



Introduction to Jeremiah Jeremiah 1:1-3

NKJ Jeremiah 1:1 The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin,

2 to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign.

3 It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month.

One of the problems that often comes with the study of Jeremiah and other prophets, is the difficulty of not knowing what was going on at the time that Jeremiah prophesied. I mean imagine if you will reading Deuteronomy without knowing where Israel was, how they'd gotten there, and who these character like Moses and Joshua were. You could get something out of it, but not nearly as much as if you understood the background and you might well come to some erroneous conclusions. So what I intend to do this morning is just to flesh out a little of the background to Jeremiah so that you might understand it better.

So, who was this prophet Jeremiah? And what was happening during the time he gave his prophecies? Well we have a few answers in these verses. First, although Jeremiah never served as a priest, he was the son of a priest named Hilkiah, who lived in Anathoth. Anathoth was one of the "Priest Cities" that had been given to Aaron's children in Joshua 21. It was about three miles north of Jerusalem in the land of Benjamin and you could see the walls of Jerusalem from the city. We might say then that Jeremiah grew up in the Suburbs of Jerusalem.

Now it's interesting that in the introduction we have no less than four kings of Judah listed. One good king, Josiah, and three lousy ones. And they are going to be very important to the story. Jeremiah was actually born during the reign of Amon's father Manasseh at about the same time as Amon's son, Josiah in 648 BC. And Jeremiah's call to be a prophet occurred during the reign of Josiah in 627 BC.

Let's start the introduction though with the time before the birth of Jeremiah, let's go back to the reign of the king BEFORE Manasseh, his father, Hezekiah. Hezekiah was a good king who loved the Lord

<p>Hezekiah (Good) (726-697) 29 years Manasseh (697-642) fifty-five years Amon (641-640) two years Josiah (Good) (639-608) thirty-one years Jehoahaz (608) three months</p>

Jehoiachim (608-597) eleven years
 Jehoiachin (597) three months
 Zedekiah (597-586) eleven years

During the reign of Hezekiah the northern kingdom of Israel had finally fallen in 722 BC. Assyria like most of the near eastern empires had a three strikes and you're out policy, when a nation resisted them and was initially conquered it became a vassal state. They were forced to pledge their allegiance to them and give them taxes and men. If they rebelled, they would be reduced in size and another king put on the throne. If they rebelled again and thus fought the larger state a third time, they would usually be annexed, becoming just a province. Their people would be taken into exile and the land would be resettled with foreigners. That is what had happened with the northern kingdom.

Judah didn't fall at the same time, because Ahaz, Hezekiah's father had made Judah the servants of Assyria. When you became a vassal of that state, you swore allegiance not only to that king but to his gods. Ahaz had agreed to worship Asshur the God of the Assyrians and even had a copy of Asshur's altar in Damacus built in the temple. Under him, Judah had declined into widespread apostasy.

His Son Hezekiah was a good king though. And he had begun the process of reform and had rebelled against Assyria in 701 BC and the cost of that rebellion had been terrible, the Assyrians had reduced every fortified city in Judah, the place was a wasteland. God had intervened to stop the Assyrians from taking Jerusalem, but that did not stop them from forcing Judah to pay tribute as a vassal state again.

Now Hezekiah's son Manasseh was a terrible king who filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, like his grandfather, he had given himself willingly to the worship of the Assyrian God, and his name is actually listed on an Assyrian treaty tablet dated 672 where he swore to treat the Assyrian God Ashur as His God. For a descendent of David to do such a thing was appalling. Worse he taught his apostasy to the people. For over Fifty Years he filled Judah with all kinds of false worship and superstition. He even sacrificed his own sons to Molech. Unfortunately the people of Judah had really taken to that false and syncretistic worship and were still steeped in it when Jeremiah began his ministry.

Amon followed Manasseh in 641 BC and was just as bad as him but thankfully didn't reign as long. Josiah had come to the throne as a boy after his father Amon was assassinated. Josiah was different. He followed the Lord and began a policy of Reformation especially after the book of the law was found in the temple. Josiah loved the Lord and he reinstated the Passover, and began to systematically wipe out the false worship, it was a thoroughgoing reformation.

This Reformation was far from popular, even in Jeremiah's home town of Anathoth. I mean imagine, you could go from being the high priest at a local altar or high place, to a relative nobody in Jerusalem. The local altars were destroyed, the heretical priests deposed or even executed. The Priests were NOT happy with Josiah's reformation any more than the Roman Catholic priests were happy with Martin Luther's. So you can understand that they DESPISED this reforming preacher Jeremiah who was sent by God to reinforce the Reformation.

Despising Reformation and Reformers was nothing new in Israel, when Gideon had torn down the altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole, in Judges 6, the people of his city reacted this way: *"29 So they said to one another, "Who has done this thing?" And when they had inquired and asked, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing."*

30 Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the wooden image that was beside it."

