

Kings and Prophets 16-05-26

This is Thursday, the 26th of May, 2016. We're studying Kings and Prophets. We're in the closing days of the southern kingdom of Judah, the time of Josiah, and the imminent end of that dynasty that began with David through Solomon and Rehoboam and all the way down in a more or less unbroken line.

I don't think Athaliah necessarily counts, but most of the others were in that direct line of David. And we will resume, because the latter part of Josiah's reign is where Jeremiah the prophet begins. So we started looking at the book of Jeremiah last time, and we'll pick up that study tonight.

It's a long and complex book, and we won't be able to do anything like justice to it, but we will survey it and see how it fits into the history that we are looking at, the overall message, because it is quite pertinent for us. We find ourselves in similar times. Let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, and then we'll begin.

Father, we thank You for another opportunity to spend time together in fellowship, to study Your Word, to improve our understanding of who we are and why we occupy this particular place and time in history. We thank You for the guidance from Your Word and Your Holy Spirit who makes it real and pertinent to us. We pray that as we spend this time in the Scriptures that Your Spirit will be our teacher and will impress each of our hearts with the meaning and practical application of what we look at so that we can live the time that remains to us in this life and enter into the next fully equipped for every good work.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we saw last time that Jeremiah is a young man when he is called to be a prophet, his first objection.

You see many times when somebody gets tapped on the shoulder to be a communicator, there is some hesitation. I know what it's like. I felt the same way.

God typically meets the objection with overwhelming divine motivation. He did it for Moses. He did it for many down through the years.

And He does it for Jeremiah. So when Jeremiah says in verse 4, actually verse 6, I cannot speak for I am a youth, the Lord said, Don't say, I am a youth. You shall go to all whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak.

And this stands in for, as I said last time, almost any weakness to which we might point in the face of divinely provided opportunity. We can say, well, I could do that, but I have a limitation. I have a handicap.

There's some reason why God has sort of made a mistake in calling me or in appointing me or in finding me at this particular juncture where I have the opportunity to speak or to serve or to

otherwise function, and I feel inadequate to the task. Everybody feels inadequate to some task or other. Most people are daunted when they realize what they've gotten into when their first child comes along.

It doesn't mean you're going to give the baby back and say, well, I'm slow of speech and of a slow tongue or whatever the equivalent is. I value my sleep. I don't know how to change diapers and don't want to learn.

Whatever it may be, we have to be careful when an opportunity presents itself, and our first response is, well, I'm not able. We may have someone in our periphery who seems to be asking questions, and they seem to have chosen us to be the one to ask those questions to, and they're of a spiritual nature. They have something to do with the hope that is in us, and we say, well, let me refer you to someone who really knows.

If someone who really knows was the person that was supposed to answer that question, they would be the ones to be talking to that person already. If you are the one to whom that person has come, they are comfortable with you. They have posed their doubts or their questions or their concerns to you, and we need to realize that it is not by might nor by power but by God's Spirit, that we are not tested above what we are able to pass, that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you, and if it is our assignment, God would not have given it to us if it wasn't possible to successfully complete it in a way that glorifies Him.

And we need to just grab up guts, man up, put on the armor of God, be prayerful, be faithful, make sure we have our own personal ducks in line before we speak or before we seek to serve, and then get with it. Most of us can think back to times when we thought the challenge was insurmountable, the obstacles were unavoidable and incalculable, and yet somehow here we are, and we not only survived, but we prevailed. So we do the same thing in the spiritual realm that we do everywhere else, which is adapt, improvise, and overcome.

We are overcomers. The Lord has given us His Spirit and not without good reason. We need it.

We are weak in the flesh, but we are strong in the Spirit. So Jeremiah is assured by God that he can and will fulfill his assignment. So stop with the whining and let's get with it.

Now, I want to share with you a bit of the structure of the book, such as it is. Scholars have struggled with Jeremiah over the years because it is not a book that lends itself to easy analysis. It seems to be not a chronological collection, and already you begin to wander and wonder what it is you're seeing.

If it's thematic, what is the organizing theme? But here's the best solution to the problem that I can give you, because there are as many solutions as there are people that have offered them. Here's what I would offer you, and this isn't necessarily original to me, but it appeals to me because it makes the most sense based on what I've seen. If you look at chapter 1, Jeremiah really has kind of a dual calling.

God calls him to be a prophet. We've just established and reviewed that. And if you look in verses 4-19, God says, look at verse 5, Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.

