



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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## **Introduction to Jeremiah, Part 2**

What is God's view of the mess that we call the church? While the prophetic office no longer is operative today, perhaps you like me, have wished for just one more "word from the Lord" and thus a definitive statement from God on the many issues facing the church. It would seem to be great if God just came down and explicitly said, "This is right and this is wrong!"

But God has given us His view in the Old Testament prophets. When one studies them you will find that each book is not irrelevant messages from an out of touch "holy man" but the word of God to a covenant people who were struggling with many if not all of the issues we face today as a church:

- Mysticism.
- False doctrine.
- Worldliness.
- Entertainment and worship.
- Division and conflict in the body.
- Wicked, corrupt and immoral leaders.

We need the prophets and to neglect this corpus is to miss a large commentary on the part of God regarding the many issues we face today as a people, congregation, and denomination. Now of all the prophets in the Old Testament, Jeremiah remains one of the most down-to-earth and practical expositions of the word of God!

The book of Jeremiah is specifically shaped by the kings who molded the world in which Jeremiah ministered.

Jeremiah 1:1-3, “The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiyah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, 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. 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 exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month.”

Once again, the biographical information places the life and ministry of Jeremiah under the last five leaders of Jerusalem: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah (and eventually Gedaliah the Jewish governor placed over Jerusalem after the exile of 586 BC). To understand the content of this prophecy, we need to be versed in the Near Eastern geo-political affairs of the 7th and 6th centuries BC.

### **Manasseh (696-642)**

When considering this king we think of “Manasseh the Maniac” as he used his 55 year regency to run headlong into sin! And yet, it wasn’t only him. He led the nation into gross rebellion which brought about a “regression” when it came to the people of God. Listen to what some unnamed prophets said:

2 Kings 21:11, “...Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations, having done wickedly more than all the Amorites did who *were* before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols...”

In other words, the people of God under Manasseh became worse sinners than the Canaanites ever were; they engaged in unspeakable sin on the Temple Mount, going way beyond the base and morally bankrupt practices of Canaanite religion. In fact, because of Manasseh’s reign Judah would lose its status as a “Christian” nation (as Israel did before them). Accordingly, God abandoned Judah to be disciplined by its own sin.<sup>1</sup>

2 Kings 21:10-12, “Now the Lord spoke through His servants the prophets, saying, ‘Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations, having done wickedly more than all the Amorites did who *were* before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols; therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, “Behold, I am bringing *such* calamity on Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears shall tingle.””

Though Manasseh did in fact repent toward the end of his life (2 Chronicles 33:10-16), the damage had been done such that everything the king did to “undo” the harm which he brought on Judah was “too little too late!” Because of Manasseh judgment would come which brings us to Amon, his son (named after the chief god in Egypt, Amon-Re).

### Amon (642-640)

When we think of this king we think of “Amon the Apostate!” The sins of Manasseh were embodied by his son quite well such that Amon fit the 55 years of his father’s sinning into two! And yet unlike his father, he didn’t repent. In fact, it was so bad that Amon was assassinated two years into his reign! In his place, his son, Josiah, was placed as king over Judah at the age of 8.

Now we are into the era of Jeremiah. But again notice, the damaged had been done. Jeremiah, Josiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk were all living on borrowed time. The end of the nation was coming and there was nothing they could do to prevent it! And yet, out of a love for God, they nevertheless labored to bring the people of God back to a healthy relationship with God. It began with Josiah.

### Josiah (640-609 BC)

2 Kings 22:1-2, “Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem; and his mother’s name *was* Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. And he did right in the sight of the Lord and walked in all the way of his father David, nor did he turn aside to the right or to the left.”

Recall that Josiah was THE bright spot in the long and sad history of Judah’s kings. When we think of Josiah, we think of “Josiah the Genuine Servant of the Lord” (cf. 2 Kings 23:25). Recall that Josiah’s regency primarily revolved around religious reformation which came about in three phases.

1. **The First Stage (632-628)** This began when Josiah at the age of 16 essentially was regenerated (cf. 2 Chronicles 34:3). For the next four years he would study and grow as a man of God until —
2. **The Second Stage (628-622)** In 628 BC, when Josiah was 20, the king set about cleansing

the land of Judah AND the northern territory, formerly called Israel, of all forms of false worship, idolatry, wickedness, corruption, and more. It was at this time that Jeremiah was called in 627 BC to the prophetic ministry (cf. Jeremiah 1:2).

