

# Jeremiah: Two Parts



Years ago, I read this statement: Illustrations are to a sermon what windows are to a house. The connection is that they let in the light. After reading the book of Jeremiah, I believe that the southern kingdom had no excuse for living in darkness, as the light of God, through the prophet Jeremiah, shined into their life. What an illustration. There were many object lessons, both privately and publicly, that God gave Jeremiah and the southern kingdom of Israel, yet they still persisted in their sin.

We are at the 24<sup>th</sup> exit of Route 66, the mountain range of the Old Testament called The Prophets. Jeremiah has more material than Isaiah, though not as many chapters. It is the second in the prophetic mountains of the Old Testament, written approximately one hundred years after the book of Isaiah.

## Scripture

***"The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do. Then the word of the LORD came to me: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation,***

***concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it. Now, therefore, say to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: 'Thus says the LORD, Behold, I am shaping disaster against you and devising a plan against you. Return, every one from his evil way, and amend your ways and your deeds.' "But they say, 'That is in vain! We will follow our own plans, and will every one act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.'"***

If I were to outline this book in a way that I can grasp, it would be a very simple outline of two parts.

1. The call and commissioning of Jeremiah
2. The ministry and the messages of Jeremiah

All of the first section is all dealt with in chapter 1. The second part is dealt with in chapters 2-52.

## **Jeremiah's Call and Commissioning**

It is the thirteenth year of Josiah. He is the last really, really, good king of the southern kingdom. He started reigning in 640 BC, so it is now 627 BC. The word of the Lord comes to a young man by the name of Jeremiah, who is approximately twenty years of age. God calls and commissions him to be a prophet to the nations. Talk about getting introduced to a really big God right in the beginning! We do. When God stepped into Jeremiah's life, He said before I formed you in your mother's womb, I knew you, wow! Before your mom and dad came together, I made you. Before you were ever conceived, I already knew you. I know some of you think that is a really big God who can look into time and already know what Jeremiah is going to do before he is ever born. You missed it. I want to propose that He is even bigger than that!

I do not believe the word used is referring to God knowing him according to factual information. It is the same word that talks about Adam knowing his wife; she "conceived and brought forth a son." Adam did not know factual information about his wife. He knew his wife intimately. God is saying to Jeremiah, before you were ever conceived, I already had an intimate relationship with you. I had already chosen you! We don't know how much time passes, but before he was born, God had already set him apart. He had appointed him to be a prophet, not just to the southern kingdom of Judah, but also to the nations. God calls and commissions this young man to have an international ministry in the Middle Eastern part of the world of that day.

Can you imagine being Jeremiah? He says what we would probably say. But God, I'm just a kid! I didn't get an A in public speaking. I'm not a very good talker! God reached His hand out and touched the mouth of Jeremiah. Do you remember in Isaiah when a seraph took a coal off of the altar in Heaven and put it on the tongue of Isaiah? In Jeremiah, God's hand literally touches Jeremiah's mouth! God said, "*I have put My words in your mouth.*"

Then God tells him that there will be a lot of people who will stand against you, but don't worry, I will be with you. Then God said hey Jeremiah, what do you see? And Jeremiah said I see an almond tree. Then God said, "*You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it.*" Now, in the Hebrew language, the word for almond tree sounds almost like the Hebrew word for watch. So you need to realize that because it sounded like their word, watch, the Hebrew people watched the almond tree, and when it started to bud, that meant that spring was coming. So God is saying don't watch what I say through you, I'll watch what I say through you. Everything I say through you, I will back it up with action!

That is the kind of man the nation needed; not a man who would stand up and say what he thought, but a man who would stand up and say what God had told him. And when he spoke, he believed it wasn't his words but it was God's words. Notice how many times in the book of Jeremiah that he says, "*The word of the LORD that came to me,*" or "*The word that came*

*to me from the LORD."* He never takes credit for a word; he gives all the glory to God!

Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a second time. God says look again and tell Me what you see. Jeremiah sees this big boiling pot that just tips over. When it tips, it tips in the direction of the north. God told him to tell the nation that there is a storm brewing, and it is going to be disastrous. It will take every one of you out.

## **Jeremiah's Ministry and Message**

Now we get to the second part of the book, chapters 2-52. It deals with the ministry and message of Jeremiah. We have studied all of the kings of the southern kingdom, but Jeremiah is ministering to the last five: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Josiah started reigning in 640 BC, but in 627 BC, God stepped into the life of Jeremiah. Then under Zedekiah, the southern kingdom fell in 586 BC. This means that Jeremiah's ministry lasted about forty to forty-one years. He preached a lot of messages. I think when you look at chapters 2-52; you will understand that it is tough. I think it is the hardest book in the Old Testament to read. The reason is because there is no order to it. I have read commentaries that say when you read Jeremiah you have to see how it is topically arranged. Well, there is no topical arrangement either; it looks like my desk. I have laid papers on my desk and then stuck something on top of it a month or two later. Then later on, I put something on top of that. Then I remember I wrote something a while back, so I go back to find it. When I find it, I reread it but don't put it back where it was, I just lay it on top again. Yeah...ask my secretary! You see, Jeremiah didn't just sit down and systematically write a letter. He wrote a lot of letters and a lot of sermons and it was written down during his ministry. But when it was compiled later, it wasn't put in chronological or a topical order. It was just put together; therefore, when you read it you are shocked at the disorder in the book. But the disorder in the book reveals the disorder that was in the life of the nation of Israel because their heart had turned from God, their Husband, to false gods. As Jeremiah said, they messed around on God.

We will learn from Jeremiah that idolatry always leads to immorality. Anytime you change your view of God, anytime you have a wrong view of God, it does not lead to correctness or rightness, it leads to wrongness. Do you understand that? Jeremiah is telling Israel in his ministry and messages that God is going to judge them for their sin. They are accusing God of breaking the covenant, but no, they are breaking the covenant! Jeremiah said King Nebuchadnezzar is going to eat your lunch! Get ready for it; you will bow to him when he comes. If you don't bow to him, it's going to be really bad. You will lose your life. But if you bow to him, he just might take you to Babylon, and you just might live to see another day. That is the message of Jeremiah.

When I look at chapters 2-52, I see three ways we can remember his ministry and his messages:

1. Through his struggles
2. Through his signs
3. Through his sermons

- **His Struggles**

This guy struggled. Every commentary that I read says he is the weeping prophet. I don't only see him as the weeping prophet, I see him as the reluctant prophet. I see him as the complaining prophet. We know more about Jeremiah than we know about any other prophet because he just kind of wore his feelings on his shirtsleeves. There is a time in the book when he talks to God, and he just says God, you deceived me! You told me you were going to be with me, but you didn't tell me they were going to want to kill me! You didn't tell me they were going to make me a laughing stock. You didn't tell me they were literally going to put me in stocks! You didn't tell me they were going to put me in prison! You didn't tell me they were going to put me in a cistern without water and be in mud up to my waist! They wanted me to hush, so I tried to hush, but it didn't do me any good. The more I tried to hush, the more Your words inside me was like a fire in my bones and I had to open my mouth and speak again, and I got in trouble all over again! God, is this what you called me to do? He said I

wish I had never been born! Don't celebrate my birthday, it's not a day of blessing, it is a day of cursing. My poor momma ought to be cursed for bringing me into this world. He said I wish the man that went and told my daddy that a boy had been born had killed me in my mother's womb. I wish my mother's womb would have been my grave and I had never seen the light of day!

Let me just say that I am glad I am a pastor and not a prophet, amen? There are times when my wife and I talk and one of us will say, "I would hate to be raising kids in this generation." Well, no one will really stop having kids because of how bad it is. But God told Jeremiah that he could never marry that girl he loved. He said you will live alone and you will die alone; you are not going to bring children into this world. Because if you do bring children into this world, let me tell you what will happen. When King Nebuchadnezzar comes down from the north and starts through the land, he will not even give you the time to bury the dead, and your sons and daughters will lie like dung in a field.

