

Bible - General Questions

Does the Church Need Some New Jeremiahs?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Part 1 of a series

Jeremiah was a prophet of God who wanted to quit. But as much as he tried, he couldn't hold back the truth. He had to speak out, no matter what the cost. He had the "fire in his bones." The church needs men like that today.

A Messenger of God's Wrath

Many Christians know Jeremiah by the name, "the weeping prophet." We know that Jeremiah wrote two books of the Old Testament, the book of Jeremiah itself and also the book of Lamentations. Jeremiah and Lamentations are, of course, prophetic books. Jeremiah prophesied against the sins of the kingdom of Judah, and he warned of God's impending judgment. But the people would not listen.

Jeremiah and Lamentations are also autobiographical. We learn a good deal about Jeremiah himself, his heart for God, his great grief over the impending judgment of God's chosen nation, and his deep frustration over Judah's lack of repentance.

Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations after the wrath of God had been poured out on the kingdom of Judah. Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed, and the people had been carried off into captivity in Babylon. Jeremiah literally sat down in the warm ashes of the ruins, and with great weeping wrote the book of Lamentations, the saddest book in the Word of God.

A Messenger of Future Hope

But God through Jeremiah also gave a message of future hope. Jeremiah prophesied the return of a remnant from captivity in Babylon, which took place 70 years later.

And in Jeremiah chapter 31, we have the great prophecy of the New Covenant. We who live on this side of the cross of Jesus Christ understand the meaning of that prophecy. From the inspired commentary that we find in Hebrews chapters 8 and 10, we understand that the prophecy of Jeremiah 31 is being fulfilled in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. We understand that in this age He continues to redeem a people, the true Israel of God, including both believing Jews and Gentiles, a people who will live with Him in glory for all eternity.

What We'll Examine in This Series

In this brief series, we'll focus not so much on that New Covenant prophecy, and not even so much on Jeremiah himself as the "weeping prophet," but on the *reason why* Jeremiah was the "weeping prophet," and the lessons we need to learn from Jeremiah in our own generation. Our series will focus on four questions:

1. Who was this man Jeremiah?
2. What was Jeremiah's message from God?
3. What were the events that led to Jeremiah's prophetic word against the kingdom of Judah?
4. What can we learn from Jeremiah for our own time?

Jeremiah's Life and Times

So first, who is this man Jeremiah? We begin by noting the record of God's call of Jeremiah to do the work of a prophet:

The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of

Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month.

Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations." Then said I: "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth." But the Lord said to me: "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you," says the Lord.

Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant." (Jeremiah 1:1-10)

We find that Jeremiah was a Levite, a descendant of Aaron. He was born a priest in Anathoth, just north of Jerusalem. Jeremiah was chosen by God to be a prophet before he was born.

Jeremiah was called of God to be a prophet when he was very young, in 627 B. C., in the 13th year of the reign of King Josiah. Josiah was the last godly king of Judah.

Jeremiah continued his prophetic ministry after the death of Josiah during the reigns of the four ungodly kings who followed Josiah: Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiakin, and Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. Jeremiah prophesied for a total of forty-one years.

We learn in Jeremiah chapter 16 that the Lord commanded Jeremiah not to take a wife, to remain unmarried, because of the terrible times in which he lived.

We learn in chapter 9 and elsewhere that Jeremiah's message of God's impending wrath against Judah broke his own heart. Although Jeremiah is speaking for the Lord, his own personal grief and frustration that the people of Judah will not listen and repent is also readily apparent.

We read at various places in the book that Jeremiah was rejected by his people. His message was unpopular, to say the least. He was hated. He was beaten. He was put in stocks. He was put in prison. He was charged with being a traitor.

A Messenger Who Tried to Quit — But Couldn't

We read in chapter 20 that Jeremiah wanted to "turn in his resignation," as it were. But he couldn't do it. We read in chapter 20 verse 9, "Then I said, 'I will not make mention of [the Lord], nor speak anymore in His name.' But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not."

Christ's church today desperately needs Jeremiahs — men who will have such a "fire in their bones" that they must speak the truth of God, they cannot hold back, no matter what the cost.

Thus Jeremiah kept on speaking out for forty-one years. In the end, Jeremiah witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity that he had prophesied. But the captain of the Babylonian army permitted Jeremiah himself to remain in the land. In fact, the Babylonians allowed a small remnant of the people to stay and live among the ruins. These people wanted to flee to Egypt, and we read in chapter 42 that Jeremiah prophesied against that. But he was forced to go with the remnant into Egypt, and he died there. Although there is no direct Scriptural evidence, Jewish tradition says that he was stoned to death by the remnant in Egypt.

What was the message that evoked such a response from the people of Judah? It was, truly, a message sent by God "to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant." We'll look at that in our [next article](#).

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