3. **The Third Stage (622) After** cleansing the land, Josiah set his focus on restoring the temple of God to its proper form and re-instituting the worship of the Lord! Recall, under Manasseh's reign, the Temple Mount was utilized for the worship and service of the Canaanite and Assyrian gods. Walls were erected and altars established for the evil worship practices of Baal. Josiah determined to restore the temple such that a demolition project was fast underway in which a copy of the book of Deuteronomy was found, brought to Josiah, and read! What Josiah heard cut him to the core such that the king led Judah in a covenant renewal ceremony by which the nation was re-dedicated to God (2 Kings 23).

Sadly throughout this time, the "Reformation" was superficial such that Jeremiah frequently called upon the nation to repent with genuineness and brokenness.

Jeremiah 4:4, "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and remove the foreskins of your heart, men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My wrath go forth like fire and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds."

The nation clearly did not listen, for years later when Josiah died, so also did the revival! Speaking of Josiah's death (which occurred when he was 39), God's word indicates that it served a twofold purpose.

1. It was the beginning of the nation reaping the consequence of Manasseh's evil reign. Listen to the preface of the section detailing Josiah's death:

2 Kings 23:26, "However, the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger burned against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him..."

Josiah was killed in battle as a consequence of his grandfather's sin! This was the beginning of much, much more! And yet we do not weep for the king.

2. It also served to "graduate" Josiah into the presence of God and so keep him from the evil that soon was coming to the land in just four years. Prior to Josiah's death, God told him this:

2 Chronicles 34:28, "Behold, I will gather you to your fathers and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, so your eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring on this place and on its inhabitants." (cf. Isaiah 57:1)

That bring us to Jehoahaz- Josiah's fourth-born son.

## Jehoahaz (609)

2 Kings 23:31, "Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah."

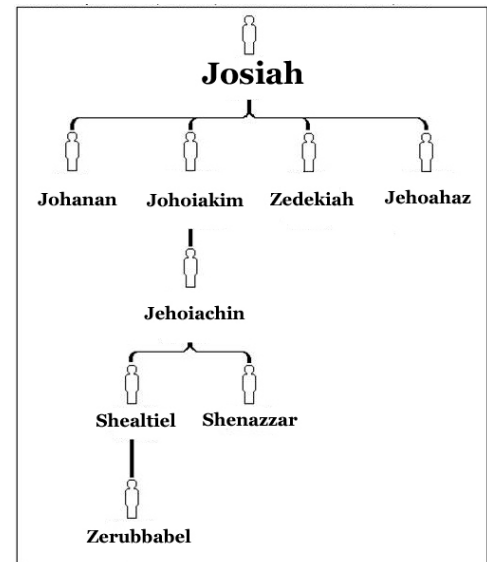
Though he was the fourth born son of Josiah, nevertheless upon the king's death, Jehoahaz ascended to the throne of Judah. Jehoahaz' reign was short-lived, lasting only three months!

Now for whatever reason, Neco (the king of Egypt) did not like Jehoahaz and summoned him to the Syrian town of Riblah. Here Jehoahaz was captured, put in chains, and brought to Egypt where he would die at a young age.

Jeremiah 22:10-12, "Do not weep for the dead or mourn for him, *but* weep continually for the one who goes away [Jehoahaz]; for he will never return or see his native land. For thus says the Lord in regard to Shallum the son of Josiah, king of Judah, who became king in the place of Josiah his father, who went forth from this place, 'He will never return there; but in the place where they led him captive, there he will die and not see this land again.'"

Why Jehoahaz was deemed a threat to Egypt we really do not know.

Most likely, Jehoahaz looked like his father and posed a risk of future rebellion. The name (this is pure conjecture) Jeremiah attributed to him, Shallum, means, "retribution"! Regardless, after Jehoahaz' three month reign, his older brother, Jehoiakim, was placed on the throne.



## Jehoiakim (608-598 BC)

2 Kings 22:34, "And Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the place of Josiah his father, and changed his name to Jehoiakim."

Initially, Judah was placed under heavy tribute to Egypt! Yet things were soon going to change as the Babylonians were on the rise! During the summer months of 608 to 606 BC, Egypt and Babylonian forces engaged in a variety of skirmishes which basically did nothing. During this time, Jehoiakim remained loyal to Egypt.

Now as a king, Jehoiakim was selfish and self-seeking. He was totally out of touch with reality. During this time of uncertainty, he built an extravagant palace with forced labor (Jeremiah 22:13-19)! Furthermore, he allowed Josiah's reforms to lapse and played into the hands of those who had always opposed them. As such, during his reign the wicked practices of Manasseh were reintroduced to the people of God. As a result, public morality deteriorated!

The prophets who resisted or opposed the king were harassed and even put to death (Jeremiah 26:20-23)! As we'll see, Jeremiah was personally attacked at this time. In fact, when the first scroll that Jeremiah wrote was read to the king, Jehoiakim had it burned column by column to the protest and anguish of the royal court (Jeremiah 36:23)! And yet through it all came the sappy words of both false prophet and priest, "All is well! Peace and safety! God is on the throne! Don't worry!"

