

Why the American Church Should Heed the Ancient Warnings of Jeremiah

The writings of the prophet Jeremiah have to be one of the most fascinating prophetic puzzles recorded in the Bible. Within the book of Jeremiah, the chapters are mixed up chronologically, as if the book were cut into pieces, thrown into the air and pieced back together however they landed. To me this is representative of the chaotic times that Jeremiah lived in, as he continuously warned the nation of Israel about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and the exile of God's people into Babylon. This was all due to their disobedience and their wanton disregard to the pleading of the God of their fathers to return to Him.

Jeremiah is well known as the weeping prophet, and it's an appropriate title. As an ambassador for God, Jeremiah was properly representing grief and heartbreak over the coming judgment. God was brokenhearted as His own children spurned Him.

Parents who genuinely love their teenage children may find it necessary to expel them if they continue to bring total chaos into the house—punching holes in the walls, being disrespectful and acting totally rebellious. As a good Father, God found it necessary to expel His children from the promised land for 70 years until their punishment was complete (Jer. 25:11). The good news for Israel, though, was that there were prophecies that they would return to the land and God would return to them as well. The Jews who remained faithful held tightly to the hope that God always keeps His covenant and His promises.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel said the main thing we learn

from history is that we do not learn from history. People are people, and while the faces may change over history, the actions of humanity are repeated over and over. As we read Jeremiah, we see that history is repeating itself, and his ancient prophetic utterances are again ringing true in the ears of all who have ears to hear in our generation.

A Rebellious Nation

At the beginning of King Jehoiakim's reign, the Lord told Jeremiah to stand in the court of the house of the Lord and speak to everyone who came to worship all the words the Lord would command him, not leaving out a single word. This was in the hope that they would turn from their wicked ways, allowing God to relent from the disaster that He was bringing upon them (Jer. 26:1-3). As a loving parent not wanting to discipline His children, God was giving them yet another chance.

But when all the people heard Jeremiah speak these words in the house of the Lord, everyone pounced on him, yelling, "You're a dead man!" One of the reasons was because he alluded to the destruction of the tabernacle in Shiloh that had stood for 369 years and was actually directly insulting them. The reason the tabernacle was destroyed, according to Jewish tradition, was because of the wickedness of the high priest Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas. The people understood Jeremiah to be saying it was because of the wickedness of the priests of his day that the temple would be destroyed.

The priests and prophets proclaimed that Jeremiah deserved to die for prophesying against Jerusalem. Jeremiah, after setting forth his case humbly, said he was in their hands and for them to do whatever seemed right. But he also warned them that if they put him to death, they would bring his innocent blood on their heads, on the city and on the people, because it really was God who sent him.

Fortunately for Jeremiah, the rulers and the people told the

priests and prophets that they believed Jeremiah spoke the word of the Lord and was not worthy of death. Even King Hezekiah had listened and repented, causing the Lord to repent of the evil He was going to send back then. By killing Jeremiah, they would be doing great evil against their souls.

This was nothing new for Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 25:1-3, Jeremiah tells us that from the 13th year of Josiah to that very day, it had been 23 years since the word of the Lord had come to him. Jeremiah was 23 when he started, and it had been 23 years, making him 46. For 23 years Jeremiah had been getting up early and speaking to them, and for 23 years they had not listened.

Remember, not only Jeremiah but the Lord had also continually risen early to speak to the people, and they had never listened to Him since they came out of Egypt. In this chapter, we see one verse after another in which God again said He had risen early, sending them His servants the prophets. I don't know about you, but when I get up early, it's because I either have an exciting adventure ahead or something of extreme importance. This just demonstrates the importance God puts on His kids returning home, back into a relationship with their Creator.

Then the Lord proclaimed that Nebuchadnezzar was His servant, and the Lord would bring him against Israel and all the nations around her. He declared that Israel and the surrounding nations would become an astonishment, a hissing and perpetual desolation as prophesied in the Torah. We also read a prophecy that the nations would serve Babylon 70 years. Then afterward, God would punish the king of Babylon and make it a perpetual desolation (Jer. 25:4-12; Deut. 28:36-37). Payback was coming!

