

Promises Made, Promises Kept

By Don Green

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Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Well, I'm interested to see for myself how this message goes this morning. I know that sounds odd but to those that have preached it doesn't sound odd at all. I have about 45 minutes of introduction for a 10 minute conclusion that is very very important for all of us. This is a very timely and strategic time for you to be with us here at Truth Community Church and I'm glad that God has brought you to be with us for such a message as this. It's a message for the times in which we live.

If you've been with us over the past three weeks or so, you know that we've been considering the book of Jeremiah from the Old Testament not on a verse by verse basis but simply in a thematic broad overview sense, and we've done this because we believe that in Jeremiah we see parallels for our own day. God in the book of Jeremiah prophesied to his sinful people that he was about to judge their nation. God is holy, he expects holiness from his people, and in the book of Jeremiah you see the sin and the rebellion of the people that were alive in that day some 2,500 years ago from our perspective, and God prophesied and warned them that judgment was coming, called them to repent and promised them restoration later on after the judgment had come. The broad themes and even just the chronological sweep of the significance of this book is just significant and wonderful to contemplate.

The full history of Jeremiah is well beyond our scope today but there are aspects of the history that we need to consider and understand in order to properly apply the things that we're going to see at the end of the message this morning. Let's just say this, that God kept his promise to bring judgment upon the nation. They refused to repent. Their sin had been going on for centuries and for centuries literally, you know, hundreds and hundreds of years they had been living in defiance of the God that had rescued them from Egypt, and it's enough for our purposes today to say that the nation experienced three waves of exile, exile meaning that the nation of Babylon forcibly removed the Jews from their own land and carried them away. There were basically three waves of deportation that took place over about a 20 year period from 605 BC to about 586 BC. Daniel and his cohorts were carried off in the first wave, we read about that in Daniel 1. A Jewish king named King Jehoiachin, that name will become important, King Jehoiachin was carried off with many nobles in 597 BC. And then finally the city of Jerusalem was destroyed in the final wave of exile in 586 BC. So there was this progressive wave of exile taking place over the course of about 20 years in response to 500 years of sin of the people and even more,

I'm dating 500 years back to the end of the reign of David is the reason for that chronological reference, and with the implication that this exile was going to last for 70 years. So we see God working out a great plan in accordance with his sovereignty and his holiness, working out a plan over the course of centuries. Keep that in mind. Make a mental note. We'll come back to that later on. But what I want to do today is right at this point, I should say, is to focus and give you a little bit of biblical information, you might say, about King Jehoiachin in case he happens to turn out to be important. I have four sections to this message before the conclusion. We're going to look at four different aspects of this time in Israel's life, the life of the nation of Judah, the southern nation.

First of all, we're going to see a failed king. A failed king. It is a bit of a jigsaw puzzle. I do not like jigsaw puzzles. It is a bit of a jigsaw puzzle to put together the biblical data on King Jehoiachin. Stay with me here because it is important. He is called by two other names in Scripture, he is called by the name Jeconiah and also the shortened version Coniah, so you can read and you'll be reading about the same man with three different names: Jehoiachin, Jeconiah and Coniah. His name is similar to others who reigned at the time and so it gets very difficult to keep it all straight in your mind. I'm going to greatly oversimplify things for you here today.

Now to do that, I want you to turn in your Bibles to 2 Kings 24 in your Old Testament. 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles is the way this works. We're just going to look at a brief historic narrative passage about Jehoiachin to give us some background information about this man who was king over God's people. It tells us and I understand that we're parachuting into the middle of a battlefield, so to speak, and so there is a lot that we're leaving out that would orient us more but I didn't want to spend six weeks talking about historical background here to make a 10 minute point. We read in 2 Kings 24:8 that Jehoiachin, there is the man of the hour, "Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king," and he became king in 597 BC. He was 18 years old when he became king, "and he reigned three months in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done." Let's just pause there for a moment. Let's keep it comfortable, take a little breath already. There is nothing, absolutely nothing about this king that would seem to commend itself to our consideration. He was a young king, he was only 18 years old when he ascended to the throne. He was a brief king, he reigned for only three months in Jerusalem. And what is more, he was an evil king. He was keeping company with all of the kings that had gone before him, at least most of them, and so we see this young, ineffective, short-reigned king being called to our attention in Scripture. That's all you need to note for now.