In 605 BC the political landscape changed quite dramatically. The Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, won a decisive victory over the Egyptians at Carchemish! The Egyptian forces retreated to Hamath where they were defeated yet again! Palestine lay vulnerable with no force to resist Babylon. Accordingly, in 605 BC they attacked!



Seeing that power was shifting to Babylon, Jehoiakim immediately transferred his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar which gave both the Judean king and the nation a vassal status before Babylon (2 Kings 24:1). This meant that not only did Judah have to pay tribute to Babylon, but their gods and their religion was to be adopted and practiced in Israel and down went any semblance of covenant loyalty and service to God! Now the first tribute that was to be paid to Nebuchadnezzar was to be in the form of people in which many of the educated, leading, and bright youth of Judah were deported to Babylon. Daniel would have been included in this deportation!

Yet Jehoiakim didn't like life under Babylon. Accordingly, when Egypt won a decisive victory over Nebuchadnezzar in 600/599 BC, Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylon! Initially Nebuchadnezzar was too busy in his own country to take action against Jerusalem. So he sent bands of marauders to plunder Judah. These bands were made up of Babylonians and men from other subject nations (Jeremiah 35:11; 2 Kings 24:2). By 598 BC, Nebuchadnezzar had addressed the problems which kept him occupied. Accordingly, "in the summer when the kings go to battle" he marched on Judah. Jehoiakim died before the king arrived. His son, Jehoiachin, ascended to the throne and was left to deal with the impending threat of the Babylonians!

### Jehoiachin (598-597 BC)

2 Kings 24:8-9, "Jehoiachin was eighteen 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. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done."

The death of Jehoiakim did not stop Nebuchadnezzar from coming to Judah. Three months into Jehoiachin's reign, on March 15/16, 597 BC, Nebuchadnezzar arrived in Judah. At this time the Babylonian king deposed Jehoiachin and placed his uncle, Zedekiah (Josiah's third born son), on

the throne. Nebuchadnezzar then left Israel taking with him 10,000 more exiles of which Jehoiachin, his mother (Nehushta), state officials, and leading citizens were a part. Ezekiel also was part of this exile.

The preservation of Jehoiachin is significant for he was in the line of Christ. In time, Jehoiachin was shown special favor by the Babylonian King Evil-Merodach (~561 BC) such that Jehoiachin was removed from prison into the royal palace of Babylon (2 Kings 25:27–30; Jeremiah 52:31–34). Jehoiachin's eldest son, Shealtiel, the father of Zerubbabel, was born in 598 BC. This is the line of Christ!

### Zedekiah (597-586 BC)

2 Kings 24:18-20, "Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name *was* Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. For through the anger of the Lord *this* came about in Jerusalem and Judah until He cast them out from His presence. And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon."

Once again, Judah is reaping the sins of Manasseh as God placed on the throne Zedekiah, a weak and yet evil man who finally would provoke Babylon unto Judah's destruction! With Zedekiah on the throne, Nebuchadnezzar anticipated that the problems with Judah were finished. Yet such was not to be the case.

It is important to note that though the Second Deportation was not large, it was significant in that it removed many of Judah's key personnel and advisors. Accordingly, those who now led the government were ultranationalists lacking in both experience and caution! Furthermore during this time, the false prophets of Judah said that the exile would only last two years; Jeremiah said that it would last 70 (Jeremiah 28:3, 11)! This played into the hands of the nationalists!

Being young and weak, Zedekiah did not have the strength to oppose all who called for rebellion. As such, in the 588 BC Zedekiah led God's people in rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar! This time the Babylonian king responded with an iron fist! He held Jerusalem under siege for one and a half years. Throughout this time, Jeremiah pleaded for the king and the people to surrender- *for the destruction of Judah was the will of the Lord* (Jeremiah 38:2). This only incited Zedekiah's officials such that they determined to put Jeremiah to death (Jeremiah 38:4)! They didn't succeed; but they did succeed in making Jeremiah's life miserable as he was thrown into a cistern where he almost died (Jeremiah 38:6).

When the hunger in the city became intolerable and Judah was at its weakest point, the Babylonians captured the lower city. Not long afterward, Zedekiah fled secretly with his army during the night (Jeremiah 39:4)! With their king gone, Judah's resolve dissipated and the Babylonians easily conquered the rest of the city. The temple, the palace of the king, and the houses of the rich and powerful were burned. The walls of the city were broken down. The house of the Lord went up in flames as well.