Before you were born, I sanctified you. I ordained you what? A prophet to the nations. Circle that, at least mentally.

I ordained you a prophet to the nations. A goodly section of Jeremiah is going to be the fulfillment of that call. Jeremiah will be prophesying to and about and in connection with the nations.

Secondly, look at verse 13, The word of the Lord came to me a second time, saying, What do you see? This really begins, we kind of left off in verse 10, See I have this day set you over the nations, over kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant. That's the end of sort of the first part of his calling. We talked about that last time.

You, by the communication of the word, are going to be involved in this setting up and tearing down, to root out and to pull down, destroy and throw down, and also to build and to plant in the context of the nations. Then, in verse 11, it says, Moreover, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Jeremiah, what do you see? I said, I see a branch of an almond tree. The Lord said to me, You have seen well, for I am ready to perform my word.

Now, what is going on with that? Well, there's a word play here between the word for almond and the word for perform. It's just a change of a vowel. The consonants are the same.

And so it's a pun. And God is lightening the mood a little bit with Jeremiah. He gives him this vision of the almond tree.

Jeremiah already says, Look, I'm young. I don't think I can do this. God says, Yes, you can.

Yes, you will. So he says, Look, what do you see? And he says, I see an almond tree. And God says, Well, I'm going to almond my word to the nations, basically.

He changes one little vowel, but confirm and almond are just one slight sound difference apart. And God is sort of getting Jeremiah to smile here. He gives him this whole vision just to make this little funny.

And God does have a sense of humor. It's throughout his word. And this is a funny.

It's a funny in Hebrew. It's funnier in Hebrew than me explaining it. But it's a word play.

And God says, Look, Jeremiah, don't wrap yourself around the axle on this. Don't get all serious. You're young, but you're going to have some fun doing this.

It's going to be hard. Jeremiah ultimately becomes the weeping prophet. But God starts him out on a light note.

He says, Look, let's just take this as it comes, and I will tell you the correspondence. You'll see something, and it seems inscrutable. I will explain it.

You would never get me confirming my word out of an almond tree, but I am here to tell you. And that is a great illustration of what God the Holy Spirit does for us. Jesus promised his disciples when the Holy Spirit comes, he will lead you into all truth.

And if we ask, if we seek, and if we knock, God will ensure. Can you imagine the God of the universe allowing a faithful, seeking believer who genuinely wants answers to the right questions to go astray and to be tangled up in error and to be neutralized and deceived and caused to stumble? There are so few believers in the world of believers who have any interest at all. God is focused on them.

He is going to divert resources to them. God the Holy Spirit is going to be active and present and leaning forward to help us any way he can if we have even a glimmer of faith and obedience and interest and curiosity and motivation to live in a way that pleases God. There is nothing God will not do for us, including prune us.

If we start growing in strange directions that block the sun where the fruit needs to grow, people don't just prune a thing haphazardly, do they? Those of you that know about plants, you kind of have to know what you are doing. There is a certain distance, there is a certain amount you can prune. You prune too much and you kill the whole branch.

Prune too little and you don't accomplish your objective. When Jesus talks about, I am the vine, you are the branches. And if you bear fruit, my Father will prune you so that you bear more fruit.

Well, that pruning is very specific. The light needs to come in and reach enough of that portion of the vine that it is going to bear the maximum amount of grapes. If you prune it too much, it can't be that fruitful.

If you prune it too little, it can't be that fruitful. But it has to be pruned. And we might grow some ideas, we might grow some interests, we might grow some activities, some investments of time or of resources that begin to diminish the spiritual fruit that we can grow.

But if we are abiding in the vine, if we are looking to the Lord Jesus as our example, I am here to do the will of my Father in heaven, then God will show us where those things need to be pruned away. And He will do the pruning. It is His power that removes those things that are obstacles to us.

So He begins there, And then the Lord said in verse 12, You have seen well, for I am ready to perform my word. And the word of the Lord came to me the second time. Now the first time the word of the Lord comes and the almond tree, I will perform my word.

Who has God's word come to? And what does God's word deal with up to this point? It is the

nations. I have called you to be a prophet to the nations. You are going to pull down and root up and destroy and throw down.

You are going to be over the kingdoms and over the nations. And here is the almond tree. It is not an olive tree.

It is not a vineyard with a hedge around it, some of the symbols that are used for Israel. This is an almond tree. That is a different thing.