God then told Jeremiah that all the nations would drink of the wine cup of His fury (Jer. 25:12-15). This is the same imagery the book of Revelation recorded, when an angel declared that

Babylon was fallen because she made all the nations drink the wine of the wrath of her fornication. This was followed by an angel proclaiming with a loud voice that anyone who takes the mark of the beast will also drink of the wine of the wrath of God (Rev. 14:8-10). I find it an interesting parallel that 70 years have now been accomplished since Israel's nationhood. Will God now bring this judgment from the book of Revelation about in our time?

God said that every nation on earth would drink of the cup of His wrath, because if He made Jerusalem, the very city called by His name, drink from the cup of His wrath for all their evil, then why should the other nations go unpunished for all of their evil? God was now calling for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth.

Wrath of God

In Seattle, where I currently live, I don't hear thunder very often the way I did when I lived in the Midwest. There, every spring brings rip-roaring thunderstorms with instantaneous cracks of lightning, often followed by supersonic booms of thunder that send everyone to the ceiling. Perhaps you know what I am talking about. You immediately collect your wits and settle down, thankful you survived.

Even more unsettling than thunder would be the sound of a lion's roar. If you were out in the brush of South Africa one night, and all of a sudden you heard a thunderingly loud roar of a lion just a few yards away, how would you feel? There would be no settling down but rather a melting into a fetal position!

Even that is nothing compared to when the Lion of the tribe of Judah will roar from on high and utter His voice from His holy habitation! He is going to give a shout against all the inhabitants of the earth that will be heard around the world. He is going to raise up a great whirlwind from the coasts of

the earth, and the slain will be scattered from one end of the earth to the other, and the dead won't be lamented, gathered or even buried.

Here we are in the middle of the 11-year reign of Jehoiakim, and we find that the Lord instructed Jeremiah to put on a linen belt, wear it to the river Euphrates and hide it under a rock. Jeremiah did what the Lord said, and after many days, he was told to go back and fetch it. When he did, he saw that it was all marred and good for nothing (Jer. 13:1-7).

The Lord then informed Jeremiah that it would be after this manner that He would mar the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. God really expressed His feelings to Jeremiah, as He referred to the evil people who refused to hear His words. God had wanted Israel and Judah to be as the belt while it was being worn, cleaving to Him for their glory, but they refused and wouldn't listen. But because they had walked in the imagination of their hearts, worshipping other gods and serving them, they were going to be just like the belt after it had been hidden under the rock, all marred and good for nothing (Jer. 13:8-11).

When God releases His wrath on earth, I don't want to be anywhere around. It reminds me of times when I was a child and my dad got mad about something. It didn't matter what he was mad about; all nine of us kids bolted in every direction like a bunch of startled cats. God's anger is always justified, always done at the correct time and always done in the right measure, but even so, I would be out of there.

I can't help but feel the tension as I read that God told Jeremiah to fill every bottle with wine and explain to the people that He would fill them with drunkenness—from the kings to the priests to the prophets to all the inhabitants—and then smash them into each other without pity or mercy until they were destroyed (Jer. 13:12-14).

God's heartbreak over His children comes through loud and clear in the next few verses, and we find the Lord calling out for them to hear and give ear. In Revelation, we read over and over the exhortation, "He who has an ear, let him hear." In Hebrew, the word for "hear" actually means both "to hear" and "to obey," or as I would say, "to pay very close attention."

God told them to not be proud but to give glory to the Lord before He caused darkness to come and envelop them, making them stumble around, and while they would be looking for light, He would turn it into the shadow of death and make it even gross darkness (Jer. 13:15-16). And if they still wouldn't hear, He said, "My soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock is carried away captive" (Jer. 13:17).

History Repeats Itself

As I write this, the world is reeling in the midst of what is called the coronavirus pandemic. I live in the Tacoma-Seattle area, which was at one time the epicenter for the virus in the United States. I know there is a Creator, and the Scriptures plainly declare in Ecclesiastes 3:1 (KJV) that "to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." So this begs the question: "What is the purpose of the coronavirus going on a rampage around the world at this very time?" God has a purpose for everything that happens. Only mankind can try to uncover the meaning. Is there a divine message that we need to discern?