In the meantime the Babylonians pursued Zedekiah and caught him, deserted by all his troops, in the plain of Jericho (Jeremiah 39:5). They took him bound to Riblah, where Nebuchadnezzar had retreated. There Zedekiah's sons were killed before his eyes. Then his eyes were gouged out, and he was carried away in bonds to Babylon (Jeremiah 39:6-7).

All the prominent people of Judah were exiled; many also were put to death. The gold, silver, and bronze from the temple went to Babylon too. Only the poorest of the people were left behind, one of which was the prophet Jeremiah!

### Gedaliah (586-582 BC)

2 Kings 25:22, "Now *as for* the people who were left in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, he appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan over them."

The king of Babylon appointed Gedaliah as governor over the people who had remained in Judah. Because of the ruined state of Jerusalem, the seat of government was placed at Mizpah. As to Gedaliah: he came from a long line of fidelity and service to God. Gedaliah's father at one point saved Jeremiah's life (Jeremiah 26:24). His grandfather, Shaphan, was one of Josiah's high officials (2 Kings 22:3) and gave strong support to Josiah's reform. In fact, Gedaliah himself supported Jeremiah allowing the prophet to stay at his house (Jeremiah 40:5-6).

After the Babylonians were gone the soldiers of Judah, who had fled during the siege, returned with their captains. Gedaliah swore to them that if they subjected themselves to his authority, they would have nothing to fear from the Babylonians. Yet they did not heed his counsel. The king of Ammon was jealous of Judah's restoration. Therefore he incited Ishmael, one of the captains of Judah's army, to kill Gedaliah (cf. 2 Kings 25:25-26).

And though Gedaliah had been warned (cf. Jeremiah 40:13-41:3), he allowed himself to be caught off guard and so was killed. Understandably, the Jews were afraid that the king of Babylon would take revenge. They requested Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord for them (Jeremiah 42-44). In the name of the Lord, Jeremiah told them that they should stay in Judah. Then no harm would befall them. Yet many did not believe Jeremiah. As such, the remaining Jews fled to Egypt taking Jeremiah with them by force (Jeremiah 43:5). There Jeremiah prophesied to them that the revenge of Babylonia's king, which they thought they could escape by fleeing, would come upon them in Egypt where they sought refuge (Jeremiah 43-44). And this is exactly what happened!

Here we lose track of Jeremiah. Did he die in Egypt? Was he released and allowed to travel back to his home? We do not know. Yet with this we are brought once again to a key theme in the life of Jeremiah; God is sovereign over the nations.



After exposing the false gods of the people for what they were, foolish and dumb, recall Jeremiah's hope, confidence, and strength.

Jeremiah 10:6-7, "There is none like Thee, O Lord; Thou art great, and great is Thy name in might. Who would not fear Thee, O King of the nations? Indeed it is Thy due! For among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like Thee."

This is the basis for all comfort, strength, and support in life: the Sovereignty and Majesty of God! You see this theme throughout Jeremiah and that which strengthened and encouraged the prophet in times of woe! When the difficulties of life come upon us, we know that "Our God Reigns!"

Knowing that God is awesome in His greatness is to know that He could have prevented the difficulty in which we find ourselves, how should this comfort us? Why was Jeremiah comforted by the truth that our Lord is "the King of the nations"?

God's sovereignty is only a comfort to us if we believe one of two things; either that He is good or that He has a plan which transcends our current struggle. Both of these played a large part of Jeremiah's message of comfort to his generation.

Jeremiah 29:10-14, "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.'"

If you read the entire passage you will note that God's promise here goes way beyond the restoration that occurred in 539 BC. It clearly has in mind the final state!

Jeremiah 33:2-3, 6-9, "Thus says the Lord who made *the earth*, the Lord who formed it to establish it, the Lord is His name, 'Call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know. [What are these "mighty things"? Only that which God's sovereign will guarantees!] ...Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them; and I will reveal to them an abundance of peace and truth. And I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and I will rebuild them as they were at first. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned against Me, and by which they have transgressed against Me. And it shall be to Me a name of joy, praise, and glory before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear of all the good that I do for them, and they shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the peace that I make for it.'"

Family of God if the Lord came to you personally and told you that no matter how dark and bleak your road may be, He was personally in charge, in the end would bless you, and so bring you to a place where sorrow, sickness, sadness, and death are no more; would you trust Him?

Would you boldly walk through the valley of the shadow of death? This is the promise Jeremiah had as he suffered for Christ so long ago. And this remains the future that awaits us all this day!

So in the spirit of our fathers and mothers in the faith who died “without receiving the promises” but “welcomed them from a distance” (Heb. 11:13-16), may God give us the grace to serve Him as aliens and strangers, looking for that country whose Founder and Builder is not of this creation!

End Note

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also Jeremiah 2:18-19.

### **VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO**

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on April 28, 2013. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.