Olives and grapes are round, meaty things that you eat, And that you can crush and get oil and wine from, right? Almonds are a nut. It is a good thing, But it is different from olives and grapes, Which are almost universally used for Israel, right? The grapes that are crushed in the wine press of God's wrath, that is Israel. They are supposed to be doing something good, And instead there is the cup of God's wrath that is going to be drunk down to the dregs.

And the olives, many times it is in hardship. You have need of endurance after you have suffered a while. You inherit the promises.

The Lord Jesus was our example. He was wounded and bruised for our iniquities, But in that suffering came the fruit of salvation for all of us. So, in this world ye shall have tribulation.

You can expect that part of being fruitful is to feel pressure. And that pressure brings out of us the olive oil, The grape juice that will become the wine that is pleasant and useful and medicinal, And all of its other wonderful uses. But you can't be fruitful without also experiencing pressure.

They go together. If you don't feel pressure for long periods of time, You are probably not being fruitful. Whom the Lord loves He chastens.

He scourges every son whom He receives. Why? Because that pressure produces more obedience, Better faith and obedience. It improves us.

There is nothing like no discipline, no correction, no instruction, No guidance to just have a patch of weeds. So, the almond tree. And God sort of gets Jeremiah to smile here.

He says, well, I'm going to confirm my word with regard to the nations. And the almond tree means this is your prophetic function that is outward. Then He says to him the second time, what do you see? And he said, I see a boiling pot and it is facing away from the north.

Now, if a boiling pot is facing away from the north, What are the two things you know about it? It's facing the south and it's tipped. So, there's a boiling pot that is in the north and it is facing the south and it is tipped. What happens when you tip a boiling pot? The boiling stuff comes out.

So, when the tipped pot releases its contents, What direction are they going to flow? From north to south. What is this a picture of? There are going to be the equivalent of swarms of

boiling waterage coming from the north. This is a picture of the impending invasion of the Babylonians.

They are the boiling pot. It is fresh off the fire and it is tipped away from the north, which means toward the south. So, it is going to flow through Judah and it is going to scald the people in it.

So, the Lord said to me, verse 14, Out of the north calamity shall break forth on all the inhabitants of the land. For behold, I am calling all the families... By the way, land there is Eretz, just like we've said many, many times. It is not going to flood the whole earth.

The boiling pot isn't going to drown as high as the mountains. It is going to flood the land, the land of Israel. Actually, the land of Judah specifically.

The northern kingdom is long gone. But, the second part of Jeremiah's prophetic call. We are still looking at what is the big picture.

How can we sort of get a handle on what the book of Jeremiah is and what it is about? Well, his two-fold call. One is, he is a prophet to the nations. And secondly, he is a prophet specifically to Judah.

And this second vision and the second half of chapter one is God telling him, You are also going to prophesy to Judah. Now, these overlap and intermingle because, of course, God is going to judge Judah using a nation of Gentiles. But, he is going to have an outward prophetic ministry that is to, for, and about the nations.

And he is going to have an internal ministry that is more about what is going to happen to Judah. Both through the incursion of other nations and primarily because of their sinfulness and their disobedience. So, this is our clue as to what to watch for in the book of Jeremiah.

Some of it is going to be Jeremiah's prophetic ministry to the nations. The rest of it is going to be Jeremiah's prophetic ministry and mission to Judah. So, in sort of a chiastic fashion, at least for memory purposes, the first half of the book is going to be Jeremiah prophesying to Judah.

The last thing that is mentioned is the first one that is going to be in the book. So, Jeremiah chapters 2 through 24 focuses on Jeremiah and the people of Judah. Chapter one is our introduction, the prophetic call, Jeremiah's momentary objection, God overruling it, overriding it.

And then beginning in chapter two and going through 24, the focus. This doesn't mean there won't be other elements. But the emphasis and the general theme of 2 through 24 of Jeremiah is going to be Jeremiah prophesying to the people of Judah.

Chapters 25 through 50 are going to be primarily Jeremiah focused on the nations. So, 2 through 24, 25 through 50. Now, there's 51 chapters in our copy of Jeremiah.

So, what is 51? Well, 51 is sort of a coda or a postscript. I'm sorry, 52. It's 25 through 51 and then 52 is your appendix.

So, each of those big sections, chapter 2 through 24 and chapter 25 through 51, each of them begins with a little introduction that sets the theme and then has another section that sort of develops and amplifies that theme. And then it's going to have a conclusion. And the conclusion of the first section and the conclusion of the second section is a sign.