My dad called me the other day and asked if I wanted him to bring the pasture renovator over. You see, when the cows go to the bathroom, they just go wherever they are. It just lies in piles in the field and pretty soon, it gets baked. Nothing will grow there and cows won't eat there, so it really limits the pasture. So Dad has this machine that breaks all that up. Jeremiah said that's how your children will be. It will be like cow piles in a field. You won't even have time to bury them. God is telling Jeremiah that this is not the time to have kids. That is what the sin of man did to the man of God. Jeremiah bore that, and he struggled.

- **His Signs**

But man, God wanted Israel to repent. He wanted Israel to get it. So He gave illustration after illustration. I want to pick out a few to share with you. In the beginning of the book, He told Jeremiah to get a new loincloth, but not to wash it. That would be like my wife telling me to go to JC Penney and get a new pair of underwear, wear it, but don't wash them! He couldn't even turn them inside out, and after a while, it just kind of clung to him. Then God told him to take it off and go bury it in a cave. Whew,

glad that is done! After a while, God told him to go get it out of the cave, and man, it was bad...God said this is how Israel is to Me; they are a spoiled loincloth. Bleach would not even get the stain out, so it's only fit to be thrown away.

Another time, He said go down to the potter's house and I will speak to you. When he went and saw the potter at the wheel making something, he saw that the clay was marred. Jeremiah expected the potter to discard it in the rubbish pile, but instead, he took it and made it into something else. Then God told Jeremiah, if I ever say to a nation that I will destroy you because of your sin, and they repent and quit doing what they are doing, then I would change my mind and not bring the disaster. Do you hear what God is saying? Children of Israel, I will not bring Nebuchadnezzar into the land if you will repent and quit doing what you are doing! Israel said you are silly! We are going to keep doing what we are doing and we're not going to listen to you at all.

Then Jeremiah sees two basket of figs; one is good and one is bad. He tastes the good and it is really good. He starts to taste the bad but says he doesn't want to eat it because it's really bad. So get this picture, when Nebuchadnezzar comes into the land, there will be three deportations, one in 606 BC, one in 597 BC, and one in 586 BC. Imagine when Nebuchadnezzar starts taking people out of the land and leaves some there. Which ones do you think are the good people are and which ones are the bad people? You will think you are good and are spared judgment if you are left in the land, and the ones who are taken into captivity are the bad ones. You would think they deserved it. God shows Jeremiah that the ones going into exile are the good people and the ones left are the bad people, and He is going to wipe them out. So the message is that you had better not stay here in the land, you had better go with Nebuchadnezzar.

Next, Jeremiah shows up with this big ox yolk on his neck. He is walking around town with the yolk on that they put on the neck of an ox to pull the cart or plow. The people said, what are you doing, Jeremiah? He said you had better listen to God, because Nebuchadnezzar is coming and his yolk is going to be easy. If you don't resist and go with him, you are going to have life pretty good in exile. You will be there about seventy years. Then

Hananiah, a false prophet, appeared and said whoa, God told me it was just going to be for two years, and then he took the yolk off of Jeremiah's neck and broke it. And Jeremiah said that God would replace the yolk of wood with a yolk of iron.

Do you remember the Rechabites? They were the people in society who were teetotalers. They would not drink wine, and they also wouldn't engage in the world. They didn't buy or sell land; they lived in tents. The reason is because their great-great grandfather said that was the best way to live. Now, because Nebuchadnezzar is coming and starting to besiege the city, the Rechabites are moving into Jerusalem. So God told Jeremiah to go down to the Rechabites, fill up some jars of wine and serve it to them, and tell them I said I said for them to drink wine. Whoa! Jeremiah pours them some wine and tells them to drink. They say we don't care what God says for us to do, we will not drink because our father told us not to drink, so we will not drink. And God said to Jeremiah, they listen and trust their father and will not break his word. I am a Father to Israel, why won't they listen to Me? Some of us would listen to our earthly mothers and fathers more than we listen to God, and it breaks God's heart.

