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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: Jeremiah 1:1-19

25. THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Ray Steadman tells that during the German occupation of Denmark in World War 2, King Christian X demonstrated remarkable courage in the face of Nazi oppression. One morning the King looked out of his window, and saw the hated Nazi flag flying over a public building in Copenhagen. He called for the German commandant and angrily demanded that the flag be removed. The amused commandant refused, " *We Germans do not take orders,* " he replied. " *We give them.* " " *If you do not have it removed this instant,* " said the king " *a Danish soldier will take it down.* " " *Then he will be shot,* " said the Nazi officer. " *Fire away then,* " said the king. " *For I shall be that soldier.* " The Germans removed the flag. That is a profile in courage, the courage to stand up for a higher cause than life itself.

Now there are many pictures of courage throughout the Old and New Testaments, men and women who took a courageous and costly stand for the Lord. One of the most courageous of all was Jeremiah. *Jeremiah was a unique spiritual leader, and one of the most outstanding personalities of the Old Testament.* Jeremiah recounts more of his life than any other prophet, telling of his ministry, the reactions of his audiences, testing's and his

personal feelings. The name Jeremiah means "*Jehovah throws,*" in the sense of laying down a foundation, or "*Jehovah appoints, establishes, or sends.*" Now while Jeremiah is one of the best known of all the prophets his book seems to have been neglected. How many of you have ever heard a series of message from the prophecy of Jeremiah ? Folk have neglected it this book and that maybe one of three reasons.

I. It is a Big Book:

It is 52 chapters long, second only to Isaiah's 66 chapters. *Legend says that Jeremiah visited the Republic of Ireland kissed the Blarney Stone and received the gift of the gab.* The length of the book reflects the number of prophecies in his 40 year ministry (627 -586 B.C.) some or all of which may have been dictated to his secretary Baruch. (36:4) Any for some it's a big book to tackle.

2. It is a Hard Book:

It's a difficult book to analyse because it is not in chronological order. Its like a collection of sermons recorded at random. Young says,

' Jeremiah's prophecies may seem to be somewhat scattered, but their arrangement enables the prophet to emphasize repetition. The themes of Jeremiah are recurring ones, the sinfulness of the nation and the approaching doom. Into his book he weaves these thoughts and as we read on we meet them over and over again until the impression which they have made upon us

is truly powerful and tremendous. ' Now as I have said it is difficult to outline this book, but we could do it like this.

- 1. Before the Fall of Jerusalem: Ch's 1-33**
- 2. During the Fall of Jerusalem: Ch's 34-39**
- 3. After the Fall of Jerusalem: Ch's 40-52**

You see, the climax of the book is the fall of Jerusalem. Everything that goes before, which includes Jeremiah's prophecies point to that hour of tragedy. This makes,

3. It a Sad Book:

There seems to be nothing but bad news for Judah, and Jeremiah was feeling the pain at what was happening to the nation. Now in spite of all these difficulties this is a wonderful book. Imagine for a moment you are Jeremiah the preacher. You live during the last days of a decaying nation. You preach to the nation and call people to repentance but no one listens. You are threatened and opposed at every turn. You have no wife, no companionship because the days are evil and the Lord has told you not to marry. (16:2) You feel abandoned and alone, your friends have turned away from you. You wish you could quit but you can't. The Word of God burns in your bones and you have to speak it regardless of the consequences.

You love your nation, and your people but you see disaster looming. You see, the enemy massing on the border ready to conquer your land and carry out the judgment of God and you are powerless to prevent it.

Instead of heeding your warnings of coming judgment, the nation turns on you and seeks to destroy, God's man in a day of crisis. Now that in essence is Jeremiah. Now as I have said it's difficult to outline the book, but the message and the man are inseparable and so I want you to notice.

(1)THE TIMES OF HIS MINISTRY

Jeremiah lived and died in a century of crisis. His 40 year ministry took place during the reigns of Judah's final five kings. Josiah (640-609 B.C.) Jehoahaz (609 B.C.) Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.) Jehoiachin (598-597 B.C.) and Zedekiah (597-586 B.C.) Thus we see that Jeremiah served in a time of,

(a) *INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT:*

Egypt (2 Kings 23:29) Assyria, (2 Kings 17:6) and Babylon, (2 Kings 20:12) were the great world powers all vying for supremacy in this part of the ancient world. You see, Israel often became the cockpit of the nations in their struggle. My when this young prophet began his ministry, Babylon was but a cloud, the size of a man's hand, on the horizon of the future. But Jeremiah lived to see that ruthless nation descend on his people and destroy the capital city of Jerusalem and the splendid Temple of Solomon, dwelling place of Jehovah, the God of Israel. (2 Kings 25:9) We, too, live in an age of international conflict. Two major world wars are behind us, but we do not know when we shall plunged into the whirlpool of a third. My are we not living in the era of passenger jets being shot out of the sky ? A crisis in

Ukraine, in Iraq, in Syria, in Gaza and in Israel to name just a few. I mean, where in the world is there peace ?