Everybody with me so far? Book of Jeremiah. When you think back on this and you've forgotten everything else I said, think, all right, Book of Jeremiah. First chapter is introduction.

Last chapter is a conclusion. That's 1 and 52. In between, you split it almost exactly in half.

2 through 24, Jeremiah, emphasis on Judah. 25 through 51, emphasis on the nations. Those two sections are going to begin with a thematic statement and end with a sign.

Make sense? There are also some scattered elements that are identifiable as similar. For example, there's something called the Confessions of Jeremiah. And I'll give you these sections.

There are six of them. And if you had to guess, just a random guess, would Jeremiah making confession be in the first section about Judah or the second section about the nations? Wild shot in the dark, which one would it be? It would be for his own people, right? How many times do you have a prophet coming before God and confessing the sins of the people? If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, seek my face, and turn, I will heal the land, in a nutshell. So, these six Confessions of Jeremiah are all in that first section.

You can write them down if you like. This is chapter 11, verses 18-23, where he says, I was like a lamb brought to the slaughter. They brought schemes against me, but, O Lord, you who judge righteously, testing the mind and the heart, let me see your vengeance on them, till you have revealed my cause, and so on.

So, chapter 11, verses 18-23, that's Jeremiah's first confession. Jeremiah 12, 1-4 is the second. Righteous are you, O Lord, when I plead with you.

You let me talk with you about your judgments. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously? You've planted them, and they've taken root. They grow, and they bear fruit.

You're near in their mouth, but far from their mind. Pay attention to that one. Jeremiah 12, 2. You are near in their mouth, but far from their mind.

But you, O Lord, know me, you have seen me, and you have tested my heart toward you. This is a bold thing to say. You wouldn't say this lightly to the Lord God in heaven.

That's the second one, 12, 1-4. The third one is chapter 15, verses 10-21. Woe is me, my mother, that you born me, a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth.

When Jeremiah starts delivering these prophecies, he meets with bitter opposition. That's one of the reasons he's the weeping prophet. All day long I hold out my hands to disobedient and stiff-necked people.

But the Lord comforts him and says in verse 11, It will be well with your remnant. I will cause the enemy to intercede with you in the time of adversity and in the time of affliction. So that's the third section.

So far we have 11, 18-23. We have 12, 1-4. We have 15, 10-21.

The fourth one is chapter 17, verses 14-18. Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed. Save me, and I shall be saved.

For you are my praise. They say to me, Where is the word of the Lord? Let it come now. If God's in heaven, why doesn't he show himself? Why doesn't he give me some proof? As for me, Jeremiah says in verse 16, I have not hurried away from being a shepherd who follows you, nor have I desired the woeful day, the day that he has to prophesy about.

I don't desire the judgment. You know what came out of my lips. It was right there before you.

Do not be a terror to me. You are my hope in the day of doom. And so on.

So that's the fourth one, 17, 14-18. The fifth one is chapter 18, verses 19-23. And you can see that these are regularly spaced.

It is a difficult thing for Jeremiah to deliver these prophetic pronouncements of judgment to his own people. He's torn. On the one hand, he decries and regrets the wickedness and the departure, the apathy, the sins of the high hand that are going on all over.

But on the other hand, it's no fun telling people the consequences of their attitudes and actions. So he alternates. And this fifth one is 18, 19-23.

Give heed to me, O Lord, and listen to the voice of those who contend with me. Shall evil be repaid for good? They have dug a pit for my life. Remember that I stood before you to speak good for them, to turn away your wrath from them.

But God is going to deliver up their children to the famine, pour out their blood by the force of the sword. Their wives will become widows and bereaved of their children. Their men will be put to death, and so on.

Sad picture. The last of Jeremiah's confessions is chapter 20, verses 7-18. So again, 11, 18-23.

12, 1-4. 15, 10-21. Those are the first three.

Then 17, 14-18. 18, 19-23. And the final one, chapter 20, verses 7-18.

O Lord, you induced me and I was persuaded. You are stronger than I and have prevailed. You

told me, despite the fact that I am young, go prophesy, and I did.

But I am in derision daily. Everyone mocks me. Do you ever feel this way as a believer and you get in a room full of naysaying, ne'er-do-well folks who have no use for God, the Bible, Jesus, or anything else, and certainly your faith? Everyone mocks me.

