

Jeremiah 7:1-8:3 “The Temple Message: Remember Shiloh” April 19, 2015

Wouldn't you like to know how the people of Jerusalem responded to Jeremiah?

Jeremiah 7 tells us that this is a sermon that Jeremiah preached at the temple.

It is likely that this is the sermon referred to in Jeremiah chapter 26.

In Jeremiah 26 we are told that Jeremiah preached at the temple,

but we are not told the exact words of the sermon –

we only hear the summary:

“I will make this house like Shiloh.” (26:6)

In other words, Jeremiah 7 sure sounds like the sermon referred to in Jeremiah 26!

In Jeremiah 26 we are simply told that when Jeremiah preached this message

the priests, the prophets, and the people laid hold of him

and dragged him to the officials demanding his death.

But there were at least a few faithful elders who refused to put Jeremiah to death.

Chapters 2-6 filled our ears with turbulent woe.

Jeremiah reminds Judah of the story of the northern Kingdom.

Israel refused to repent – and was destroyed.

Judah, on the other hand, *pretended* to repent –

and while “fake repentance” can buy you some time,

it only makes it worse in the end.

Faithless Israel is more righteous than treacherous Judah.

Because at least Israel was honest!

Jerusalem claimed to love the LORD – even as she betrayed him behind his back.

Which is worse:

a wife who says, “I hate you” – and goes and commits adultery,

or a wife who says, “I love you” – and still goes and commits adultery?

And yet God says that if you repent, if you return to the LORD,

then he will be merciful.

Chapters 4-6 then proclaimed the coming disaster –

the disaster from the north.

As we saw, this message was proclaimed “in the days of King Josiah” –

the best king Jerusalem ever had.

All of Josiah's reforms – all of Jerusalem's corporate repentance –

was only half-hearted.

Israel at his best failed to do and to be all that God called Israel to do and to be.

The message of Jeremiah is that destruction is coming –

and there is nothing you can do to stop it!

The temple sermon, in Jeremiah 7, declares that God will do to Jerusalem what he did to Shiloh.

1. “You Trust in Deceptive Words” (7:1-15)

Introduction: “Stand in the Gate of the LORD’s House” (7:1-2)

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² “Stand in the gate of the LORD’s house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the LORD.

Jeremiah is standing at the gate of the temple –
this is the place where he will be able to address the largest group of people –
and (since he has a large stone wall behind him)
the place with the best acoustics for being heard!

It is also the center of the problem that he has come to address.
When you come to the liturgy of the temple in Jerusalem,
when you put your trust in the words of the priests,
you are trusting lies.

You will see in your bulletins that there is a chiasmic structure to Jeremiah’s message in v1-15.
Jeremiah’s temple message has two points:

- 1) You are trusting deceptive words.
- 2) Truth has perished.

In the outline you will see that these two points are at the center of the two chiasms.

In the first chiasm, Jeremiah sets out his basic point right up front:

a. “The Temple of the LORD” Is Not Why I Let You Dwell in This Place (v3-4)

³ *Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place.*

If you repent and return to the LORD, then God will let you dwell in this place.

Words are not enough.

You must amend your *ways* and your *deeds*.

As we saw in chapter 3, Jerusalem’s repentance has only been half-hearted.

If you *say* that you are sorry, but you keep doing wickedness –
that is not enough.

Repentance is not just a matter of *words*, but of *deeds*.

That’s the main point.

But there is a subordinate point that Jerusalem needs to hear:

⁴ *Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’*

This is where Jeremiah gets radical.

The people of Israel had often repented.
They had cried out to the LORD, and the LORD saved them from their enemies.
Indeed, Solomon had prayed at the dedication of the temple,
 “When your people Israel are defeated before the enemy
 because they have sinned against you,
 and if they turn again to you and acknowledge your name
 and pray and plead with you in this house,
 then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel
 and bring them again to the land that you gave to their fathers.”
 (1 Kings 8:32-34)

Solomon had told them to pray in this house.
The glory of the LORD had filled this house.
Israel’s failures and shortcomings were *covered* in this house!

