



Lessons from the Life of Jeremiah



BARUCH WRITING THE PROPHECIES OF JEREMIAH

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF JEREMIAH

“Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

“Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.

“But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.

“Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.

“Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.

“See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.” (Jer. 1:5-10)

When the Lord God commissioned Jeremiah for a great work, the prophet’s response was similar to that of Moses after being in the Wilderness of Sinai for forty years. God called Moses

to go to Pharaoh as His instrument in the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt. Described as the meekest man in all the earth, Moses felt insecure and was discouraged in spite of his former greatness in Egypt, for he feared that his own people would not receive him because of his lack of eloquence (Num. 12:3). He did not think he had adequate words to express himself properly in a way that would be convincing to his people. Nevertheless, God commissioned Moses to go to Pharaoh, assuring him that he would be strengthened. God not only gave Moses much power but also provided Aaron as a mouthpiece or spokesman. Incidentally, there are Scriptural clues to show that Moses himself was a great orator from other standpoints.

Like Moses, Jeremiah felt insecure, saying, "Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child." However, God said He had purposed that Jeremiah would be His instrument and prophet over nations and kingdoms. Jeremiah was appointed "to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." Of course he did not do anything politically or militarily to destroy nations. Rather, as God's spokesman, he *prophesied* of trials and calamities that would come on various nations. When the calamities occurred, it seemed as if Jeremiah

merely had to pronounce the words and the judgments came to pass. The power and the truthfulness of his message were manifested by the fulfillments.

“Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see a rod of an almond tree.

“Then said the LORD unto me, Thou hast well seen: for I *will hasten* my word to perform it.

“And the word of the LORD came unto me the second time, saying, What seest thou? And I said, I see a seething pot; and the face thereof is toward the north [that is, *from* the face of the north].

“Then the LORD said unto me, Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land.

“For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the LORD; and they shall come, and they shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah.

“And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands.

“Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them.

“For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land.

“And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee.” (Jer. 1:11-19)

Jeremiah’s first reaction was to say, “I am but a child.” But God promised to be with the prophet and make him a strong character, for the Holy Spirit would operate mightily through Jeremiah; that is, the power of God would be so strong in the prophet’s life that he would indeed be courageous. Like an “iron pillar,” he would boldly declare the Word of God with inflexibility and faithfulness. God said further that He would make Jeremiah a “defenced city.” Not only was a well-defended city difficult to bring into subjection, but also a one- or two-year siege was sometimes required to cause the city to surrender. In addition, Jeremiah would be made like “brasen walls,” not just cement walls but *brazen* walls that were virtually impenetrable.

And that is what happened. When God's Spirit came upon Jeremiah in the declaration of prophecies and judgments, he was almost invincible in the power of his message and logic, starting with the king at the top and reaching down to the common people.

“Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! surely thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul.” (Jer. 4:10)

Here is another experience. The Scriptures are frank and open in reporting the Lord's dealings with His people. For instance, while the Word may reveal an inadequacy of development along a certain line, it also reports growth in faithfulness and character development as time goes on. After the prophecy that Jerusalem would be destroyed and great calamities would occur because of the sins of the people, Jeremiah said to God, “Surely you have deceived the people by saying there would be peace, whereas the sword reaches unto the soul.” The Prophet Isaiah preceded Jeremiah, and much of Isaiah's message was of a happy nature, being predictions of future blessings that would come upon the nation of Israel. No doubt at this particular period of Jeremiah's experience, he thought that the calamities he was

predicting were a contradiction to the prophecies of blessing. To have the nation destroyed would seem to frustrate the divine purpose of having Israel be an instrument of blessing. And so the utterance of Jeremiah, as recorded in verse 10 above, reveals a weakness in his character at this point, but changes took place in the prophet's life as time went on.

“To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it.

“Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD; I am weary with holding in: I will pour it out upon the children abroad, and upon the assembly of young men together: for even the husband with the wife shall be taken, the aged with him that is full of days.

“And their houses shall be turned unto others, with their fields and wives together: for I will stretch out my hand upon the inhabitants of the land, saith the LORD.” (Jer. 6:10-12)

At this juncture in his life, Jeremiah was “weary with holding in.” He began to realize the worthlessness of a *superficial* righteousness—that God's Law had to be in the inner man for the

blessing of the Lord to fully enter one's life. The Law Covenant was ineffectual unless it was received into an open and ready heart. As we continue, we will see more lessons along this line.

“Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the LORD hath rejected them.” (Jer. 6:30)

In the sixth chapter, the nation of Israel was likened to “reprobate silver” because the evil at that particular time was waxing worse and worse. So evil was the nation in government, in religion, and in the daily affairs of the people that it was comparable to a worthless, very poor grade of silver incapable of being refined because of so many impurities. Some silver reaches a point where no amount of burning will extricate or separate the impurities, and Jeremiah observed the nation of Israel from this standpoint. As far as any ministry he might perform or as far as any reform was concerned, the situation was hopeless.

As a result, Jeremiah became very despondent. Evidently he had prayed about the matter, beseeching God to have mercy on the people of Israel and to help them in their affliction, for it seemed that nothing could save them. God's reply to Jeremiah was as follows:

**“Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee.”
(Jer. 7:16)**

Even though Jeremiah had spoken strong messages and was a pillar of righteousness in the land, he realized the people’s undone condition and was very compassionate toward them. Therefore, his prayers were not just silent ones but were very emotional, accompanied with crying and beseeching and interceding on their behalf. But Jeremiah was told to conform his thinking and emotions to *God’s* thinking and the way *God* would steer him.

Some of Jeremiah’s subsequent thoughts, feelings, and emotions are recorded.

“Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!

“Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! for they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men.

“And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the

earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the LORD.

“Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders.

“And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity.” (Jer. 9:1-5)

What a deplorable condition Jeremiah experienced! His emotionalism manifests another aspect of his character. Not only was he fiery for righteousness and his hatred of iniquity, but also he was emotional from the standpoint of concern for his people. His reaction points up certain lessons in the lives of God’s people, as will be seen.

“O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.

“O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.

“Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name: for they have eaten up Jacob, and devoured

him, and consumed him, and have made his habitation desolate.” (Jer. 10:23-25)

Jeremiah realized that in his *own* flesh, he could do no good thing (and neither could the nation), but he put himself in the hands and mercy of the Lord and asked for *correction* “with *judgment*.” The word “judgment” usually has a favorable connotation, meaning the bringing forth of *victory* in either the individual or the nation God is dealing with. Wisdom, correction, and help are all implied as God’s objective in rendering judgment. Jeremiah was asking for judgment not in a condemnatory sense but in a corrective sense; that is, he wanted to be corrected but with judgment.

“[Thus saith the LORD to Jeremiah] Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble.

“[Jeremiah replied] And the LORD hath given me knowledge of it, and I know it: then thou showedst me their doings.

“But I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, saying, Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from

the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered.” (Jer. 11:14,18,19)

Many of God’s people in both Old and New Testament times, including Jeremiah, have spoken strong, corrective messages, but the messages were uttered in the spirit of *love* and *helpfulness*. However, as is usually the case and as happened with Jeremiah, the people resented correction and regarded him in a very unfavorable light. In fact, they wanted to put him to death, to “cut him off from the land of the living.” While mercy and pity were welling up in Jeremiah on behalf of the nation, the people’s emotions were the opposite. Jeremiah was so guileless and naive that he was greatly surprised by the reaction of the people, who misunderstood his good motives and intentions and wanted to murder him. God’s people often have very hard experiences in obeying His commandments and in uttering His message.

“But, O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause.” (Jer. 11:20)

Now Jeremiah realized that in spite of his desires to help the people of Israel, they *needed correction*. The nation’s attitude of devising mischief against his life revealed a wrong heart

condition that prevented them from recognizing him as a prophet of the Lord.

“Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place.” (Jer. 16:2)

Jeremiah suffered deprivation in another way too. He was forbidden to marry.

“Now Pashur the son of Immer the priest, who was also chief governor in the house of the LORD, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things.

“Then Pashur smote Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the LORD.