I am in derision daily. For when I spoke, I cried out. I shouted, violence and plunder.

God's judgment is coming. Because the word of the Lord was made to me a reproach and a derision daily. Then I said, I'll stop.

I'll quit. I'll put on the camouflage and go into hiding. I'll have a ghillie suit.

Nobody can see me. I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more 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 will tell you, anybody to whom God assigns a communication gift feels this way. It's like that song, I've got the music in me and it's got to come out.

Well, if God puts the need to communicate His word in you, it has to come out. You would talk to the walls. You would teach it to the air just to get it out.

His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones. I was weary of holding it back. That's 27 through 18.

So those are Jeremiah's personal expressions of everything from angst to recounting his persecution. He goes before the Lord. He just pours his heart out.

And it's not just a confession in the sense of acknowledging sin or homo logeo, either for himself or the nation, but he wrestles with his mission. He's a sensitive guy. There are also in the unrelenting, if you made the journey through Isaiah, and you remember in that first section, the first 30-odd chapters, it was just an unrelenting depiction of evil and sin and apathy and difference, all the mental attitude sins and overt sins and sins of the tongue that were taking place and the inevitable impending judgment, the wrath of the Lord coming, and you just longed for some relief.

And every once in a while, there would be a prophecy of hope. And, well, the Lord's wrath will not last forever. There is a coming kingdom.

They will be restored at some point. And it was just a little bit of light in the midst of a completely dark room. You're there, and you're parched and hot and crawling across the desert, and you finally get a little cup of water, and then you crawl across a bunch more desert.

Well, same thing in Jeremiah. So in chapters 30 and 31, now remember, this is going to be in the second section in his prophecies to the nations, and you think, well, here's God's judgment

coming on the rest of the world, and you think, well, the whole world is coming to an end. This will be worse than the days of the flood of Noah.

But chapters 30 and 31 are hopeful. Write in a book for yourself, he says in verse 30, the words that I have spoken to you. For behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will bring back from captivity my people Israel and Judah, says the Lord.

I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. These are the words that the Lord spoke concerning Israel and Judah. And then he goes on from there in chapter 30 and 31.

So it isn't unrelieved misery and woe. There are these looking beyond. And it is a reminder to us that sometimes as we experience our particular assigned set of circumstances, it just seems unrelenting.

It seems endless. There doesn't seem to be any light at the end of the tunnel. It just looks like it's dark and getting darker.

And we need to lift our eyes. Lift your eyes unto the hills from whence cometh strength. And there is the promise of relief.

There is the promise of vindication. There is the promise of reward and opportunity and a new day and a new kingdom, a new body, a new heart and mind free of the corruption with which we are born, able to avail ourselves of everything we've learned in this life without the impediments of sin and the world, the flesh and the devil. So we need to do the same thing the Word of God does, which is shift our gaze from the darkness of circumstance to the hope.

God raised Christ from the dead and the Spirit that raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal body also. That's a promise of God. So that's the big idea.

That's the big structure. Now, some of the interesting details about the book of Jeremiah. There is no more strange book in the Old Testament in terms of its text than Jeremiah.

It is the second longest book behind the Psalms. Not many people know that. You would think, well, Isaiah would probably be the mack truck of the Old Testament, but Jeremiah is the second longest.

However, the Septuagint version, which was translated a couple of hundred years before Christ into Greek from the available Hebrew manuscripts of the day, that version is more than 12.5% shorter. And there's a big section of it that has been displaced and moved to a different spot. Interestingly, even though the Septuagint version is shorter, it's got about a hundred verses in it that aren't in this one.

There's a hundred verses in the Greek Jeremiah that are not in the Hebrew Jeremiah, but the Greek Jeremiah is still 12.5% shorter overall. The way it gets shorter, there's really only a couple

of big missing sections. The last half of chapter 33, 33, 14 through 26, Jeremiah 33, 14 through 26, does not exist in the Septuagint.

It's just gone. And chapter 39, verses four through 13. So 33, 14 through 26, 39, four through 13.

Those are two big chunks that went away in the Greek version. But that is not even close to 12.5%. Most of the shortening is due to individual verses using less words. And there will be words and occasionally a sentence that drops out.

And so it is a more compact text. It's condensed, but mostly by small things being taken out. You say, well, do the Dead Sea Scrolls give us any help in figuring out is one better than the other? No, because there are fragments of both of the Hebrew originals, both the Masoretic text that we have in our Bible and the Hebrew behind the Septuagint, both of them are represented at Qumran.