But God says that the “temple of the LORD” is *not* why I will let you dwell in the land.
The rest of the chiasm expounds this central point.

b. If You Do Justice – Then I Will Let You Dwell in the Land (v5-7)

⁵ “For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, ⁶ if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, ⁷ then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

If you change your ways, then I will let you dwell in this place.
This is a dramatic challenge to Jerusalem and Judah.
The warning is very clear:
 if you do not change, then you may not live here.

We usually think of idolatry as the central problem.

But here Jeremiah starts with the problem of *justice*.

Execute justice – which means:

 Do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, the widow.

 Do not shed innocent blood – do not go after other gods.

What does “doing justice” mean for us?

 It means that when the immigrant comes to the county building office
 confused about what office to go to about some matter,
 you help him find the right office.

 It means that you have fair and clear laws – fairly and honestly executed.

Let me give you an example.

Let’s say that you’re a police officer.

 You pull over the son of the police chief for going 50 MPH down Main Street,

 Five minutes later you pull over the son of an illegal immigrant for going 45 MPH

What happens?

 If you ticket the son of the illegal immigrant, but *not* the police chief’s son –

that is oppression.

I know a small town judge not far from here
who became famous for his even-handed approach to justice.
He became *hated* by the rich and powerful because he wouldn't let their kids off!
Police officers quickly learned that if they wanted a ticket to stick –
send it to Judge H's court.
He wasn't mean about it.
He simply understood that *doing justice* requires *equity*.

Not “same-ness” – but *fairness*.

If you live in a community where the rich and powerful get special treatment,
that is an oppressive community.

Justice does not mean forcing the rich to give their money to the poor.
Justice means that the rich and powerful use their wealth and power
in order to *help* the poor.

When I look at human history, it is very rare to see a society that does this.
But one thing is clear from Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God:
the church is supposed to be a society that practices this.

[Newton on a penny for the poor for every penny spent on conveniences]

Just out of curiosity: did you notice the seeming contradiction in verse 7?
⁷ *then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.*

If God gave it to their fathers *forever* –
then why is God threatening to drive them out of it?
On the one hand, *yes*, God promised the land to Abraham and his descendents *forever*.
But that does not mean that any *particular* descendent of Abraham
has a right to live in the land.
This is the point that Paul will make in Romans 4.
The promise was not made to Abraham's genetics.
The promise was made to Abraham's *faith*.
Without the faith of Abraham you may not receive the inheritance of Abraham.
And if you have the faith of Abraham,
you will also share the obedience of Abraham.

God will be faithful to his promises – and his salvation is *always* by grace –
but that does not mean that you can ignore his commands!

As Christopher Wright puts it,
“Obedience was never the means of earning the land.
But it was the condition in which the grace-gift
could be possessed and enjoyed....”

Obedience is the only way to enjoy the blessing of God’s promise.” (p110)
As the old hymn says,
“Trust and Obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus,
but to trust and obey.”

Verse 8 is the hinge and centerpiece of our first chiasm:

c. But You Trust in Deceptive Words to No Avail (v8)

⁸ “Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail.

Judah keeps saying, “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.”
But the temple of the Lord cannot save them!
What lies do you believe?
What deceptive words do you trust?
Well, let me ask you this:
what sins do you regularly confess every Sunday?
That’s what Jeremiah focuses on in verses 9-11

b’. You Do Abominations – and Then Think the Temple Will Save You! (v9-

11)

⁹ *Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, ¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations?*

Jeremiah’s point here is that the people of God
are using the temple as a means of not really dealing with sin.

In the words of Walter Bruggemann:

“The governing paradigm for the tradition of Jeremiah is *Israel’s covenant with Yahweh, rooted in the memories and mandates of the Sinai tradition.*
That covenant taught that the sovereign God of Israel required obedience to covenant stipulations about social practice and power.
Disobedience to those covenant stipulations would result in heavy sanctions (curses) that would be experienced as death or displacement....” (Brueggemann, 3)

But in Jeremiah’s day, this covenant theology had developed a sort of Davidic exceptionalism.
The Jerusalem establishment claimed that “the God of Israel had made irrevocable promises to the temple and the monarchy, had taken up permanent residence in Jerusalem, and was for all time a patron and guarantor of the Jerusalem establishment.”

Their idea was that so long as we all “go to church” and say “sorry,”
we can live however we want!

How often do we do the same thing?

