

LECTURE 12 – Jeremiah 50:1-52:34

Think with me about someone you consider a significant person in your life – someone who has made a difference in who you are today either because of what they said, or what they did, or just because of who they were . . . their character or influence. I haven't read *Reader's Digest* for quite a while, but they used to have a feature called "My Most Unforgettable Character" where people would share about someone who really stood out.

As we close this book of Jeremiah, I hope you'll agree that he was one who stood up to adversity, stood for righteousness, and spoke out clearly about the Lord God Almighty . . . certainly an "unforgettable character" in Scripture.

As we get to the end of the book of Jeremiah, we'd like to have a nice, neat little ending to the book that tells us what happened to the remnant in Egypt and to Jeremiah and Baruch. But that's not to be.

In last week's lesson, Jeremiah penned his prophecies to the Gentile nations. This week we read of God's plan for the future of Babylon. For two chapters, Jeremiah writes about three things:

1. God declaring war on Babylon (50:1-28)
2. God assembling armies to come against Babylon (50:29-51:26)
3. God's announcement of victory over Babylon (51:27-58).

There are critics and scholars who challenge these last three chapters of Jeremiah as not being his work. They claim it's just too detailed and must have been written after the events took place instead of 65 years before the fall of Babylon. But Scripture itself states at the end of chapter 51, "The words of Jeremiah end here." Fulfillment of prophecy is one of the great apologetics for the inerrancy of our Bible. We **can know** the end from the beginning. Although Jeremiah wrote about the future, he wrote as if it had already happened.

When we started at the first of the year, we spoke about prophecy and how often times it had both a near-term fulfillment and a long-term fulfillment. Some things happened in the generation alive at the time of the prophet that would vindicate him as a messenger from God because they did come to pass; other prophecies, however, have yet be fulfilled – awaiting the Second Coming of Christ.

In this lesson about an overall prophecy of the fall of Babylon, many Christians don't agree as to the extent of the prophetic fulfillment. The Medes and the Persians under Cyrus captured Babylon in 539 B.C. but they didn't destroy the city. It was Alexander the Great who destroyed the city in 330 B.C. and left it in a heap of ruins. Jeremiah had predicted Babylon would be a "desolation forever," yet we meet Babylon again in Revelation 17 and 18 with many parallels to what we have read in Jeremiah.

Certainly Babylon represents everything connected with an anti-God world system, so here we may have a dual fulfillment of prophecy. Whether Babylon will be rebuilt literally or whether the Revelation chapters refer spiritually to false religions and corrupted commercial systems is a matter of how you interpret the Bible.

In looking at secular history, we see that Babylon has fallen at least 18 times between 539 and 122 B.C., rising each time in a weakened condition. In the first century B.C. and A.D., Josephus described how Jews in Babylon were subjected to severe persecution and finally abandoned the city in the middle of the first Christian century.

There are just a few specifics I'd like to comment on in this prophecy against Babylon in this week's lesson.

First of all, we noticed that God not only declared war on Babylon but on the gods of Babylon too – Bel and Marduk. They would be shamefully defeated. Idolatry was a leading sin of God's people that sent them into captivity and just as they had idols on every corner in Jerusalem, no doubt their new Babylonian environment would have just as many idol symbols visible. Once and for all, as this great power of Babylon would crumble, so too the idols would crumble into dust. It was God Almighty who raises up or destroys nations in His sovereignty.

In chapter 50:5 Jeremiah writes, "the people will ask their way to Zion." Remember after 70 years, most of them were born in captivity. We know that eventually many did return to their homeland under the

leadership of Ezra, Zerubbabel and Nehemiah. “Be ready to flee – leave the land of the Babylonians,” was God’s warning.

Their captors had the self-righteous excuse that “they were being God’s servants and these sinners deserved what they got.” But God was angry because He said, “You rejoiced and were glad to pillage my inheritance.” Therefore, (50:15) do to Babylon as she has done to others. It brings to mind what God said to Abraham in Genesis 12:3—“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse.” Being used by God is not an excuse for pride. The Babylonians abused the responsibility given them by God. They relished their authority and superiority and it led to self-righteous pride.

This is certainly a good time of year to examine our own hearts toward those outside of Christ. Have we abused the power given us as children of God to win the world for Christ by a haughty attitude, a feeling of superiority, critical spirits and unforgiving natures? Self-righteousness in any form, toward fellow Christians or non-Christians, destroys. For this sin Babylon would be destroyed.

But there is good news in verse 20. “A search will be made for Israel’s guilt and the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for I will forgive the remnant I spare.” What a wonderful promise! Sin had driven them into exile, but they could return to God with a clean slate.

The New Year is just a couple of weeks away. It’s the traditional time for resolutions – new year, clean slate, start fresh, do it right this

time. But we'll never do it right until we ARE right with God.