- **His Sermons**

And then, we see Jeremiah's sermons. The first one that got my attention was the one where he went to the temple. Get this picture; it is the Sabbath and people are coming to the temple. They are bringing their sacrifices and getting ready to sing, and Jeremiah appears at the door of the temple. This would be like a Sunday morning; we are tithing and worshipping after doing what we have done all week long. Jeremiah stands up and says if you think being in the temple on Saturday undoes what you did Sunday through Friday, you have missed it. You don't have a clue what is going on. Being here now doesn't make up for what you did last night!

How many times have you thought being in church kept you good and made up for what you did on Saturday night? Belly up to the bar on a Saturday night in a honkytonk, but praise God, I'm in church on Sunday morning! Hey God, you see me, here I am! Here is my offering; listen to me sing to You! Are you kidding? Do you really believe being in church



cancels out some of the other places you have been? Jeremiah says you don't have a clue, and some of us don't have a clue.

His next sermon is about the Sabbath. I don't know if you have noticed, but God took that one day really seriously. He took it seriously because it was the covenant relationship with the children of Israel. Circumcision was the sign of Abrahamic Covenant. But the sign of the Mosaic Covenant was the Sabbath; work six days and rest one. On the day they rested, it said to the nations around them that they served the God who created everything. Just think about this scenario. We want people to believe in God and that He created everything out of nothing. We want the world to believe that. But if we don't listen to Him, why should we expect the world to listen to Him? So God set this one day apart and He takes it seriously. Don't work on it, don't trade on it; this is not your day, this is My day. If you can't finish it on Friday, it will wait until Sunday. But the children of Israel just made that day like any other day.

But then again, I can understand, can't you? I mean, back then it was really primitive. You didn't have a combine, so if you need to get your wheat crop in and you work all day on Friday and it could rain on Sunday, so you just swap Saturday and Sunday and work. You can work on Saturday and worship on Sunday, but then it doesn't rain on Sunday and you forgot about your swap. I'm sure at some point in our past that someone said we just can't shut these plants down on a weekend. I'm sure that someone said it doesn't really matter if we play soccer and football all day on Sunday. Let's just be honest. We have people come from other cultures, countries, and religions to the US. Do you believe they think we have a day that is really special to us; a day above all days that is set aside, the Lord's Day? I think we should have a home court advantage here in America. People are coming here about as fast as we are going there now. Have they really met a Christian when they go back home? Have they really felt like they were in a nation that was different? Or is it just like it was in the day of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah?

In the midst of all this judgment, Jeremiah stepped forward and said hey guys, when you get to Babylon, buy a house, and plant a garden. Settle

down, because you are going to be there for seventy years. You realize this is the story that caused Daniel to understand the Babylon captivity was about to be over and God was going to judge the Babylonians.

Now Jeremiah starts saying, "*Behold the days are coming.*" Then, he said you are no longer going to talk about your exodus from Egypt. You are now going to talk about your exodus from the Babylonians; you will have a new reference point. I just have to say that God doesn't want your reference point to be your granddaddy, your grandmother, your momma, or your daddy. He wants you to have a reference point in Christ. If you looked back and traced your family tree, you would see that there was a time in your family's life when someone stepped out, really got committed to Christ, and it changed your family tree. We broke sin's pattern! All of a sudden, a family that was selfish and of the world started to become a family that knew the Lord. If we aren't careful, families will still bank on great-great granddaddy, and what he did for God! Jeremiah said hey, you are actually going to experience the same thing your forefathers did. You are going into exile, but you are going to come out. When you do, you will quit talking about Egypt and start talking about Babylon. Do you have that personal reference point, where you know you have come out of sin and are in a right relationship with God?