You hear the declaration of pardon every week:

“Believer in Jesus Christ, you are free from the guilt and the power of sin!”
If you respond to that by saying, “Woo hoo! We are delivered –
now I can go back and sin again this week!” –
then you are missing the point of the temple!
“Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?
By no means!
How can we who died to sin still live in it?
Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus
were baptized into his death?
We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that,
just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,
we too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:1-4)

Jeremiah has strong words for this:

¹¹ *Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD.*

A den of robbers is a safe place for robbers.

Robbers will go out and steal –
and then run back to their den – their hideout – for protection.

Here God asks, is *my temple* a robbers den to you?!

Is this house – which is called by *my name* – a safe place for those who reject my law?

Jesus quotes this verse when he drives out the money-changers.

I think that sometimes we only focus on the fact that they were *money-changers*.

But the idea of a “den of robbers” is not just about robbing.

It is the idea that this is a *safe place* for those who practice injustice.

The temple should not be a safe place for robbers.

The church should never be a “safe place” for those who want to go out and harm others.

And so God calls Jerusalem to remember what he did in Shiloh (v12)

a’. Go to Shiloh and See What I Did to Israel – That’s What I Will Do Now (v12-15)

¹² *Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel. ¹³ And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, ¹⁴ therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh.*

¹⁵ *And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim.*

The tabernacle had been set up in Shiloh.

The ark of the covenant had dwelt there –

until the days of Eli, when it was captured by the Philistines –

when the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas, died in the battle –
and then, when he heard the news that the ark of God had been captured,
Eli fell over and died –
and then his daughter-in-law died in childbirth,
and as she lay dying, she named the boy “Ichabod” (no-glory)
because the glory had departed from Israel.

We sang about this in Psalm 78 –
and as we sang Psalm 78, you might have come away thinking,
“now that God has raised up David, Shiloh will never happen again!”
Certainly the crowd that was listening to the sermon in Jeremiah 26 –
the crowd that seized Jeremiah and demanded his death –
they thought that Shiloh would never happen again!

Jesus – and Stephen, and Paul – would all get in trouble for challenging the temple leadership.

By the way, do you know where Jeremiah was from?

Anathoth – the home of Abiathar, who was from the dispossessed line of priests after Eli,
the sons of Ichabod.

Was Jeremiah one of the descendents of Ichabod?

We don’t know.

But certainly he remembered the story of Ichabod – no glory –
and he warns the priests in Jerusalem that the same story is about to be repeated.

Think about that for a moment:

God appears to have called a descendent of Eli – a son of Ichabod –
as the last prophet of the Kingdom, who would warn the priestly line of Zadok
that their time had come.

It would be like God using the descendent of King Saul to rebuke the house of David!

Oh, wait, he did, with Mordecai – and the book of Esther!

Our second point can be briefer – because it so obviously follows from the first!

If the people of God are trusting in deceptive words,
then it follows that “truth has perished.”

And so the LORD says to Jeremiah:

2. “Truth Has Perished” (7:16-8:3)

Introduction: “Do Not Pray for This People” (v16)

¹⁶ *“As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you.”*

The “you” is singular.

Jeremiah, do not pray for this people... for I will not hear you.

In the first point, God started by telling Jeremiah to preach to the people.

But here in the second point, God starts by telling Jeremiah *not* to pray for them.

The apostle John tells us not to pray for the one who has sinned “the sin unto death.”
Do not pray for those whom God has condemned to destruction.

I have often struggled with explaining this – but Jeremiah helped me tremendously.

What prayer will God not hear?

In Jeremiah 7 (like in 1 John 5) the prayer that God will not hear
is the prayer of intercession: “please forgive them.”

If you pray “please forgive them” – but *they* refuse to repent –
then God will not hear your prayer!

This is why Jesus’ prayer, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,”
is so important!

Jesus is the *one man* who can intercede with the Father in such a way
as to *forgive* our sins – as well as *change us* so that we become repentant!

But in Jeremiah’s day, it’s still getting worse:

a. The “Queen of Heaven” and the Idolatry of Jerusalem (v17-19)

¹⁷ *Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?*

¹⁸ *The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven. And they pour out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke me to anger.*

¹⁹ *Is it I whom they provoke? declares the LORD. Is it not themselves, to their own shame?*

Verses 18-19 describe the particular idolatries of Jerusalem –
but the LORD also says that they are simply provoking themselves to their own shame.