So they had them both. So it doesn't tell us, and so both were in existence before the time of Christ and probably right to and through the time of Christ. So the question arises, well, do we need to grab those hundred verses out of the Septuagint and bring them in? Do we need to take out the parts that aren't in the Septuagint? How do we treat that? Do we just assume that because the particular version of the Hebrew text that came down past the time of Christ into the time when it was translated into English, so that's the one? You have to sort of assume, the King James only folks believe that the King James is inspired, therefore they would say, well, hands down, slam dunk, this is the one and the other one is spurious, and they would pay no attention to the Septuagint, and they typically never do.

We have to be a bit more interested, I think, and I'll address, I don't have time this evening to talk about the nature of those differences. Are they important? How do we need to resolve? I just wanted to let you know that Jeremiah is a strange fish in the net of the Old Testament. It's not like the other sea of Galilee, tilapia that are laying in there.

It's just different. Not only that, but Jeremiah had substantially completed the book, and you remember the king burned it page by page in the fireplace, and Baruch had to rewrite the whole thing at Jeremiah's dictation, and you ask yourself, well, he must have really had a Holy Spirit trance to get all of the original wording right, or maybe it was the will of God, and the first one wasn't good enough to be inspired, and that one had to be torched, and the second one is the one we have. Or did somebody come in after the king left and salvage enough pages to make the alternate manuscript that became the... No book has a textual history like Jeremiah, but again, what is the name of our study? Kings and Prophets.

We put this prophet in the context of his time, and there was no time in the history of Israel like the closing days of the southern kingdom. And so the uniqueness of the communication as it has been collected and transmitted and preserved is sort of fitting for the closing days of the southern kingdom of Judah where God's promise that David would not lack a man to sit on the

throne was still in effect. God has promised that no word of His will fall to the ground, and yet here's somebody actively burning His word in the fire.

So we have a few questions that we'd like to at least get some tentative answers to beyond the content of the text itself. One thing we can say without any great hesitation is that the text that we do have is inspired, and none of it needs to be excised. The fact that it doesn't appear in the Septuagint is sort of an argument from silence.

I don't know how it dropped out or why it dropped out, but that doesn't mean this is not inspired any more than any other partial manuscript would say something against the manuscripts that do contain it. So we can have confidence in our copy of Jeremiah. All we really have to do is figure out those extra hundred verses in the Septuagint is that inspired, and it ought to be included as a little appendix or inserted in a different color of ink or something, different typeface, so that we know the rest of the story.

Is this the little Paul Harvey addendum that we're lacking here? And I'll talk about that next time. But here's the thing. Here's the main idea.

What I want to do in just the few minutes that remain to us tonight is skip forward to chapter seven. Now when I say chapter seven, what do you immediately apply from what you've learned tonight? If I'm in chapter seven, what do I expect it to be about and to? This is Jeremiah's prophetic ministry to Judah. So just as sort of a spot check of our theory here, we go to chapter seven.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, Stand in the gate of the Lord's house. Ah, what a relief. We're in Jerusalem.

This is in fact Judah. So far so good. Proclaim there this word and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all you Judah, who enter in at these gates to worship the Lord.

Now, if that was as far as you got, you'd say, well, this is very interesting because there are probably people who don't care anything about the Lord, never come to the temple. Jeremiah is standing in the gate of the house of the Lord and the people that are going to hear him are the people that are interested enough to come to the house of the Lord. I was glad when they said unto me, let us go to the house of the Lord.

Right? So these are the subsection of the population that come to the house of the Lord. That's who Jeremiah is talking to. So maybe he's going to be talking to the faithful remnant.

That might be a working hypothesis, right? But thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Do not trust in these lying words saying the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these. He says, you're coming to the temple and people are saying something repetitive, repetitive, repetitive, and that all is well because you have come to the temple.

And he says they are lying words. Can you make a jump to our present day? Just because you go to church and you do the 7-11 praise chorus repetitive to the point of boredom, don't think God's happy. They were doing the same thing.

Can you believe this? 3,500 years ago, people were going to the house of the Lord and yammering the same thing over and over and over. The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. God says cut it out.

It's lying words. It's deceiving you if you think that this is worship. Do not trust in these lying words for if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, you are not measured by whether or not you show up to church or to Bible class or to daily devotionals.

