Son of God, when He came from heaven to preach in Jerusalem, was destroyed. God is in charge of the beginning and end of Jeremiah, and the beginning and end of Jerusalem. God uproots some nations, and establishes other nations. God tears down some kingdoms, and rebuilds other kingdoms. This aspect of God is the key thing to know. It is not the city of Jerusalem or the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem that is the key. The key is the destruction of the temple of God that is the person of Jesus Christ. The weeping prophet Jeremiah would have wept at the way that the body of Jesus was nailed to a cross, and then buried. But the death of Jesus is not the end of the story. God built resurrection life into the body of Jesus. God takes that same resurrection life and builds it into the life of every believer. The Holy Spirit destroys sin in our hearts, and then the Spirit of God establishes faith in us.

The more our culture declines, the more we need to pay attention to the Word of God, which is Jesus, and build up our hope.