Notice that the whole family is involved in this idolatry.

The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough.

Our idolatry today focuses around materialism and consumerism. [Wright, 115]

Marketers know that if they target children,
if they can lure them into a world of material pleasure,
then they will own the next generation.

Deuteronomy 6 had spoken of how the family is supposed to be oriented
around the word and works of God –

 speak of these things when you rise up and when you lie down.

But too often we are oriented around games, sports, movies, music –

 our own pleasures and interests, rather than the words and works of God.

What is it that you do together as a family?

 What is it that you *worship* together as a family?

After all, judgment is coming:

b. “My Anger and My Wrath Will be Poured Out on This Place” (v20)

²⁰ *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, my anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place, upon man and beast, upon the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground; it will burn and not be quenched.”*

And when judgment comes, it will not only affect the people,
it will affect all of creation.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God said,

“Cursed is the ground because of you.”

God created humanity to govern and care for the created order.

Therefore, when man sinned, the creation was subjected to futility.

And in the same way, Israel was called to be the second Adam –

to succeed where Adam failed –

and likewise, Israel’s failure results in God’s curse on creation.

The trees of the field and the fruit of the ground will also be scorched.

God’s wrath will be poured out on this place – both upon man and upon beast.

The creation groans.

All natural disasters are a result of human sin.

Every time you hear of a flood, an earthquake, or a tornado

you should remember that God’s judgment is against sin!

Verses 21-23 add a curious statement:

c. I Did Not Command Burnt Offerings but Obedience (v21-23)

²¹ *Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: “Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. ²² For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. ²³ But this command I gave them: ‘Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.’*

This has caused much consternation over the centuries.

After all, in Exodus, Moses insisted on taking flocks and herds out of Egypt

so that Israel could offer sacrifices to the LORD.

And in Exodus 20, the very first thing that God says to Moses

after giving the 10 Commandments,

is the law of the altar –

how to construct an altar for burnt offerings and sacrifices!

There should be no controversy here.

Jeremiah’s point is very clear:

Jerusalem has become obsessed with the minor details of the law.

Burnt offerings and sacrifices are *minor* details.

The *big point* of the Law is

“Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people.

And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.” (7:23)

In other words, the sacrificial system is *not* the main point.

Jesus will say the same thing:

Love God – and love neighbor –

“on these two commands depend all the Law and the Prophets”

If you succeed at keeping all the minutiae of Presbyterian church order,

but you fail to love God and neighbor,

then you have missed the whole point of Presbyterian church order.

d. But They Did Not Listen to Me (v24-26)

²⁴ But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward. ²⁵ From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day. ²⁶ Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers.

Verses 24-26 then summarize several hundred years of prophetic preaching.

Ever since they came out of Egypt I have sent my prophets to call them back.

But they refused to repent.

And they will not listen to you, either:

d'. And They Will Not Listen to You – Truth Has Perished

(v27-28)

²⁷ “So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you. ²⁸ And you shall say to them, ‘This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, and did not accept discipline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips.

That’s why the LORD says to Jeremiah:

“Truth has perished.”

They have believed lies – and so truth has perished.

If you do not accept the discipline of the LORD, then you will lose the truth.

We see that in the mainline churches – and increasingly in evangelicalism as well!

If you will not listen to God – then truth simply becomes a matter of personal preference.

Truth has perished.

When Jeremiah hears this, he cannot help but utter a brief lament:

Interlude: a Lament for “the Generation of His Wrath” (v29)

*²⁹ “Cut off your hair and cast it away;
raise a lamentation on the bare heights,
for the LORD has rejected and forsaken
the generation of his wrath.’*

“The generation of his wrath”!

What a phrase!

In times past, Lord, you showed favor!

But now you have abandoned your heritage.

Jeremiah has been instructed not to *pray* for this people –
but he can still lament over them!

Notice, however, that this lament is not addressed *to* his own generation.

Jeremiah calls *his readers* – he calls *us* – to lament over “the generation of his wrath.”

The lament is one of the lost arts of the modern world.

We have barely retained the art of confession –

where we confess that *we* are not as we should be.

But we have lost the art of lamentation –

where we lament that the *world* is not as it should be –

our *fathers* were not as they should be.

Sure, we can grumble about it!