Now as part of God's prophesied judgment on the nation, this King Jehoiachin was carried off into exile and we read about that in the following seven verses. Let's look at verse 10 with me, "At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon went up to Jerusalem, and the city came under siege. And Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came to the city, while his servants were besieging it. Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he and his mother and his servants and his captains and his officials. So the king of Babylon took him captive in the eighth year of his reign."

Meaning the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, not Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin only reigned three months so it's obviously talking about his reign, referring to Nebuchadnezzar, the eighth year of his reign.

What else did Nebuchadnezzar do? Verse 13, "He carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, just as the LORD had said. Then he led away into exile all Jerusalem and all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land. So," summary statement here, "he led Jehoiachin away into exile to Babylon; also the king's mother and the king's wives and his officials and the leading men of the land, he led away into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. All the men of valor, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths, one thousand, all strong and fit for war, and these the king of Babylon brought into exile to Babylon."

So, you know, as I'm standing here at the moment, it's a very difficult thing to justify before you and to you why I am spending this time explaining King Jehoiachin to you. He is the Jewish version, he is the Jewish version of William Henry Harrison, if that name means anything to you. William Henry Harrison was the ninth President of the United States back in 1841. He died on the 32nd day after he was inaugurated, from March 4 to April 4. He was a brief hiccup in the presidential line and he died and had such a short reign in office that he is largely forgotten as shown by the blank faces that I met when I mentioned his name to you. He is buried just up the road in North Bend, Ohio. But King Jehoiachin seems to be the Jewish version of William Henry Harrison, a short, brief, ineffective reign and then God removes him and we move on. Strange, isn't it, that he's mentioned like this in Scripture? Strange, isn't it, that a pastor would spend time focusing on a man like that? A young, brief, evil king? What's the point of even paying attention to such a one as that? Let's just leave that question hanging in the air, kind of like, you know, fireworks go off without wind and the smoke just kind of hangs in the air and you see it hanging over what comes next. Let's do that with King Jehoiachin here this morning and move on to something else.

Second section of today's message: a forecast distinction. A forecast distinction. God does something through the ministry of Jeremiah in chapter 24, Jeremiah 24, and I do believe that this jigsaw puzzle will come together for you in the end, so you just kind of trust me as I lead you through some highlights here. We're used to tour guides pointing out certain things as we visit a historic home, doesn't show all of the details, just points out particular high points of interest. Well, God had something to say after Jeconiah, Jehoiachin was carried off into exile, and we see it here in Jeremiah 24 and you see how this links together chronologically. Jeremiah 24:1, "After Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah." Okay, I told you in advance Jehoiachin went by the name of Jeconiah so this doesn't throw us off now. We understand we're talking about the same person with using two different names. After he had carried him off, "and the officials of Judah with the craftsmen and smiths from Jerusalem and had brought them to Babylon, the LORD showed me," Jeremiah

speaking, the Lord gave him a vision, as it were, "the LORD showed me: behold, two baskets of figs set before the temple of the LORD!" Well, that's odd. What could that possibly mean? "One basket had very good figs, like first-ripe figs, and the other basket had very bad figs which could not be eaten due to rottenness. Then the LORD said to me, 'What do you see, Jeremiah?' And I said, 'Figs, the good figs, very good; and the bad figs, very bad, which cannot be eaten due to rottenness.'" So Jeremiah reports what he sees in the vision to the Lord who gave it to him.

Now what is the significance of that vision at this point in time? What did this vision mean? Well, God interprets the vision for him beginning in verse 4, "Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel, "Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the captives of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans.'"" That's another reference, it's another term used to identify the people that we've earlier called the Babylonians. God says, "I will regard as good the captives who Babylon has carried off into exile with Jeconiah, with Jehoiachin." And he says in verse 6 and he's saying this decades in advance, he says, "I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them again to this land; and I will build them up and not overthrow them, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart."

Stop for a moment here and let's just talk about this and I'm glad you're staying with me. It's really important to do so. So what God is saying in the background, God is interpreting current history for Jeremiah and telling him what's going to happen later on. What happened is God carries them away into exile by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar and says now what he's going to do with them. He says, "I am going to bless them. I will protect them and one day I will bring them back to this land from which I have expelled them." In other words, "I have this perfectly under control. I have not forgotten My people. I will be good to them even though for now" – now watch this and put yourself, do this for me, put yourself in the sandals of the Jews that had been carried off into exile. This looked like an utter catastrophe. They had been kicked out of their land. They had suffered a military embarrassment, a humiliation, and they had been carried away to a land that they did not know by a people whose language they did not speak. That's serious and what God is telling Jeremiah, he says, "I have My eye on them. What you see in this exile is not the end of them, one day I'm going to bring them back. One day I'll bring them back and they will be changed. I'll give them a new heart and they'll be back in this land and I will bless them and they will be My people and they will worship Me as they should have all along," so to speak.