The English people by and large rejected the second Reformation the Puritans brought in, and when they restored an evil king, Charles II to the throne, they quite happily did away with the reforms to worship and practice, and brought back as many of the former unbiblical ceremonies and rituals as they could

Assyria meanwhile began to be seriously weakened by 626, In that year a man by the name of Nabopolassar the ruler of Babylon had rebelled against them and won. Nebuchadnezzar (Nebuchadrezzar in some bibles is the way the Akkadian spelled it and the way that it occurs in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In many translations the name has been standardized according the Hebrew spelling found in Daniel)

The Medes attacked them from the East and the Babylonians from the West and gradually their power over the region began to wane. So much so that Josiah was able to reassert Judah's sovereignty and extend his reforms into the territory that had been the northern kingdom. Eventually the Assyrian army was on its heels at Haran and the Egyptians marched to their aid attempting, no doubt, to prevent the Babylonians from establishing their dominance. Josiah of course, didn't want the Assyrians to be rescued and so he attacked Pharaoh Neco's relief forces at Meggido in 609 BC (Har Meggido or Armageddon) no doubt Josiah hoped that he would be victorious and that the Babylonians would treat him as a valued ally. Instead he was killed, and Egypt took over control of Judah.

Josiah's successors however, were weak men, and once again pluralists, they tried to ally themselves with the Egyptians and rebel against the Babylonians. The first king who tried to be free of them this way was Jehoiakim, it was under his rule that Daniel was taken captive to Babylon as a young man. He rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar in 600 and in 598, Nebuchadnezzar took the city but this being only strike one, did not destroy it.

One of the things that we will see, is that instead of trusting in the Lord, loving Him and His Word, the people became enamored of the outward trappings. They figured we have the city of David, Zion, and the Holy Temple, the Lord will never allow these to be destroyed. And so they fell into a kind of national arrogance – the LORD has to defend us regardless of the reality of our relationship to him. In that they are rather like the people who assume that the Lord MUST let them into heaven when they die, because they were born into a congregation, were baptized, tithed, and were frequently within the building on Sunday. Nothing is sadder to me than encountering these people who are now elderly who in many cases have never heard the gospel, never closed with Christ, were never born again, and in fact in many cases make fun of "born agains" but expect to go to heaven because they're good church people.

Jehoiachin, his son also attempted to rebel, and this time because he surrendered the city was not sacked by the Babylonians. His reign lasted all of three months.

Zedekiah, a son of Josiah, was the next ruler, he attempted to organize another revolt, and during this time Jeremiah preached submission to Babylon instead of national destruction. They would not listen to him, especially because the other prophets were preaching a patriotic message that resounded with the people. Inevitably Nebuchadnezzar descended upon them, and Jeremiah got into even more trouble by advising them to surrender saying this was God's judgment on their continual apostasy and that it

COULD NOT be avoided, and that if they continued to fight, the city and the temple would be destroyed.

Now I want you to step back and understand how radical this was, we aren't ancient Israel so this analogy is imperfect, but imagine the United States was under attack and a preacher stepped out and said, we must surrender this is God's judgment. People, even Christians would probably be rather miffed to say the least. When the Romans invaded during the Jewish revolt in 66 AD those Jews who had become Christians were accused of being similarly unpatriotic because they also saw it as God's prophesied judgment and did not join in the rebellion.

Zedekiah refused to surrender, had Jeremiah imprisoned, and inevitably Nebuchadnezzar took the city by force in 586. This he sacked it, tore down the walls, and burned the temple and all the major buildings and then transported the majority of the population off to a prophesied 70 year exile in Babylon.

However, Jeremiah was no Babylonian toady, he refused their offer of a cushy life in Babylon and instead stayed with the remnant that was left in the land after the conquest with it's terrible living conditions. That wasn't the end incidentally, believe it or not even then the people that were left in the land managed to make some really awful decisions, but I'll let them be a cliff hanger, that's enough for the introduction.

Applications:

1) Reformation is ALWAYS resisted by the natural man and when it comes in there are always advocates of a mixed religion of biblical and unbiblical devices. Any attempt to go back to the old paths, will INFURIATE people. Calvin in his time wrote: **"I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by his word"**

I myself remember talking to a fellow from the PCA who called me to tell me how angry he was, it was almost a flashback to my old days at the tech support desk. He was simply LIVID that there were two PCA churches in the city and none of them had contemporary/seeker sensitive worship. He said it was a tragedy because what we could be doing was packing people in with the worship of this generation that everybody liked, and then giving them good Reformed Preaching. Instead we did this Old Paths stuff and had small congregations. I remember he said, ***"You are too reformed to do any good in this town."*** Well, we will find that many of the people had exactly the same opinion about Jeremiah's ministry in Jerusalem. And think of how many "opportunities" Jeremiah missed out on, because he was too zealous for doing what the Lord told him to. But if he hadn't been so zealous we and countless generations of the Lord's people wouldn't have had this book!

Kids, many of your parents like me are first generation Christians who have left the false worship of their parents, some of your parents have come from churches that weren't very reformed but rather were steeped in traditions.

2) No Outward Laws, be they Man or God's will ever be able to change the hearts of people. NO reforms that are merely external will ever produce real righteousness. It would take an inward change:

31 " Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah --

32 "not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD.

33 "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

34 "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

That new Covenant was brought in by Christ - Matthew 26:28 "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Our problems certainly aren't that we don't have enough laws, our problems are spiritual, what we need is this new covenant that Christ brought in. Personally and Nationally. It will never be sufficient for our children merely to have rules unless they love Christ.