Just read Facebook!

But a godly lament requires us to bring our sorrows to God!

c'. They Have Done Detestable Things Which I Did Not Command

(v30-31)

³⁰ “For the sons of Judah have done evil in my sight, declares the LORD. They have set their detestable things in the house that is called by my name, to defile it. ³¹ And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind.

Verses 30-31 then shows how far the people of God have fallen:

they have defiled “the house that is called by my name” with their detestable things –
and they have burnt their sons and daughters in the fire to Topheth.

Notice the parallel “I did not command” with verse 22.

First (verse 22) the sons of Judah mistook sacrifice as *the point* of serving God.

And so second (verse 31) they corrupted the idea of burnt offering

to the point that they burned their sons and daughters in the fire.

If sacrifice *is the point* –

then why not offer the thing that is most dear to you?

This is why Jeremiah says that sacrifice and offering is *not* the point!

The point is obedience!

When you lose sight of love of God and neighbor,

the result is that you will destroy your children.

The obvious example in our culture is abortion.

We allow people to kill their children for their own convenience.

They are sacrificed on the altar of pleasure.

Truth has perished.

But Jeremiah says that what God desires is *obedience* to what he has *said* in his Word.

And Jeremiah warns that God's patience will not continue forever:

b'. "The Valley of Slaughter" – the Land Shall Become a Waste (v32-34)

³² Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when it will no more be called Topheth, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter; for they will bury in Topheth, because there is no room elsewhere. ³³ And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth, and none will frighten them away. ³⁴ And I will silence in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, for the land shall become a waste.

God promises that the days are coming when the Valley of the Son of Hinnom will be called the Valley of Slaughter.

The Valley of the Son of Hinnom will eventually be known as "Gehenna" – a synonym for "hell."

The land shall become a waste – as God's judgment comes upon Jerusalem.

You can see in verses 32-34 the beginning of the picture of the final judgment that John will describe in Revelation 19-20.

"The dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth... and I will silence...the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness..."

a'. The Bones of Jerusalem Shall Be Spread Before the Hosts of Heaven Whom They Worshiped (8:1-3)

8 "At that time, declares the LORD, the bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of its officials, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be brought out of their tombs. ² And they shall be spread before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven, which they have loved and served, which they have gone after, and which they have sought and worshiped. And they shall not be gathered or buried. They shall be as dung on the surface of the ground. ³ Death shall be preferred to life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family in all the places where I have driven them, declares the LORD of hosts.

We have often heard Jeremiah use the language of kings, officials, prophets, priests, and people.

The result of Jerusalem's sin is that the bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of its officials, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem –

“shall be spread before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven...”
and the remnant of “this evil family” would be scattered all over the earth.

Dead bodies are unclean.

To have your bones spread “as dung on the surface of the ground”
is a horrendous fate.

Jeremiah’s temple sermon was famous.

It was preached at the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim (ca. 608 BC).

It is quite likely that there was a fourteen year old boy present –

also a son of the priests – but in his case, a son of the *Jerusalem* priests.

And as he listened to Jeremiah proclaim the coming day of the LORD,
the vision of the bones of God’s people strewn across the valley,
was impressed upon his mind and heart.

Twenty-two years later, that same boy, now living in exile in Babylon,
heard the news that Jerusalem had fallen.

“The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. And he said to me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ And I answered, ‘O Lord GOD, you know.’” (Ezekiel 37:1-3)

Ezekiel probably listened to Jeremiah deliver that sermon.

Or at the very least, he sat riveted that night when his father described it!

Jerusalem was a small town.

The priesthood was a small and powerful group.

The preaching of Jeremiah powerfully influenced Ezekiel.

Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones is the answer to Jeremiah’s temple sermon.

Jeremiah’s sermon has no happy ending.

Jeremiah’s sermon ends: “Death shall be preferred to life

by all the remnant that remains of this evil family

in all the places where I have driven them, declares the LORD of hosts.”

Perhaps that was the point in the sermon where the priests and prophets had Jeremiah arrested!

When God declares that he will cast Jerusalem out of his sight –

just like he did to Shiloh –

“That was the unthinkable conclusion to an intolerable sermon.” (Wright, 113)

But then again, sometimes the sermon needs to end by saying,

“If you don’t repent, then you will die.”