That's one aspect, that's the good figs. The Jews in exile in Babylon were the good figs. The exile did not mean that God had abandoned them. He was simply doing something that was outside of their immediate comprehension. And imagine and it's easy for us to kind of gloss over and let our eyes glaze over what we're reading and forget the significance and what it was like to those who lived through it. Imagine if a foreign army from Russia had swept into America and forcibly removed you from your home and relocated you to St. Petersburg or to Moscow, meaning those cities in Russia. And you're

in the midst of a land that is foreign to you, you don't know the language that is being spoken. Everything about home is gone and you are completely disoriented. That was the experience of the Jews at that time and here is God speaking to Jeremiah saying, "I know what it's like now but I'm going to be faithful to them. It's going to take place over a long period of time but I will bring them back." That's one aspect. There is a distinction being given here of the good figs, those Jews who were relocated to Babylon.

Let's see what he has to say about those that are left in the land. Verse 8, Jeremiah 24:8, "But like the bad figs which cannot be eaten due to rottenness--indeed, thus says the LORD--so I will abandon Zedekiah king of Judah and his officials." Zedekiah was the king who replaced Jehoiachin on the throne. God is saying, "I will abandon that king and the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land and the ones who dwell in the land of Egypt. I will make them a terror and an evil for all the kingdoms of the earth, as a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse in all places where I will scatter them. I will send the sword, the famine and the pestilence upon them until they are destroyed from the land which I gave to them and their forefathers." God has made a very clear distinction here. The Jews in exile he is going to watch over, protect and bring back. The ones who have stayed in the land that are there are going to be a recipient of even further judgment and he's just going to drive them to the wind as a consequence of their sin.

Now what you need to understand is this, this is counterintuitive. You would think that the ones who stayed in the land were an emblem of faithfulness and were the ones who were going to experience the ultimate blessing of God as you're watching this unfold in real time, but the truth of the matter was the exact opposite. It was the ones that God had carried away that were going to experience his future blessing and future restoration, and the ones in the land were going to experience his judgment. So what we find is this, as the nation has been divided up by exile and by those who remain, and in this word that God had given Jeremiah – watch this – in a situation that they could not have begun to understand what was unfolding apart from the word of God, like us being carried off to Moscow seemingly in utter defeat, what they needed to do, what the people needed to do was to trust and obey God as national events unfolded, and they needed to trust and obey God as these national events unfolded in ways that they could not understand, and ways that were severely disruptive and painful to them. God says, "You must trust Me for this."

Indeed he goes even further in chapter 29, if you'll turn there with me. The history around this and the narrative of Jeremiah in this last half of the book is wonderful Scripture. It pains me to just give an overview of it. I commend it to you for your reading. But in Jeremiah 29:4 you see God addressing the exiles in Babylon and what does he say to them? "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease." He's saying, "This is life now. Settle into it and live normally. Settle into it and build your families, build your homes, place down roots while you are there." And further he says in verse 7, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf;

for in its welfare you will have welfare." Again, utterly counterintuitive. You can imagine just building on the hypothetical that I've placed before you, I would venture to say that most of you if you were carried off into exile into Russia would be angry, would be bitter and could not wait for it to be over, and you would hate the overlords who had done that to you. Well, the Jews were no different from us. They would have been tempted that way. God gives them a different message and says, "Settle into this. Trust Me. Live life. Enjoy life and seek the good of the people that are around you."

And he goes on in verse 10, he says, "For thus says the LORD, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you,' declares the LORD, 'and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,' declares the LORD, 'and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.'" God has set forth a very serious distinction between the two groups of Jews as we're referring to them today. Those in exile, he says, "I have a plan for you. Settle down, build your life there. It's going to be 70 years, it's going to be a long time but I have My eye on you. I will restore your fortunes. I will be faithful to you. Just trust Me through this exile and I'll bring you back." To the horribly rebellious Jews who were still in the land, we're not going to even have time to look through just how wicked they were and how they manifested that, there was the promise of judgment and utter extinction to them. Here's the thing, beloved, God had made promises, he had made promises to those in exile and he said, "I will keep them. Just trust Me." To those that were wicked that stayed in their sin, that stayed in their rebellion, he made a different kind of promise, he promised them with judgment and as we're going to see momentarily, he kept that promise too.