That's not the measure. The measure is your ways and your doings. What is the fruit of your life? If you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place or walk after other gods to your hurt, then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before me in this house which is called by my name and say, we are delivered, just so you can do these abominations? Do you think God is preserving you and blessing you and providing for you just so that you can go break more than half of the commandments on the tablets of stone that he just listed? Has this house which is called by my name become a den of thieves in your eyes, quoted by the Lord Jesus? So, do you think this part of Jeremiah is inspired? Again, we are on safe ground. But now, go to my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel.

Remember what happened in Shiloh. Who was operating out of Shiloh? Three famous priests, just before Samuel came on the scene. Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas.

How did that turn out? Not well. God says, go to Shiloh, look around, see if you can find any scraps left of where my house used to be once the priests got corrupt. And now, because you have done all these works, says the Lord, verse 13, and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear.

Grace before judgment, warning before the big wipeout. How long of a warning did they have before the flood came? 120 years. How long of a warning did they have in Canaan before Joshua marched around and wiped them all out? Remember the first thing they did after Jericho and Ai was to go up to Mount Ebal and whitewash a cliff, and Joshua wrote the entire law of Moses on the cliff and read it out loud, not only to the Israelites, but to a huge assembled company of strangers who could go and tell others.

People could come by for years after that and read that cliff and know. Did Rahab the harlot

testify to the fact that everybody in the land had already heard about their God because of the wonderful things he had done in Egypt in delivering the children of Israel, and they knew that there was a God in Israel? So was there warning before judgment? And by the way, Egypt was 40 years before Joshua crossed the Jordan. They had four decades to pay attention and wake up and say, you know, we've got the story, caravans, traders going back and forth with goods, coming and telling the stories by the campfire.

You'll never believe what happened down in Egypt. You know, mighty, mighty empire, and it's been destroyed to rack and ruin. Well, why did that happen? Why didn't the gods of Egypt protect them? Because the God of Israel is stronger.

And Moses led them out with a mighty hand, and now they're in the wilderness, and they say they're coming here. This is their stop. They say that their forefather Abraham and Isaac and Jacob used to dwell up here, and they're coming back and reclaiming the family property.

They had 40 years to get ready. They had 40 years to turn and change. Same thing here.

Go now to my place which was in Shiloh. Go now, verse 13, I spoke to you rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you, but you did not answer. Therefore I will do to the house which is called by my name, in which you trust.

Notice they're trusting in the house, not in God. They're trusting in the temple. This is like putting your confidence in all of the good things your church does.

You know, I've talked to people countless times, and all they want to do is tell me all the great things their church is doing, all the different ministries it has, how many missionaries. They aren't personally necessarily doing anything, but their church is going gangbusters. In this place which I gave to you and your fathers as I have done to Shiloh, not only God's word, but God's example, I will cast you out of my sight as I have cast out all your brethren, the whole posterity of Ephraim.

Therefore, now look at verse 16 and 17. Do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them, nor make intercession to me. Wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute.

Didn't Abraham intercede for Lot and for any remnant that would be in the cities of the plain down there, Sodom and Gomorrah? Didn't Moses intercede for Israel when they were coming out? The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man, of Edelmuth, much? Can't we see somebody that's in line for judgment and pray for them? We certainly can, but there is in fact a point beyond which there is no recovery. The door of the ark slams shut. Joshua comes across the Jordan, and if you have not already joined the innumerable company that has joined itself to native Israel, you're going to be judged.

Time's up, unless you're really wily like the Gibeonites. So do not pray, do not lift up a cry or prayer of intercession. I will not hear you.

There is no reversing this judgment. It is coming, it is inevitable, it was pronounced in the days of Manasseh, remember? Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem where the children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven? And they pour out drink offerings to other gods that they may provoke me to anger. Do they provoke me to anger, says the Lord? Do they not provoke themselves to the shame of their own faces? Therefore, says the Lord God, my anger, my fury be poured out on this place, on man and on beast, on the trees of the field, on the fruit of the ground, and it will burn and not be quenched.

Unquenchable fire. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel. And look at verse 21 and 22.

This is really, see if you can figure this out. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat meat. For I did not speak to your fathers or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices.

This is what I told them. Obey my voice and I will be your God and you shall be my people and walk in all the ways that I've commanded you that it may be well with you. Now is this true? Did God not give them any commands about sacrifice and offering? It is true.