“And it came to pass on the morrow, that Pashur brought forth Jeremiah out of the stocks. Then said Jeremiah unto him, The LORD hath not called thy name Pashur, but Magor-missabib.” (Jer. 20:1-3)

Jeremiah was placed in the stocks in a *high* gate of the wall of Jerusalem and thus was made a spectacle or gazing-stock before the nation. His head and neck were pushed through a hole in a beam, and his wrists were locked into two other holes so that he remained in a stooped, cramped position all that day and into the next. Meanwhile, people, *including the religious leaders*, jeered and

spit upon him or did whatever amused them. And other problems, such as his toilet needs, brought shame and ignominy. What a deplorable treatment of one's fellowman, especially a true prophet of the Lord! For shame that religious and civil authorities similarly persecuted those with differing religious views in the Dark Ages! And even up to relatively recent times in the New England states, the stocks were used as a form of punishment. Cannot men reason together on their differences?

This experience was indeed very hard for Jeremiah. When he was released from the stocks, God spoke through him to predict dire punishment that would come on Pashur, the one who was responsible for putting Jeremiah in the stocks, and on his friends, as follows:

“For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will make thee a terror to thyself, and to all thy friends: and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and thine eyes shall behold it: and I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive into Babylon, and shall slay them with the sword.” (Jer. 20:4)

As a result of his experiences, Jeremiah became greatly discouraged and cried out to the Lord.

“O LORD, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me.

“For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily.

“Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name....” (Jer. 20:7-9a)

Jeremiah realized that indignities and persecuting experiences had come upon him because of his faithfulness in preaching God’s Word. At first, he thought that perhaps it would be wiser not to speak out so strongly. But Jeremiah had a sense of justice and could not stand the evil and the unrighteous conditions that existed in the nation. When he stopped speaking strongly for a while, the sense of justice built up within him until he could not remain silent any longer.

“... But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.” (Jer. 20:9b)

Jeremiah’s righteous indignation, as well as his desire to help the nation by warning of impending disaster, could not be

stified. The prophet could not hold back the Word of God. Thus his impetuosity was an asset in his development.

In addition to the prophecies of doom that the Lord commissioned Jeremiah to give, he had the privilege of telling of the New Covenant, which would be made with the nation of Israel way down the stream of time in our day.

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.” (Jer. 31:31)

At the dark moment when the enemy was entering the land, Jeremiah purchased some property in order to demonstrate his confidence that at a later time, after the judgment, God’s favor and mercy would return to the nation of Israel. Of course an individual would not normally purchase land at such a time, for he would know that the conqueror would seize the land and it would be worthless. Instead Jeremiah *publicly* bought land and declared to the nation that he would someday return and claim that property for his inheritance. Moreover, the “evidence” (the deed) was made out in duplicate, one copy sealed and one not sealed. Both copies were given to Baruch, his trusted scribe, with the instruction to hide them for “many days.”

“And Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

“Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth: for the right of redemption is thine to buy it.

“So Hanameel mine uncle’s son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said unto me, Buy my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine; buy it for thyself. Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.

“And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle’s son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver.

“And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances.

“So I took the evidence of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open:

“And I gave the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch ... in the sight of Hanameel mine uncle’s son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison.

“And I charged Baruch before them, saying,

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days.

“For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land.” (Jer. 32:6-15)

Jeremiah subsequently went to Egypt and eventually died *without obtaining the land*, but in the general resurrection in God’s Kingdom, soon to be established, *the deed will be found, and he will get his property back* (Matt. 6:10). In fact, Jeremiah is the very prophet who said that God set “signs and wonders” in Egypt and Israel.

“... [God] hast set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, even unto this day, and in Israel, and among other men; and hast made thee a name, as at this day.” (Jer. 32:20)

One of these “signs” was Jeremiah’s deed. When the deed is found in Israel in the near future, it will be an evidence of the truthfulness of Jeremiah’s prediction that was given under the spirit of the Lord.

In his life, Jeremiah experienced three major periods of doubt and passionate repugnance to his experiences as a prophet of the Lord, yet his life as a whole, as analyzed and seen in his book, changed to one of *complete self-conquest and full, settled trust in the Almighty God*. In the following verses, we can see that the prophet was mellowing, for he realized all of the experiences would ultimately work for the good of his people. With full confidence and trust in the great Jehovah and His coming mercy, Jeremiah knew with certainty that the favorable prophecies of his ministry would be fulfilled in the future.

“Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee:

“Thou showest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of hosts, is his name,

“Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” (Jer. 32:17-19)

Frank Shallieu