You see, God is not only sovereign and knows the end from the beginning, when God speaks his word, he keeps it without exception, and men who are living through the outworking of his purposes in time, day by day, month by month, men who are living in the outworking of his purposes in actual real time are not in a position to evaluate what God's going to do in the future, they're not in a position to evaluate whether a particular event is good or bad, and they are not in a position to evaluate what the ultimate outcome of it will be either. That's true globally. That's true in your life personally. God does things in ways that are not our ways. He acts according to thoughts that are not our thoughts. The fact that we do not understand it in time is no diminishment of the good purposes of God whatsoever and you and I must build our lives on that truth. God is a God makes promises to his people, he keeps them, and no matter what happens to us in the interim, you and I are to trust him, to be confident of the outcome, to believe and to affirm his goodness even when everything around us seems to contradict that fact.

Now so we've seen, we have seen a failed king, a forecast distinction. I'm still in the introductory part of the message, you might say here and I'm two sections into it. Let's go to section number three, we can title the third point this way: a fallen city. A fallen city

and this is painful to see, painful to read about. God having, as it were, disposed of his promises toward the exiles, we get a preview of what's going to happen to them over the long-term. Jeremiah brings us back to describe the history of what happened to those Jews who were still in the city and whom God was not finished with yet in his judgment upon them. What happens to the fallen city? What happens? What happens while the exiles, they're about 10 years into their exile and settling into the new place that God had brought them, what happens in the meantime back in the homeland back in Jerusalem? Fallen city. Meanwhile while the exiles were settling in and building their gardens, the Babylonians brought God's severe judgment on the city.

Look at Jeremiah 39 beginning in verse 1, and this is enough to send chills down the spine of a godly man who reads it. Jeremiah 39:1, "Now when Jerusalem was captured in the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah." Okay, so nine years Zedekiah had been on the throne there in Jerusalem. This is nine years after the others had been carried off into exile, the chronology helps orient us here, "in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came to Jerusalem and laid siege to it; in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, in the ninth day of the month, the city wall was breached." So the city had been under siege for about a year and a half and finally the time came their defensive walls were breached and the Babylonian army had access to everything inside. The judgment was literally pouring in at this moment.

Verse 4, "When Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw them, they fled and went out of the city at night by way of the king's garden through the gate between the two walls; and he went out toward the Arabah. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and they seized him and brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he passed sentence on him." Nebuchadnezzar passed sentence on the king of Judah. It's painful even today to read about the severity of what comes next. Before we do that, understand and remember that what we are about to read is a manifestation of the judgment of God on these sinful people. The severity of the judgment should not offend us toward God, it should offend us toward the sin which provoked him to this action. We get an earthly insight into the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the exceeding blackness of rebellion and iniquity against God. We see something of the severity of God in what we are about to see upon unrepentant sinful people. It is so important for you to understand that and not merely have an emotional reaction to the human events that we are about to see. This is the promised judgment of God on a wicked people.

So what is it like? Remember Zedekiah is the representative king and he's helpless at what followed. Verse 6, "Then the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes at Riblah; the king of Babylon also slew all the nobles of Judah." Zedekiah was forced to watch the execution of his own sons. He was forced to watch the execution of his own nobles. Helpless, utterly defeated and disgraced and humiliated before the strength and might, on a human level the strength and might of the power of the king of Babylon. That was the last thing that he saw with his human eyes because, look at verse 7, "He then blinded Zedekiah's eyes and bound him in fetters of bronze to bring him to Babylon." He saw this horror of bloodshed, perhaps heard ringing in his ears the cries of

anguish as his sons and his nobles were executed and it was the last thing that he would see on earth because Nebuchadnezzar blinded him so that he would never see anything better. The last thing he saw, humanly speaking, was the worst thing that he had ever seen.

