

Where are the Jeremiahs?

The one book in the Bible that prepares the preacher's heart and moulds the man of God is the tear-stained ministry of Jeremiah. Very few prophets exist today, yet arguably, Jeremiah remains a tract for the times, a classic auto-biography of deep psychology, and a theology of sin, judgement, wrath and repentance. Fifty two chapters for fifty two weeks in the year present a record of his own lonely experience of failure.....a personal crucifixion comparable to Job, a mortification of the flesh only paralleled in the life of Jesus, a protracted martyrdom that dwarfed the imprisonment of Joseph.

Jeremiah was the weeping prophet.....and like Baruch we must become his disciples in these end-time days. Reading the prophecy once a year with study will sharpen the preacher's art of exposing sin and imposing Jesus as Sovereign Lord of our lives. Sovereign means God will do what He wants, when He wants, using whom He wants, without asking our permission. He took Israel into Exile for seventy years to cure them of idolatry. Jeremiah for the previous 40 years had been using the word of the Lord as a hammer to break their hard, stubborn hearts, but all to no avail.

God judged by a process of scattering His people; put the clock back; the Jews went back to bondage, in an alien land. The end of the history of Israel became the beginning of world history and the times of the Gentiles. After Babylon, Israel never had a king in Jerusalem. After the 70-year exile, they were allowed to resume the kingdom. The tension within Jeremiah's heart is mirrored today within every faithful preacher of the Cross. A faithfulness to God's word and a compassion for God's people brought Jeremiah to the point of cursing the day of his own birth. By tracing how he saw himself we see why there are so few, if any, Jeremiahs today.

HIS SELF CONSCIOUSNESS AND IMAGE

1 : 6 *I am but a youth;*

1 : 18 *Behold, I have made you this day a fortified city and an iron pillar,
and bronze walls against the whole land;*

6 : 27 *I have set you as an assayer and a fortress among My people;*

9 : 2 *Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place for wayfaring men that I
might have my people, and go from them!;*

15 : 10 *A man of strife and a man of contention;*

15 : 17 *I sat alone because of Your hand;*

15 : 20 *And I will make you to this people a fortified bronze wall;*

17 : 16 *As for me, I have not hurried away from being a shepherd who follows you
nor have I desired the woeful day; You know what came out of my lips...
.....;*

23 : 9 *My heart within me is broken because of the prophets. All my bones shake.
I am like a drunken, like a man whom wine has overcome, because of the
Lord, and because of His holy words.*

The great dejection of Jeremiah 20:7-18 sums up this extraordinary paroxysm of inner agony.....these verses are the private psychological record of failure and the spiritual record of success because he did not commit suicide, but remained faithful to the call of God. His indomitable spirit underlined at personal cost the promise of protection: ***“for I am with you to save you and deliver you” says the Lord.***
The success amid failure is found in **Jer. 45:5:**

“I will give your life to you as a prize in all places wherever you go.”

In human terms the only success was the preservation of his life. Does this parallel the tribulation of the Antichrist, and the preservation of the remnant?

Night is coming to Western Europe. The remnant will hide and survive the wrath of the Antichrist in the great tribulation. The sense of impending doom through Jeremiah is parallel to the spiritual climate of these days. The Chaldeans are coming! The Antichrist is coming! We are soon to enter into the reality of Revelation 12:14-17. Let not the rapture before the tribulation preachers fool you into false peace. Sense God's now heartbeat in Jeremiah 45:5. God will preserve an obedient, radical remnant. Everyday in England crime costs £14 million, 435 babies are aborted, 20 commit suicide, and people spend £300,000 on pornography. Night is coming! The inevitable judgement of sword, famine and pestilence is coming in Jeremiah and in the twenty first century.

Jeremiah is essential reading because he repudiates the biblical objectivism of positional truth, and looks into the actual state of the human heart. His own heart had to be tested for him to be a faithful assayer - a man who would test the quality and strength of the metal (or mettle?) of Israel. (Jeremiah 12:3). This verse does not proudly parade the prophet as self-justified but shows the gap between the people and the true man of God.

All the prophets saw the gap between the character of God and the conduct of man. For Jeremiah God gave him the first glimpse of the new covenant when the Spirit would sow the word into repentant hearts and put God's law in the mind and heart. Then God's people, and only then, DO THE DESIRES OF GOD FROM THE HEART. Self-effort is banished when we live in the promises. During his prophecy the reality was sin engraved in the heart (17:1). Judah continued to play with sin, but a time would come when they would pray for revelation. (33:3). The weeping prophet saw the contradiction between the good purpose of God and the wicked playground of man. The huge gap brought this lonely man to despair the day of his birth.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD IN JUDGEMENT

1. God reminds Israel and Judah of their sinfulness. Two evils are found in **Jeremiah 2:13:**

- (a) The root sin: ***“they have forsaken Me”;***
- (b) Resultant sin: **making substitutes for God.**

Although fashions change and sin changes it's camouflage, the root sin is always leaving God. Jeremiah does not move on much in terms of history and action, but he goes deep into the nature of sin. Judgement begins at the house of God therefore the word of the Lord continues to show what is blessed and what is cursed, so Jeremiah painstakingly

has to extract, “the precious from the vile.” Praise Him for this goodness in our lives now.