Many are endeavoring to figure out how to cope with this virus when at this time there are no test kits, there is no antidote, and there seems to be no way to stop its spread other than to isolate yourself, hide in a bunker or at best, stay 6 feet away from everyone as you soak yourself in hand sanitizer. Few people stop to think if there may be a divine message in all of this. Here are some of my thoughts as to the

possible clues.

We have been experiencing the greatest bull market in history over the last four years. Mankind has been consumed with the hustle and bustle of making money that they have taken all the credit for. They have forgotten to take a timeout to thank God. The Scriptures tell us in Deuteronomy 8:18 that it is God who gives you the power to get wealth. We need to remember, as the Bible says in Job 1:21, we came into this world naked, we are leaving naked, and it is the Lord who gives to us, and it is the Lord who takes away. We are not in control.

With this coronavirus, the big thing is to make sure you keep your hands clean. Let's put a spiritual application to this and remember Psalm 24:4, which states that the one who ascends to the house of the Lord is the one who has clean hands and a pure heart. I've heard it said that as a parent puts a child into timeout when he has been bad to give him time to reflect on the consequences of his misbehavior, maybe God is forcing humanity into a timeout for us to rethink our own priorities. I also believe this could be a dry run for bigger things that may be coming our way over the next 10 years, giving us time to repent and return to God.

Sadly, in the book of Revelation, instead of repenting when God is trying to get man's attention, all the people do is harden their hearts as Pharaoh did when the plagues were coming fast and furiously at him!

Many of us are familiar with the Bible verses about pride going before destruction and how it is better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly. If I were to ask what the sin of Sodom was so that God saw fit to destroy it, many would think it was sodomy or homosexuality.

But if you remember, Abraham's heart was not to judge the city, but he was trying to save it, hoping God would spare it if he could find at least 10 righteous living within it. Sure,

Sodom had a lot of sins, but there is a difference between the root and the flower. What was the underlying root cause? Ezekiel 16:49-50 informs us that the city's chief iniquity was pride, followed by fullness of bread and an abundance of idleness—in other words, they were “fat and lazy.” Sodom didn't help those in need, but was haughty and committed abominations.

Speaking of abominations, if we go to Proverbs 6:16-19, we find God's top seven abominations: “a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.”

Do you notice what No. 1 is? Homosexuality is not even in the top seven, but a lot of the other top abominations are found rampant in the church. Within churches are lying tongues, wicked imaginations, feet running to mischief, false witnesses speaking lies and those who spread discord among the brethren. I'm not justifying the gay lifestyle, but rather asking when the church will oppose these other abominations as well in the public forum. We have to have equal weights and measures and not pick and choose between acceptable and unacceptable abominations.

History truly repeats itself in our day. We see the chaos our world is in and how few genuinely biblical prophets are out there preaching true repentance to the body of Christ rather than massaging the consciences of the people.

The church today is basically just as lawless as the people of God were 2,500 years ago. Like Jeremiah, many of God's servants feel all alone, with their voices being shut down not only in the political world or at their jobs, but also in the church as they cry out prophetically for true repentance and a return to God. There is a cacophony of voices shouting to be heard, as anyone knows who watches television or gets on the

internet.

The warnings from Jeremiah truly parallel the warnings that need to be heard in our generation today. The main encouragement we need to hold on to is that God keeps covenant, and His mercies endure forever. I believe God is giving a clarion call to all who have ears to hear what He is saying to us today. As believers, now more than ever, we need to plug in where the truth is being taught and not be caught up with all the false prophetic voices preaching a false peace and saying all is well while we are lulled to sleep.

God is looking for people He can trust to pour out His Spirit upon in these last days. He looks for people who are selfless, humble and not in it for any fame, fortune or power but want to see Him, not themselves, magnified. God is looking for warriors who realize their only interest is in advancing His kingdom by storming the gates of hell and setting His sons and daughters free.

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