But it didn't stop there. What happened after that, after Zedekiah was blinded? Verse 8, "The Chaldeans also burned with fire the king's palace and the houses of the people, and they broke down the walls of Jerusalem." As if that was not enough, more came upon the people. Verse 9, "As for the rest of the people who were left in the city, the deserters who had gone over to him and the rest of the people who remained, Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard carried them into exile in Babylon. But some of the poorest people who had nothing, [he] left behind in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at that time." This people had been utterly decimated at the hands of the king of Babylon, the severity of it. Imagine a Russian army watching on the news, watching them burn down the White House, burn down the Capitol building, watching the destruction of the great homes throughout our country and watching that all on live television, and just the utter decimation and the utter hopelessness of it all, and everything that was a symbol of our power being destroyed in front of our own eyes by a foreign invading conqueror. Well, it's not likely that you and I will see that but maybe the hypothetical gives us something of a sense of what this was like for the Jews. This was utterly devastating and God had told them this was coming. God had told them that judgment was about to happen and they still refused to repent. They preferred their rebellion to repentance and they found out something very important for all of us to know about a holy God: God when he warns about judgment is not bluffing. God does not bluff. He speaks, he gives people a long long leash to repent, gives them a lot of time to repent, but eventually God has the prerogative to bring the judgment that he predicted.

Now what happened to Jeremiah when the city was falling? Well, he stayed with the poorest of the people in the land. Jeremiah, the prophet, kept his post. He was still a prophet of God to the remaining few people that were still there in the land whom God had said they would still be judged even further. He kept his post. Chapter 40, verse 6, "Jeremiah went to Mizpah to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam and stayed with him among the people who were left in the land." That's all I want you to see. Jeremiah stayed there.

Now over the next four chapters, 40, 41 through 44, chapters 41 through 44, you have a historical narrative telling you what happened in the meantime. I made the painful decision to cut that material out of the message just for the sake of time, and I'll simply summarize it and oversimplify the history for you here now just for the sake of time so that we see the flow of what is happening. What happened to those Jews who were left in the city with Jeremiah, the king of Babylon appointed a man to oversee them, to be the one who implemented Babylonian policies and Babylonian rule, and enforce peace and order, law and order upon the people. Well, what did the Jews do with him? They assassinated him. They were really in trouble now, just humanly speaking. The king of Babylon appointed this leader over them and they assassinate him. What's going to happen to them, humanly speaking? The full fury of Babylon is about to come down upon them. They were manifesting their utter complete depravity and wickedness.

Now in the midst of that, Jeremiah comes to them, chapter 42, verse 10, and the people are fearful. Now they realize they've really done it now and Jeremiah speaks to the people and he encourages them to stay in the land. This is kind of an interim prophecy and promise of protection within the greater context of God's judgment coming down upon those who did. It'll all make sense here in a moment. Jeremiah tells them as they are frightened, they've got to figure out what they're going to do now that they have incited the wrath of the king of Babylon against them, Jeremiah says, "All you need to do here is trust God. I'll tell you what God has for you to do." Verse 9, "Thus says the LORD the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your petition before Him." Here's what God says to you, "If you will indeed stay in this land, then I will build you up and not tear you down, and I will plant you and not uproot you; for I will relent concerning the calamity that I have inflicted on you. Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you are now fearing; do not be afraid of him," declares the LORD, 'for I am with you to save you and deliver you from his hand. I will also show you compassion, so that he will have compassion on you and restore you to your own soil.'" And so after all that we've seen, after all of the rebellion and all of the judgment that's come down upon them, the God of the Old Testament comes to them and still promises them mercy. He says, "I will protect you. I will help you. Just trust Me and obey Me."

You would think, you would think that after the 100 percent fulfillment of everything that Jeremiah had said that would come upon them, they would say, "This time we'll listen. This time we'll pay attention. This time we'll heed." You'd think that. That's not what happened and God warns them, he says, verse 13, he says, "But if you are going to say, 'We will not stay in this land,' so as not to listen to the voice of the LORD your God, saying, 'No, but we will go to the land of Egypt, where we will not see war or hear the sound of a trumpet or hunger for bread, and we will stay there'; then in that case listen to the word of the LORD, O remnant of Judah. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'If you really set your mind to enter Egypt and go in to reside there, then the sword, which you are afraid of, will overtake you there in the land of Egypt; and the famine, about which you are anxious, will follow closely after you there in Egypt, and you will die there. So all the men who set their mind to go to Egypt to reside there will die by the sword, by famine and by pestilence; and they will have no survivors or refugees from the calamity that I am going to bring on them.'" In other words, they were looking at Egypt as a place of refuge. They were going to flee from their vulnerability to the king of Babylon, go to Egypt and find protection there. God says, "Don't do that. I have told you where your protection is, your protection is right here. I will protect you. I will restore you. But if you go your own stubborn way, here's what's going to happen." It was all laid out before them. After everything that had happened, after all of the warnings, after all of the fulfillment, after all of the judgment and with Jeremiah right there in their midst being a true prophet of God, what did they do? Do you think they listened? No. No. Look at chapter 43, verses 1 and 2, "But as soon as Jeremiah, whom the LORD their God had sent, had finished telling all the people all the words of the LORD their God--that is, all these words--Azariah the son of Hoshai, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the arrogant men said to Jeremiah, 'You are telling a lie! The LORD our God has not sent you to say, "You are not to enter Egypt to reside there."'" They rejected

the word of the Lord and from the prophet who had been in their midst for decades. That's how hard and cold and rebellious they were.