Everything around us this time of year reminds us of Christmas – the incarnation of the Son of God – the gift of the Lord Jesus. He is the answer to our desire to be right with God.

Psalm 32 says, “How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity.” Our God is a great God! He not only forgives, but He forgets our sins. They are removed as far as the east is from the west. Through Jesus Christ we can walk clean before our Lord.

Jeremiah 50:24 went on to say that God said, “I set a trap for you, O Babylon, because you opposed the Lord.” All the time Jeremiah foretold that Babylon would conquer Judah as God’s servant, God knew the thoughts and intents of Babylon’s national heart. Conquest, seize, plunder . . . the people and the temple. Rich temple treasures were carried off to Babylon and in vs. 28, God said He would take vengeance for His temple.

Why do you think this was important? Shouldn’t plunder of gold and precious objects be expected from a conquering army? We’ll study the story of Belshazzar in detail when we get into the book of Daniel. But basically, he held a great feast and demanded the temple vessels be brought to the party for one and all to drink from. A hand appeared on the wall and wrote his doom. That night he was slain by the army of Darius. He had abused the holy things of God.

Remember that the judgment of chapters 50 and 51 were not against Nebuchadnezzar, but against his descendants King Na/bo/ni/dus and his son Belshazzar, who were ruling as co-regents of Babylon when they were conquered.

God issued the challenge (50:44) “Who is like Me?” – the eternal God, the Creator. Universalists today say all roads lead to god and it really doesn’t matter what religion you are. That’s why the cross is so offensive to mankind – it says there is only ONE way. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father but through Me.” God demands we acknowledge His way and His Sovereignty.

Then Jeremiah in 51:11 went out on a prophetic limb. He named the Medes as the conquering nation. At the time of the prophecy, they were small and certainly no threat to Babylon. But Jeremiah’s reputation was on the line as a true prophet of God. Remember that specifics in prophecy had to be one hundred percent. To date there have been thousands literally and fully fulfilled. Of Bible prophecies 87% have already come to pass just as they were written. Some 13% concern the future Second Coming. There is no doubt that these, too, will be literally and completely fulfilled.

Prophecy has always been important in God’s Word. It’s one way to measure truth. There was a time in Jewish history though when the Jews thought God’s Word had failed. The Jewish priests put on sackcloth and ashes and went about mourning. That was the day the

Roman government took away from Israel the power of capital punishment. Jacob had said in Genesis, “the scepter shall not pass from Judah until Shiloh comes again.” A Messianic prophecy. The Jews thought the scepter (their rule/power) had passed to the Romans and the Messiah had not come. God’s Word had failed.

They didn’t know of a little boy growing up in Nazareth – their Messiah was among them.

Jeremiah . . . so accurate . . . named the Medes.

The oracles against Babylon close with a message and a sign (another illustrated sermon) when Jeremiah instructed Seraiah (Se-righ-uh) to take a scroll to Babylon and read it.

Scripture says this happened in the fourth year of King Zedekiah’s reign. Commentators say the King Zedekiah was called to Babylon that year to possibly:

- 1) explain the conference he had with the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon that we studied in Jeremiah 27:3. (Remember he was plotting a rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar.) OR
- 2) to attend the grand unveiling of the huge 90 foot gold statue that we read about in Daniel 3.

Whatever the reason, Seraiah was commissioned by Jeremiah to go with the king. By the way, Seraiah was the brother of Baruch, not the chief priest we read about in Chapter 52.

The words on the scroll may have contained some or all of the oracles against Babylon in chapters 50-51. The instructions were to read it, tie a stone around it, and throw it into the Euphrates River as a sign the Babylon would sink and rise no more.

This brings up the question, “To whom did Seraiah read the scroll?” Probably not the Babylonians or a large assembly of Jews – it would have been too dangerous. More likely it was read before a group of faithful witnesses who would testify to it in later days. It was a pledge of God to His people, something to comfort them over and over during their 70 years in exile. After almost every message of doom for Babylon in these chapters has been a message of hope for Israel. Throwing the scroll into the river was a visual aid similar to what we saw in earlier chapters of Jeremiah with the rotten girdle, the iron yoke, the basket of figs, the potter’s wheel, and the broken clay jars.

Chapter 52 was probably not written by Jeremiah. The most likely candidate is Baruch, Jeremiah’s secretary. It describes again in full detail the fall of Jerusalem that characterized Jeremiah’s prophetic message. Second, it relates the release of Jehoiachin from prison on the death of king Nebuchadnezzar. Certainly this must have been an encouraging sign to the captives.

As your questions pointed out, we as Christians can see ourselves in the release of Jehoiachin. Released from the prison of sin, seated with

the King of Kings, feasting at His table, being cared for all our lives. Something we didn't earn, something we don't deserve. It called grace.