(b) **NATIONAL DECLINE:**

As Dr. Ted Rendall says "*Jeremiah lived in the midst of a crumbling society, rotting within, and fast falling apart at the seams. Like a vessel caught in the storm, Judah was fast breaking up.*" For Israel the law of Moses was the national code, and tested by that standard the wall of Judah was crooked and was marked for demolition. Think of the record of Judah, in Jeremiah's time. There was

Idolatry: the worship of a whole series of pagan deities, and entailed involvement in immoral practices and sinful rites. (3:1 4:1 5:7)

Immorality: " *They were as fed horses in the morning every one neighed after his neighbour's wife.*" (5:8) " *I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing, they commit adultery.*" (23:14) There was **Injustice:** (5:26-28)

Covetousness: " *The itch to be rich.* " Jeremiah says *from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness.*" (6:13 8:10)

Dishonesty: (9:8)

Violence: (6:7)

These were the sins of Jeremiah's age, and these were the sin's that made his people the generation of God's wrath. (7:29) We need hardly point out the fact that they are the sin's of our society as well. Can we hope therefore to escape the righteous judgment of God ? (a) (b)

(c) **FORMAL WORSHIP:**

The people believed they could sin as they please and pay mere lip service to the Lord. Now in Jeremiah's day there was a tremendous reformation. This was initiated by a man called Josiah. (1:2) Now Josiah was a very godly King. (2 Kings 23:25) In his day idolatry, sodomy and inhumanity was put down. (2 Kings 23:5 7 10) But Josiah's reformation proved to be superficial and did not produce true spiritual worship of Jehovah. All that Judah had was a formal religion. Look if you will at (2:8) Of how many pastors in this land could that be said ? Look at (3:10) Formal worship. *Is there not a warning here for us ? Do you ever feel that we're just going through the motions ? Do you ever feel that we're just going through the mechanic's of worship ? Is it not easy to traffic in unfelt truth and offer formal, and perfunctory prayers ?*

(d) **CONTINUAL APOSTASY:**

The land was full of false prophets and blind leaders. God spoke to Jeremiah and said, " *Then the Lord said unto me, 'the prophets prophesy lies in my name I sent them not, neither have I commanded them neither spake unto them*

" (14:14) You see, these false prophets were offering false security (28:1-17) while the faithful prophet, Jeremiah was delivering faithful sermons. Who do you think they believed ? (5:12 6:9-17 7:26-28) What an age it was, a time when the servant of God was despised and the Word of the Lord was disobeyed. A time when it was said, " *truth is perished.*" (7:28) Now is Jeremiah's age not a picture of ours ? An era when God's Word is

rejected, resisted and reviled ? Even by those who profess His name. And what of those who speak in the name of the Lord ? Are they not branded fanatics ? Of course this age climaxed in

(e) PROVIDENTIAL JUDGEMENT:

Indeed, is this not the theme of the book ? The judgment of the Lord, upon Jerusalem and Judah. The Lord announced this judgment as early as the first chapter. (1:16) And time and again God's judgment is declared as the consequence of the peoples sin and disobedience. (2:17 5:19) My sin cannot be left unpunished, the nation has to be purified and purged. Now these were the leading characteristics of Jeremiah's age. (1)

(2)THE TERMS OF HIS MINISTRY

Now when I speak of terms I mean " *the conditions of an agreement.*" Here the Lord enters into an agreement with Jeremiah and He lays down the conditions. Notice,

(a) THE SELECTION:

It's generally agreed that Jeremiah was born in 645 BC. He was born in a small village called Anathoth (1:1) today called Anata about three miles northeast of Jerusalem. Naturally timid and sensitive Jeremiah shrank from the gigantic task to which God called him. Look at (1:4) and note four telling phrases.

" *I formed thee,*" Jeremiah is responsible to God **Physically:** You see, God gave him the genetic structure He wanted to possess. We're reminded in the New Testament that the Christians body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. We must not defile or abuse that body.

" *I knew thee,*" Jeremiah is responsible to God **Intellectually:** You cannot know a person unless you share in depth, in mind, exchange of ideas and thought patterns. God gave Jeremiah his I.Q. We have to love the Lord our God with all our " *minds.* "

" *I sanctified thee:*" Jeremiah is responsible to God **Spiritually:** The idea here is to be separated to God, to be in a God-given place. God sets us apart spiritually.