So what did they do? Skipping over the details, look at it in verse 7, "they entered the land of Egypt (for they did not obey the voice of the LORD) and went in as far as Tahpanhes." A region in Egypt. Stunning. Step back. This is a lot of history for some of you maybe hearing it for the first time. I realize it's a lot to absorb but you get the basic gist of it. God said, "I'll take care of you in exile. If you stay you'll face judgment." Even then there's a parenthesis of mercy offered to them that once judgment had fallen and the city had fallen, God said, "Stay and I'll protect you here." And they flipped their face, they flipped their nose at God, at the prophet who had brought the word of the Lord to them and they said, "We'll go to Egypt." And history verifies that they died there.

Beloved, their hearts were so stubborn. Their hearts were so so wicked. Their sin had blinded them so fully that they pursued after their chosen path just like the blinded men in Sodom tried pounding down the doors to get to the objects of their lust. They didn't even stop. They were utterly incapable of stopping themselves in their sin and recognizing, "What are we doing? Look at all that has happened. More is going to come if we continue in this path of rebellion." The heart of man is so black, so stubborn, so evil, so resistant, so hostile to God that it prefers judgment from God to repentance and blessing. You say, "That's utterly irrational." Precisely. Ecclesiastes talks about how insanity reigns in the heart of men all the days of their lives. That's how bad it is. We get confused about this point. We see a general modicum of external nice aspects of people, people seem outwardly nice and conforming to us, and we lose sight based on external appearances of the utter depravity and depth of the wickedness of the human heart vertically against the God who made it. It's fearsome, I tell you. You read in the book of Revelation and you see the judgment of God coming down and they still refuse to repent. It's horrifying. Well, I'll tell you what's horrifying, it's horrifying to read about the judgment that came on the city of Jerusalem, it's horrifying to see the city falling like that, seeing what Zedekiah saw and then getting blinded, but it is geometrically more horrifying to contemplate the wickedness of the human heart. And those of you who are not Christians, I just described your heart because this is the blackness that belongs to the heart of the human race since the fall of Adam.

So it would get bad for these Jews to whom Jeremiah had spoken but it is going to get worse. Chapter 44, verse 11, "Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I am going to set My face against you for woe, even to cut off all Judah. And I will take away the remnant of Judah who have set their mind on entering the land of Egypt to reside there, and they will all meet their end in the land of Egypt; they will fall by the sword and meet their end by famine. Both small and great will die by the sword and famine; and they will become a curse, an object of horror, an imprecation and a reproach. And I will punish those who live in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, with the sword, with famine and with pestilence. So there will be no refugees or survivors for the remnant of Judah who have entered the land of Egypt to reside there and then to return to the land of Judah, to which they are longing to return and live; for none will return except a few refugees.'"

In the outworking of the book of Jeremiah, chapters 46 to 51 are devoted to judgment on the surrounding nations. The God who judged his people in the first, let's say, 45 chapters of the book is sovereign over all the world and so he judged and he will bring judgment on the sin of the nations as well. But a fallen city, a fallen people who had not an ounce of fear of God in them, not an ounce of repentance in them, not an ounce of true worship on them, they were driven to the uttermost under the judging hand of God. It's fearsome and so you see the forecast distinction kind of brought, you know, advanced, you might say. Some of them went into exile up north to Babylon in 597 BC, 10-12 years go by, God brings his attention back to Jerusalem and brings his judgment upon them. Then in the outworking of the book, you've got seven chapters of more judgment that are left on the surrounding nations. What a book. What a book. I mean, this is just overwhelming to take all of this in, isn't it?