Some are quick to point out there seems to be a discrepancy in the number of people taken in the account of Jeremiah and the account in 2 Kings. Two possible explanations are: One – males only could have been counted in Jeremiah while women and children were included in Kings. Or, possibly, Jeremiah included only those who survived the rigorous trip to Babylon.

Jerome tells us that tradition says that Jeremiah died in Egypt, martyred by stoning at the hands of his own countrymen. There is nothing specific in Scripture. However, when we consider the attitude of that remnant in Egypt – calling Jeremiah a liar – and their attitude toward obeying God, or rather not obeying Him, it's certainly within the realm of possibility that Jeremiah met his death in that manner.

In spite of the tragedies of his life, Jeremiah's integrity and faith and perseverance still serve as inspiration and challenge to us today. George Bernard Shaw said, "If all you do in life is that which is comfortable and convenient, the great things will never get done."

Jeremiah cared . . . really cared . . . about his people and his nation. He didn't ever seem to get any earthly rewards. He even tried to quit but couldn't because of the inner fire in his bones. He's called the weeping prophet because he wore his compassion on his sleeve. His heart was breaking for this stubborn, rebellious people. But he was tough.

When he got through preaching, he wasn't popular, but everyone had a clear idea of what he was saying. He didn't hold back because he might offend someone. Preaching must bring results. If preaching produces neither positive nor negative reactions, then you can be sure it's not God's Word being preached. The cross of Jesus Christ divides.

The parable of the fisherman says, "If you give a person a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime." That's what we're trying to do in this type of in-depth Bible study . . . teach you how to fish for the deep truths of God's Word to nourish your soul for a lifetime. It's said, "We learn that which we are passionate about. We simply memorize the rest."

Do you feel a passion . . . a fire stirring within you right now as you think back over the book of Jeremiah? He was an unforgettable character of Scripture.

Our last question asked, "How has God spoken to you through the book of Jeremiah?" What morsels of truth did you catch for yourselves? I'll share my answer with you . . .

- ✓ Jeremiah was faithful for the long haul – I need to be too.
- ✓ He didn't shirk doing hard things to further God's purposes even if it meant a lot of personal sacrifice.
- ✓ The sins of Judah were the same as those I see today – show of religion, listening to false teachers, giving God low priority, ignoring those who would call us to repentance.

- ✓ God is not silent. He warns the righteous and the unrighteous of things to come. He is a God that will do what He says – that affirms my faith. I am standing on those promises of God.
- ✓ No one abuses God's people without His vengeance. Evil will not triumph.
- ✓ Through Jeremiah God promised a new covenant, restoration and living in the presence of the King – all these things are made available to me through Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah is challenging both to study and to teach – just ask any of the lecturers. We could have spent much longer with this major prophet, but we'll be moving on to Lamentations beginning in January.

I'd like to leave you with one last thought concerning the book of Jeremiah. Some of you have been great at taking down notes as the lecturers have made their presentations – probably because you know we're going to ask you about that as question one next week. But doing individual study, participating in your small group and being attentive to the lecture isn't all there is to this Bible study. "Don't just write down what we say or do, plan what you're going to do with it."

1 Timothy 3:16-17 . . . All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

God created us to make a difference in this world. We learn, we grow, we influence. This time of year we often see again the old Jimmy Stewart film “It’s a Wonderful Life.” It’s about a man who didn’t think he made a difference and the world would be a lot better off if he were never born. He got the chance to see what a world without him would have been like. The absence of his righteous moral character changed the whole environment of his town.

Do you know that someone may have had YOU on their mind when I asked about a person of influence in my opening remarks? Each individual has an opportunity to impact others – for good or bad.

Jeremiah had an impact on his world, whether he ever felt like it or not. We’re still feeling conviction and encouragement today through his writings. But the Man who truly made an impact on this world was born in a lowly stable, laid in a manger, deity in diapers. As we celebrate this Christmas season with our families, let’s praise God for that one solitary life. James Allan Francis wrote:

Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the Child of a peasant woman. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty, and then for three years He was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never owned a home. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put His foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness.

He had no credentials but Himself. He had nothing to do with this world except the naked power of His Divine manhood. While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a Cross between two thieves. His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth while He was dying -- and that was His coat. When He was dead He was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. Such was His human life -- He rose from the dead. Twenty wide centuries have come and gone and today He is the Centerpiece of the human race and the Leader of the column of progress. I am within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever were built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that One Solitary Life.

Let's pray. Truly we are humble and grateful, Lord, that you have brought us into Your kingdom of light through the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We celebrate His birth, Your generosity in giving Him to us, and our salvation. We praise you for what we have learned, and for what we will yet learn, as we commit ourselves to the study of Your Word.

In Jesus' name, Amen.