" *I ordained thee:*" Jeremiah is responsible to God **Vocationally:** He's called to be a prophet not a priest. You see, Jeremiah should have followed in his father's footsteps, at this time the priesthood was hereditary but God had another plan. Has God another plan for you ? Is God setting you apart for special service ? Now remember what a prophet was. The Hebrew word probably comes from an Arabic root that means " *to announce.*" For example Moses spoke to Aaron and Aaron was his spokesman (prophet) before Pharaoh. (Ex 7:1-2)

My prophets did more than reveal the future, for their messages applied to the nation at that time. They were forthtellers more than foretellers, exposing the sin of the nation and calling them back to their covenant responsibilities before God. This was the task that

Jeremiah was set apart for. Selected for service. Is that you ? Is God putting His hand on your life ? A veteran missionary once gave the following advice to prospective missionaries, "*Don 't go to the field unless you can look the Devil straight in the face and say, ' I have a perfect right to be here.'*" (a) Did you notice,

(b) THE OBJECTION:

As Jeremiah says, "*Ah, Lord God behold I cannot speak for I am a child.*" (1:6) Now if you look at (1:2) we can date Jeremiah's call. It came in the 13th year of the reign of Josiah which was 627 B.C. so Jeremiah was about 18 years of age when he received the call of God, a mere child according to the notions of his day. No wonder he hesitated. When he looked at the work before him, and the wickedness around him, and the weakness within him, Jeremiah was sure that he was not the man for the job. "*Ah, Lord God, behold I cannot speak for I am a child.*" Dr. Rendall reminds us that

When Moses was called by the Lord he pled his Inability. (Ex 4:10) When Gideon was called by the Lord he pled his Inferiority. (Jud 6:15) When Isaiah was called by the Lord he pled his Impurity. When Jeremiah was called by the Lord he pled his Immaturity.

" *Ah, Lord God behold I cannot speak,*" reminds me of Moses " *O Lord I am not eloquent I am slow of speech.*" (Ex 4:10) Like this man that was getting ready

to bail out of an airplane and he said, " *I'm a little shook up about this.*" He said, " *what do I do ?*" And they said, " *Oh, its very simple. You just jump out, count to ten, and pull the ripcord.*" So as he went hurdling toward the ground he passed another man and someone heard him say, " *T-t-t-t-t-two.* " " *Ah Lord God, behold I cannot speak.*" The funny thing about Jeremiah's plea is he called God "*Lord,*" but he did not submit to His Lordship. My He's either Lord of all or not Lord at all. Is this not the crux of the matter of excuses ? You see, any time we offer an excuse for not coming to church, not fulfilling a position, not witnessing to some soul, or simply not doing God what says we are not submitting to His Lordship. You may sing "*He is Lord,*" but is He really your Lord ?

Jeremiah shrank from the work thrust upon by God, but God would not take no for answer. So He gave young Jeremiah three instructions, " *Go, where I send you, speak what I command you, and don't be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you.*" Now that's

(c) THE PROTECTION:

As we have noted Jeremiah was about 18 years of age when he began to preach and he was very, very nervous. So God reassures him: "*Jeremiah, you have my presence, I am with you.*" He knew that the Lord was with him. My as you face that difficult assignment, do you realize that the Lord is with you ? "*For he hath said I will never leave thee not forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do*

unto me." (Heb 13:5-6) God reassures him. But that's not all.

God reinforces him: Look at (1:18) In other words none of the hostile looks or comments of the people would intimidate him. Anyone who has spoken in public will know what that means. We call Jeremiah " *the weeping prophet*," (9:1) and he was but he was also a courageous man who faced many dangers and trials and remained true to the Lord. Is the Lord calling you to special service ? Like Jeremiah are you fearful, nervous, and uncertain ? My the God who calls, equips (1:5) the God who equips, encourages (1:8) the God who encourages, fortifies us to do His work. (1) (2)

(3)THE THEMES OF HIS MINISTRY

Jeremiah's message was twofold. Destruction and construction. Did you notice that in (1:10) You see, when you study the Old Testament prophets there are a few truths that stand out. The first was,

- 1. Past Sin:** for the appearance of a prophet was always a sign that apostasy and rebellion were predominant in the nation. The nation had disobeyed God's law.
- 2. Present Responsibility:** the people must repent or God will sent judgment.
- 3. Future Hope:** the Lord will come one day and establish His glorious kingdom.