So the book of Jeremiah ends on chapter 52. There's a recount, a rehearsal of the fall of Jerusalem, and then this brings us to our fourth section which I nearly failed to point out. Our fourth section is this: a freed king. A freed king. He was set free, in other words, is what I mean by that word. We had a failed king, a forecast distinction, a fallen city, and now in this fourth section we see a freed king. Decades have gone by at this point, to say nothing about just in a literary sense the 28 intervening chapters since we saw that prophecy in chapter 24, and so everything points to the fact that I really did waste my time telling you about Jehoiachin, but the book of Jeremiah ends, its last four verses, with a reference to Jehoiachin? Are you kidding me? This young, brief, evil king? That's where this book ends? This is impossibly incoherent, it would seem. Here's what Scripture says, "Now it came about in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah," so he's now 55 years old, 55-56 years old, somewhere like that, in the 37th year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah. Let's just pause there and give ourselves a little bit of perspective. 37 years from today would be the year 2057. I'll be long gone by then. 37 years looking backwards, 1983, Ronald Reagan was President of the United States. There have been a lot of intervening Presidents since then. If you are under the age of 50, you have no independent memory of the presidency of Ronald Reagan that has any meaning. That's how long we're talking about. An entire generation has come and gone in those 37 years, okay?

So let's keep reading and see what happens, "in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth of the month, that Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, showed favor to Jehoiachin king of Judah and brought him out of prison." He had been in prison for all this time, for 37 years and now the new king of Babylon shows him favor and what happened? Verse 32, "he spoke kindly to him and set his throne above the thrones of the kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin changed his prison clothes, and had his meals in the king's presence regularly all the days of his life. For his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king of Babylon, a daily portion all the days of his life until the day of his death." Wow. God showed grace, showed mercy, showed kindness to a past evil king in exile after 37 years had passed by. What's that saying? Why this historical note to end the book? It seems kind of out of place and anticlimactic to what we are used to in modern literature perhaps. Well, there is a very

specific and clear message that is being spoken here. What you see by this historical note is that God is saying, "I have not forgotten the people in exile." There was still another 30 years to go and this is at the end of Jeremiah's ministry so Jeremiah is about to leave and there is still half of this exile left to go, another 33 years to go. But God had not forgotten. It was a preview of the future. Jehoiachin was a down payment that God would fulfill his promises to those Jews that were in exile. Just as God showed some temporary mercy to Jehoiachin and he had power over the heart of the king to bring that result to pass after all that time, God had not forgotten his king in exile and showed kindness to him so that his latter end was better than the days that went before. The Jews who were reading this were to understand that that meant, that was a promise from God, a historical promise from God that what he had promised to do to bring them back after 70 years of exile was finished, he was certainly going to keep it. Jehoiachin was a down payment on what was to come. God makes promises and God keeps them and God has the power to bring his promises to pass.

Now in days gone by, I would have just stopped there and would have been content to have talked about the book of Jeremiah, but we don't want to stop just there today. What does all of this mean for today? Those of you that are visiting here, you've just come, you've missed how over the past three weeks we've seen, we've talked about our own country, we've highlighted the fact that our country is collectively guilty of breaking all of the commandments of God, we entertain ourselves with sin, we are a spiritually adulterous nation, and what passes for the professing Christian church is filled with false teachers today, that's an undeniable fact, and so we are faced with something serious here. Our country is as spiritually adulterous as the past nation of Judah. We are not only ripe for judgment, we are seeing judgment playing out in the daily news in front of our eyes and we are in this position, we are not a covenant nation like Judah was. God did not make promises to our forefathers to keep us as a nation like he did to Abraham. We have no promise of restoration like the Jews did, and so we are, as it were, we are naked and helpless in the midst of what is happening here, speaking nationally as a country. There is nothing standing between us and a well-deserved judgment from God and you and I as Christian people ought see it and discern it that way and not be blinded by patriotism to the spiritual reality of which I speak.

What does that mean for us as Christian people living in the midst of a nation like this, then? What is our take away as Christians? 1. Well, I'm going to have a few points of application here, I guess. Is it not obvious to you, beloved, that you and I as discerning biblical Christians, that we should not trust in political leaders or political processes to bring about a spiritual deliverance to us? Politicians cannot fix what ails us. We have the same dark heart that the nation of Judah did and whether we keep or exchange political leaders, nothing's going to change that. Our hope is in Christ alone. Our hope is in the Gospel alone. And in Christ we have one who will not leave us nor forsake us. Speaking as Christian people now, Christ has made promises to us, that he is always with us even to the end of the age. "I fear no evil for You are with me. I will never ever leave you nor will I ever ever forsake you." Beloved, you as a Christian, that must be your hope, not what happens three weeks from now in an election. You must get it clear in your mind what your hope is and who your hope is in and rest it there and in there alone because he

will keep his promises to his people and we must trust him no matter how our future unfolds.