2. God gives them time to repent. Forty years represents a limit to God’s patience, (and Jeremiah’s!). From 626 BC to 586 BC the man who wanted to be a hotel keeper was calling them back to God. In the days of Josiah there was a revival (outwardly), a Passover celebration, greater than anything since the days of Joshua. He was the last good king of Israel, but could not avert the impending doom from the east. God allowed Pharaoh to kill Josiah, to take him out of the explosion of God’s wrath. Jehoahaz, his son, only lasted 3 months. Then Jehoiakim was put on the throne by the king of Egypt for an eleven year reign, during which the king of Babylon had been quietly plotting. Jehoiakim is cut out of the genealogy of Matthew 1 because he cut to shreds the word of the Lord from Jeremiah. His burial was like an ass - just left by the roadside. His son, Jeconiah reigned for 3 months. Then Zedekiah became the last king of Judah for 11 years. Jeremiah prophesied to them all, and consistently kept to the word of judgement. **Jeremiah 8:7** says:

“The stork in the heavens knows her appointed times; and the turtledove, the swift and the swallow observe the time of their coming. But my people do not know the judgement of the Lord.”

3. God limits judgement to seventy years. The parallel is to God shortening the last days for the sake of the elect. Not only does God modify and limit punishment but He blesses those who submit to chastisement. The first batch of captives were the good figs who went to Babylon to settle down, accepting their punishment straightaway. In wrath, God remembers mercy. God gives to everyone according to his actions, and submission to judgement is necessary for full repentance. He gives us time to repent and promises to bless us if we are willing to go through His disciplines. We cannot repent by our ways because our hearts are too hard. Jeremiah, the prophet of Calvary, foresaw it is the Cross that remains forever as God’s instrument to bring repentance, to bring His people to a place where they can receive forgiveness. This will often occur during the season of His judgement when He judges us with the same measure we have judged others. He will discriminate between what is of faith and what is presumption, what is true grace and what is not, what is revelation and what is false charisma. Jeremiah goes deep deep deep down in revealing how sin strangles the true function of believers. A forgotten law of life today is retribution. Where are the Jeremiahs to bring clarity of mind and purity of heart on these issues?

ANOTHER VESSEL

The faithful Father, knowing the supernatural options for our lives, is putting us on the wheel of His circumstances to make us another vessel. (Jeremiah 18:4) AS SEEMS BEST TO HIM! God is Sovereign and will do what HE wants, when HE wants, how HE wants without asking us His permission. There is a process in making a pot. You have to throw the clay onto the center of the wheel after pounding it to make it pliable. The punch of God is the chastening after sin we need while centering the vessel is saying “Lord, I submit to Your counsels spirit, soul, and body, for the sake of Jesus’ name.” To be another vessel, a vessel of gold or silver unto honour, we have to be dissatisfied with having been a vessel unto dishonour. We are to cleanse ourselves (2 Timothy 2:21) dealing with the marring of sin and self and the demonic. Only when we deal with the past can we look at His future, His gracious designs for our lives.

We are distorted in our viewpoints, disfigured in our conscience, broken emotionally, erratic and bound in our wills, chaotic in our imaginations until the miracle of regeneration when a seed of the highest quality is born into our spirits. The law of degeneration has to be replaced by the life of regeneration from the atonement.

Salvation is more than being recycled.....it's the inception of an undiluted, unchanging, undefiled eternal life.

After the new birth we discover "our times are in his hands", so that time becomes a friend not an enemy. He spins us on His wheel sometimes slow, sometimes fast, fashioning our hearts to live and abide in Jesus Christ. The moulding of our souls takes years of discipline, love, testings, fellowship and prayer, as God patiently works for eternity. God sovereignly arranges days of boredom in work as well as inspiration, days of sorrow as well as joy, times of refreshing in His presence and the dark night of the soul when His presence cannot be sensed.

We are on His wheel of sovereign providence, turning, turning, turning at His will, so that everything of the old nature is ultimately overthrown. Each one of us is a one off, an individual vessel with a path in God only we can fulfill. Each one is an individual member of the body of Christ with an individual gifting.....but we develop character and gifting only by our Gethsemanes; the regular personal cross. The pot must be baked in the fires of persecution and left on the shelf before it's function as a container. We contain heaven's treasure which flows from us only as we co-operate with the Father, believing He is in control even when we fail to understand the circumstances.

How do we react when things suddenly go wrong? Will we hang on to His sovereignty when things seem against us? Why did Peter get 3000 souls, but Stephen get 3000 stones? God is the potter, we are the clay. He will mould us into another vessel as seems best to Him. Jeremiah wanted Israel to become another vessel, but his advice was disregarded.

Believers now desire change; but will they submit to a path that will horribly disappoint the flesh life and the carnal aspirations? God knows what is in the darkness, so we must fully trust Him with ALL our hearts, as He reveals His plans for our good. In our distress we must cry out to the Lord from the depths because change only comes from true repentance. Jeremiah shows us the true spirit of personal religion.....to refuse his message will cause many to walk the broad way of superficial tradition where we hear words of "peace, peace" but there is no peace. Where are the Jeremiahs that courageously reveal the narrow way that leads to the reality of the indwelling Christ? He, the Lord of glory will enter our hearts when we cease the sins of feigned obedience and rejoice in the eating of His holy word.