It is absolutely true. What did God command? Because what this is talking about and in the preceding context, this is what families are doing and the individual sacrifices that you find in Leviticus 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and the priestly instructions that follow that. There is no command to offer those.

If a man brings an offering, this is what he should do. It's not a command. Only the public national sacrifices performed by Aaron's sons were commanded.

But the command to the individual Israelite and that's what's being addressed here. He's talking about the ones that light the fires and chop the wood and knead the dough. Families, individuals, what is the command to the individual? What is God's command to you and to me? It isn't a matter of adhering to ritual.

Well, we always say grace before our meals and now I lay me down to sleep before we go to bed and we attend church every time the doors are open and we're good traditional Christians. God says, I didn't command you to adhere to traditions. I didn't command you to be sure and dress up on Easter and give presents at Christmas and give thanks at Thanksgiving and whatever else the Christian world establishes by way of I'm a good Christian.

He said, I commanded to obey my voice and I will be your God and you shall be my people. Walk in the ways that I have commanded you that it may be well with you. This is obedience from the heart.

These are the moral code. What did he indict them with earlier? Breaking all of those commandments? You steal, murder, commit adultery in verse 9. You swear falsely. You worship

other gods.

Walk after other gods that you do not know. Verse 9 trashes more than half the 10 commandments. God says, that's what I commanded you.

What are they doing now? They are commending themselves because they come to the temple and they offer sacrifices. And what does God mean when he says add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat meat? He says, save the trouble. Instead of bringing these animals to the temple and slaughtering them there and sending them up in a whole burnt offering, keep them and eat them because you're not doing yourself any good bringing them to me.

Your sacrifices are a waste of time. Coming to the temple is a waste of time when your heart's not right. That's what he's saying.

You're wasting your time conforming to the ritual if your heart is not in it because I commanded your heart, not your externalities. This is what I commanded. Obey my voice.

I will be your God. Walk in the ways that I've commanded you. Yet they did not obey or incline their ear but followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts and went backward and not forward.

Since the days your fathers came out of the land of Egypt unto this day, I have even sent to you all my servants, the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them. Yet they did not obey me or incline their ear but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers.

Therefore you shall speak all these words to them but they will not obey you. You shall also call to them but they will not answer you." He says, Jeremiah, you're the weeping prophet. You're going to have to keep on weeping.

You still preach but don't expect a response. And because I know they're not going to respond, I also know that I'm not going to revoke this judgment. You can't pray for them and have the judgment lifted.

You shall say to them, This is a nation that does not obey the voice of the Lord their God nor receive correction. Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouths. Cut off your hair and cast it away.

Take up a lamentation on the desolate heights for the Lord has rejected and forsaken the generation of His wrath. The children of Israel have done evil in my sight, says the Lord. They have set their abominations in the house which is called by my name to pollute it.

They have built the high places of Tophet which is in the valley of the sons of Hinnom to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire which I did not command nor did it come into my heart. In fact, you remember when we read the commands back in Deuteronomy, the curses, blessings and curses, if you do as the nations do, I will cast you out just as I'm casting out those

nations for those same things. Read Leviticus 21.

God says, I'm casting out these nations greater and mightier than you because of their evil I will do the same to you. Well, this is the burden of Jeremiah. He has a two-fold calling.

Part of it is internal, part of it is to the nations. So, we'll continue our survey of the book of Jeremiah next time, but you can easily see how well it fits into the context of the closing days of the reign of Josiah and then this mishmash that happens with Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin and Zedekiah and it's just really the ball being fumbled and rolling out of bounds as Nebuchadnezzar eventually comes within 20 years with three successive waves. A first that takes the cream of the land, a second that digs deeper, and the third which rakes even the ground out from under Solomon's temple.

So, it's a sober illustration for us. God told the people of that day, look at what I did to Shiloh. God tells the people of this day, look at what I did to Solomon's temple.

This was the house that was called by my name. I had my very presence at the Ark of the Covenant in the mercy seat and look what I did and think about why. And it's a sober warning for us all.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. We'll pick this up again next week. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you that you always precede judgment with grace. We thank you for the warning and encouragement to examine ourselves and judge ourselves to avoid the pitfalls and mistakes that we see so clearly delineated in your word. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will use these things to motivate us and encourage us.

As David prayed in Psalm 51, we pray that you will show us our secret faults, purge us with hyssop so that we can be clean, wash us so that we can be whiter than snow. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.