So the Lord didn't give Jeremiah a joyful message of deliverance. Can you imagine listening to a preacher for 40 years hammering away at the same message ? Judgment ! Judgment ! Judgment ! Now we notice here,

(a) *Judgment on the Sinning Nation: Ch's 2-45*

In this section Jeremiah predicts that Judah's punishment coming very quickly. He appealed to his countrymen to repent and avoid God's judgment by an invader. (7: 1-7 26:1-9) Once invasion was certain after Judah refused to repent he pleaded with them not to resist the Babylonian conqueror in order to prevent total destruction. (27:12) Can you imagine how that went down ? My Jeremiah was regarded as a traitor. He was misunderstood, persecuted, arrested, imprisoned and more than once his life was in danger. *You see, the people then, just like the people now didn't want to hear the truth, but Jeremiah told them plainly that they were defying the Lord, disobeying the Law, and destined for judgment.* (1:14 4:6 12:14)

In (Ch 1) the Lord gave Jeremiah two signs about what would happen. There was,

1. The Sign of the Almond Tree: (1:11-12) The almond tree is the first to awaken after the winters sleep, and this sign symbolized the nearness of events that were to come.

2. ***The Sign of the Boiling Pot: (1:13-15)*** This symbolized the eruption of the Babylonians into Palestine.

Yet beyond this doom and gloom comes a ray of hope. For some of the most positive prophecies about the future of Israel are found in Jeremiah. Bible scholars call (Ch 30-33) "*The Book of Consolation.*" It's the dawning of a new day for the people of Israel, not only for the exiles in Babylon (25:12) but also for the Jewish people in the latter days before the Lord returns. Look at (29:10-14) Do you what it would take to destroy Israel ? (31:35-37) If the sun quits rising, and the moon quits shining, and the waves of the sea roll no more, then Israel will cease to exist. My the fact that the name Israel, is back on the map today is proof that God keeps His promises. There will always be an Israel and there still is.

(b) Judgment on the Surrounding Nations:
Ch's 46-51

Do you recall that Jeremiah was called to be "*a prophet unto the nations.*" (1:5) He had spoken to his people for over forty years but they would not listen, now he speaks to the nations related in some way to the Jewish people. One by one he predicted judgments from God on various nations. In the closing chapters of this book there are messages for Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, and Elam as well as Babylon. There's a phrase that's repeated in these chapters time and again. Do you know what it is ? "*I will.*" (4:25-26) Do you know something ? "*History is His story.*" Benjamin Franklin

said, "*I have lived Sir, a long time and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of this men.*" Do you believe that ?

God see's what the nations do and He rewards them justly. My have the nations of our day acted any better than the nations of Jeremiah's day ? Abortion, genocide, international terrorism, the abuse of kids and a host of lather sins have stained the hands of nations with blood. What will they do when the Judge becomes angry and starts to avenge the innocent ? (Heb 10:31) (1) (2) (3)

(4)THE TRIALS OF HIS MINISTRY

For Jeremiah faced major trials. There was,

- 1. Trial by Death Threats: (11:18-23)**
- 2. Trial by Isolation: (15:15-21)**
- 3. Trial by Stocks: (19:14-20:18)**
- 4. Trial by Arrest: (26:7-24)**
- 5. Trial by Challenge: (28:10-16)**
- 6. Trial by Destruction: (36:1-32)**
- 7. Trial by Imprisonment: (37:15)**
- 8. Trial by Starvation: (38:1-6)**
- 9. Trial by Chains: (40:10,)**
- 10.Trial by Rejection: (f:1-43:4)**

Let's go over to (15:15-21) Jeremiah here is under severe strain. He is under tremendous pressure. Why ? Well as Dr. Ted Rendall reminds us, there was,

(a) UNCEASING OPPOSITION:

Look at his prayer in (15:15) That persecution was fanned into flame by his own townspeople. The people of Anathoth, Jeremiah's hometown, attempted to assassinate the prophet. (11:18-12:6) It injured their family pride that this teenager was going around upsetting the whole of Jerusalem. From then on, he was branded a traitor. He was rejected by the prophets because they were false prophets. He was shunned by the priests because he spoke against the priests job, the Temple and the sacrifices. The kings regarded him as a political traitor and the people hated him hatching various plots to end his life. You talk about opposition, Jeremiah knew all about it.

The famous preacher John Henry Jowett said on one occasion, "*Preaching that costs nothing accomplishes nothing.*" That certainly applies to Jeremiah. For ever an Old Testament servant had to take up his cross in order to follow the Lord it was Jeremiah. Could it be that you are facing opposition because of your witness ? Is that stand against you coming from your own family ? Your own town ? Your neighbours ? Perhaps like Jeremiah you feel like quitting.