Now here's the conclusion that I was promising you. It won't be 15 minutes long. Here's some bullet points that I want you to take away to give you some discernment going forward and a place where your heart can rest. It's not simply about national events, it's not simply about what happens to our country. This is what's true for you in your personal life if you are a believer in Jesus Christ. Three things to start with.

1. God is sovereign in human history. God is sovereign in human history. Don't ever lose sight of that. Secondly, God protects his people. God protects his people. Christ tells us that he is with us and the understanding that we're to draw, he is with us to protect us, to care for us, to provide for us. If you are in Christ, you are in the hand of his protection and Jesus said in John 10 no one can pluck you out of there. Now do you believe that or not? That's a serious question that I ask to the entire church of Jesus Christ throughout the United States of America. Do we believe that or not? Thirdly, God fulfills his purposes over long periods of time. God fulfills his purposes over long periods of time, that means that it would be utterly foolish for us to judge the future by what happens three weeks from now. That would be utterly foolhardy. We have no idea what lies beyond, whatever the election brings. We have no idea what lies beyond it. And so therefore based on those three things, God is sovereign in human history, God protects his people, God fulfills his purpose over long periods of time, therefore three parallel points to draw from that.

1. As Christians we should not, cannot, must not fear human events. If God is sovereign over human history, and he is, we just saw that in the 52 chapters of Jeremiah, right? We just saw that and if God is sovereign over nations like that, then you and I should not be living in fear of what human events may bring to us because God is directing them to accomplish his purposes and he will protect us in the midst of them.

Secondly, closely related point, you and I as Christians, we should not overreact to the politics of the day. The politics of today are simply details in God's bigger plan that he will certainly carry out. Now look, I know that a lot of you really need to hear this, a lot of you really need to turn off cable news and get back and read your Bible for a change because you are letting that warp your entire perspective of life and you are dishonoring God by your fear of man. If God is sovereign in human history and God protects his people, that ought to shape the entire perspective that we view what happens in the course of our lives.

And number three, we should fear God, not man. God judges nations, he judges sin, and when he warns of eternal judgment for people who do not turn to Christ, he's not bluffing. He may be long-suffering, he may be very patient with you, he may have given you 60, 70, 80, 90 years but he's not bluffing. Don't misinterpret his patience for insincerity.

So that brings us to these closing questions, my friends. Do you belong to Christ or not? Scripture says the one who believes in him has eternal life, the one who does not believe

the wrath of God abides on him, John 3:36. So I invite you to Christ, he who shed redeeming blood for your sin to reconcile those who believe in him to God. Now to you Christian friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, and trust me, I had to preach this to myself before I preached it to you. Here's the question. Everything can be simplified and boiled down to this one question how you view life going forward: do you trust Jesus Christ or not? Do you trust him or not? If he holds the future and he's promised to bless and keep you, do you trust his word or not? Because if you trust him, it robs all of human events of their fearful aspects. If you want to hold onto the fear and be angry about the politics of it all, you just can't hold onto them both. You want to be angry about politics then let's stop saying that we trust Christ. If we trust Christ, let's stop being afraid about the politics. This is not difficult, my friends. This is not difficult. There is no difficult concept in what I'm expressing here at all because everything else flows from that. My friend, did Jesus Christ redeem you at the cross or not? Is he with you today or not? Will he take you to heaven or not? Answer well, my friends, because it sets the frame of mind, it sets your worldview for the rest of your life on earth, and has implications for all of eternity. Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Let's pray together.

Father, You're a God who makes promises and You're a God who keeps promises. I pray that You would use what's been said here today for the benefit of Your people, to strengthen us that we might rest in You, that we might trust You and give You the honor thereby that You so richly deserve and that it would transform us from angry fearful people about the world around us into trusting, resting, quiet hearts that are content with whatever You choose to bring to us. Father, for the unbelieving here, some that I'm dying to mention by name but You know them, Father, I pray that You would have mercy on them to eternal life, that You would impress upon them the fear of God for that is the beginning of wisdom, and that when You warn against sin and Your judgment against sinners, You're not bluffing, and the time is short. Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day for them to repent and believe in Christ, O God. I can't make that happen. I'm utterly futile and helpless up here, O God, and unless You somehow by Your Spirit lend divine power to the conversion of their hearts, we've wasted our time. Please don't make this a waste of time, O God. Show saving mercy to many and help Your people to see the glory of Your name, the glory of Your faithfulness, and to rightly trust You in response. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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