## **The New Covenant**

That leads to a new covenant' He begins chapter 31:31-34 with, "*Behold the days are coming.*" The prophet who brought the most judgment and doom to the nation; the man who bellyached, complained, critiqued, and wanted to quit, saw a vision of a day coming when God would not deal with His children the way He had been. It would no longer be a conditional covenant, but a new covenant. Isaiah talked about the virgin born, suffering servant, who is holy, holy, holy. He came into this world to usher in a brand new covenant.

In chapter 31:31-34, Jeremiah said it is not like the old one. He listed four ways it is different.

**1. The law is not written on tablets of stone, but in a person's heart.**

If you are a Christian, you have a moral compass called the law of God. That moral compass is within you, in your heart. If your heart does not lead you to morality and holiness, you probably still have a heart of stone, not a heart of flesh that is being molded by the Spirit of God. I am not saying you can't sin. We can still sin because we live in an unredeemed flesh. But as a child of God, the law has been written in our heart. You don't need your pastor, the church, your momma, your daddy, or your spouse to know what is right and wrong.

**2. I will be your God, you will be My people.**

The reason this is big is because under the Mosaic Law, God said, if you will do 'this,' then I will be your God. If you don't do this, then I won't be your God. It was conditional, based on works and obedience. Now I would never criticize anyone else, but I have to state this. There are still many Christian churches today who have built their theology on the Old Covenant and not the New Covenant. Salvation is not by works. Your relationship with God is not based on what you do or do not do. It is based on what He has done for you in Christ. If He has written His law on your heart and His Holy Spirit is inside you, your relationship with Him is based on what He has done, not what you do. That relationship can never be broken because it wasn't established on your faithfulness; it was established on His faithfulness. Where you can be unfaithful, He can never be unfaithful. You have to get this! We are not under the Mosaic Law! We are under the New Covenant. Hebrews, chapters 8-10, clearly reveals that we are in the New Covenant age.

**3. You will not have to teach your neighbor to know God, for they shall all know He is Yahweh.**

This is a bit puzzling, but I think this means that under the Old Covenant you were born into citizenship. When you were physically born, if you were

a descendant of Abraham, you were a child of Israel. But you could be an Israelite and not really be an Israelite. You could be a physical descendant and not be a spiritual descendant. You could be physically born, but not have faith in God. So there was always this need to teach because Israel was mixed. There were believers and unbelievers. But if you were physically born a descendant, it didn't matter if you were an unbeliever. You had the rights of nationality and citizenship, but you could still die and go to Hell.

I don't know if you realize this, but for many years, a lot of churches still practiced mixed membership. Therefore, if a couple had a baby, they would baptize, or christen, the baby to bring the baby into the church. That baby was under the protection of the church. No, no...people have asked me if it was ok for their children to take the Lord's Supper. No, it is not ok if they aren't believers. The New Covenant people of God are not mixed; you are not physically born into it. Just because your momma and daddy are Christians doesn't mean you are. You don't get into the New Covenant people of God until you come to that place where you personally repent of sin, and put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Then, you follow Him in believer's baptism and become part of the church. Nobody has to tell the church this because everyone in the church knows this! Once you are in, you are in. But you don't get in until you have been spiritually reborn from God! It is by grace, not by works.

#### **4. I will forgive their iniquity and their sin, I will remember no more.**

Jesus laid down His life on a cross and did what the blood of the bulls and goats could not do. The beauty of the New Covenant says, *"I will forgive their iniquity and their sin, I will remember no more."* In counseling, when someone says, "I can forgive them, but I will not forget it." I just say, "I'm glad you're not God." He forgives, and He forgets. Do you hear this? God, willfully, makes a choice not to remember our sin because on the cross, He dealt with what was wrong with us! We are forgiven and it is forgotten; we are right with Him!

Jeremiah saw this day coming. As a pastor, I can say that day is here. No matter what you have done, it can be forgiven and it will be forgotten in the sight of God. You can be made brand new and you can be healed and become part of the covenant people of God. God will be your God and you will be His child. He will be your Husband and you will be part of the bride. Put your trust in Him and be made brand new.