(b) **UNRESPONSIVE CIRCUMSTANCES:**

Did you know that discouragement can come from two causes ? It can arise from a sense of our own inability (1:6) or it come from the unresponsive circumstances in which we labour. Jeremiah had conquered the first but was suffering the last, at least for a time. It was the failure of his people that brought Jeremiah to a place of discouragement. Why wasn't the Word he was preaching

bearing fruit and changing the nation ? Was it really worth it all staying there and ministering to such a hardhearted people ? Why was Jeremiah unable to reach and win them ? He said at one time "*A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land, the prophets prophesy falsely and the priest bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so.*" (5:31-32 8:20) Do you know something about this test ? Are you preaching away with an apparent lack of success ? Do you feel that in that Sunday School class, that work with the elderly, that ministry in the community that's all in vain ? (a) (b)

(c) **UNRELIEVED ISOLATION:**

For as he recounts his past experience in (15:16-17) he says, "*Thy words were found and I did eat them,*" no doubt referring to his call in (Ch 1) He then mentions the cost of answering that call, "*I sat not in the assembly of the mockers nor rejoiced, I sat alone because of thy hand.*" Do you know what Jeremiah experienced ? Social suffering. God did not allow him to marry. "*The word of the Lord came also unto me saying, Thou shalt not take thee a wife neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place.*" (16:5) Coupled with that the Lord said to Jeremiah "*For thus saith the Lord, Enter not into the house of mourning neither go to lament or bemoan.*" (16:5) Jeremiah was to maintain a thorough separation from the ordinary and legitimate functions of social life.

He was told there is no point in settling down to a comfortable lifestyle because judgment is near. Can you imagine the terrible sense of isolation and aloneness that

must have gripped Jeremiah during those dark years ? And is his fortitude not so relevant for our age ? With our nation seemingly hell bent on undermining every moral law based on the Scriptures, with religious denominations denying the fundamentals of the faith, with modernism dominating many evangelical churches, the sense of aloneness and pressure for conformity is almost unbearable. As Gareth Crossley says "*Religious leaders of our day do not how to blush.*" (8:11-12) But quickly there was also the trial of,

(d) UNANSWERED PRAYER:

For Jeremiah is forced to cry out " *why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed ?*" (15:18 5:3 32:17) Indeed he's laying the blame for his circumstances at God's door. He is openly accusing God of having failed him in the hour of his spiritual need, in the time of his spiritual thirst. Jeremiah got so low that he wanted to quit. He said, " *I will not make mention of him nor speak any more in his name.*" (20:7-9) Is that you ? Do you feel like quitting ? My it is always too soon to quit. Who are you doing it for anyhow ? Could it be that Jeremiah forgot his calling ? One thing is certain, in the last chapter of his life we are confronted with,

(5) THE TRIUMPHS OF HIS MINISTRY

You see,

(a) He was Encouraged to Continue his Ministry:

Look at (15:19) The Lord was going to Reinstate Him: W.G. Blaikie has paraphrased this verse like this, " *If thou returnest to Me and givest up these doubts and reproaches, I will take thee back as My servant, to stand before Me, and if thou bringest forth in thy heart, good, instead of unworthy thoughts of Me, thou shalt be My mouth.*" I wonder do you need to be reinstated ?

The Lord was going to Empower Him: Jeremiah was going to be like a wall of brass to withstand the attacks of his people. (15:20)

The Lord was going to be With Him: " *For I am with thee, saith the Lord.*" (15:20) My have you stumbled in your ministry ? Have you forgot your calling ? The Lord wants to reinstate you, empower you, be with you. He was with Jeremiah so much so that,

(b) He was Enabled to Complete his Ministry:

All that Jeremiah predicted came true. The nation was taken to captive to Babylon. After 586 B.C. he was forced jto go with a fleeing to remnant to Egypt. (Ch's 43, 44) Some say he was stoned to death there for preaching the truth. Whatever, Jeremiah finished well. *Imagine preaching for over 40 years and in the end seeing everything fall apart.* But God didn't call Jeremiah to be successful. He did not call him to win a popularity contest. Measured by human standards he was a failure, but measured by the will of God he was a great success. My do we not need men and women of Jeremiah's caliber in our churches today ? *Christians, who consider*

faithfulness more than fame, loyalty more than popularity, the praise of God more than the praise of men.

Are you such a person ? Perhaps you're saying, " *There's a price to pay.*" There certainly there is. But my there is a crown to win, there is a Christ to please, and there is a commendation to hear. " *Well done, thou good and faithful servant*" (Matt 25:21)

**Go labour on tis not for naught
Thy earthly loss is heavenly gain
Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee not
The Master praises what are men**