

Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

Week 32: Jeremiah 1-18 *When Judgment is Coming*

Welcome to Week 32 of the Bible reading coach podcast. My name is Karl Vaters and I'm here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks.

Today, well this week, we begin three weeks reading through what can only be called one of the Bible's great epic books. I call it epic for a couple of reasons. First of all, because it is by words, the longest book in the Bible, Genesis is the second longest book in the Bible by words. Psalms is the longest one by chapters and verses, but by about 3000 words, Jeremiah is that much longer. So it's epic because of that.

It's also epic, because of the size of the story that it tells is really an amazing book. It's named, of course, after the prophet Jeremiah, who wrote the book, and whose life we read a lot about in the book, in fact, because he tells so much of his autobiography in this book, we know more about Jeremiah than we know about any of the other Old Testament prophets. He prophesied right after Zephaniah, who will be reading about in week 39. And his time of ministry overlapped with Habakkuk, who we'll get to in week 39 as well, and Obadiah, who we'll get to in week 40.

Also, while Jeremiah was prophesying, Ezekiel was also prophesying, Ezekiel was prophesying in Babylon because he had already been exiled. And Jeremiah was prophesying in Jerusalem, because he had not yet been exiled. But the exile of that Southern Kingdom was really, really close. So let's get right to the passage, we'll be reading the first 18 chapters this week. And we'll begin, I'm going to actually read several of the first verses to you because it puts the entire context of the book in place for us.

So let's take a look at Jeremiah chapter 1, beginning with verse 1. "The words of Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, one of the priests of Anathoth, in the territory of Benjamin." Now, when we're reading the Bible for inspiration, we often just skip over verses like that. But it's important for us to understand what these verses are saying. It tells us here who Jeremiah was, who his father was, which isn't a big deal to us, but that he was a priest. So sometimes prophets were just prophets and didn't serve any other role. But he was a priest, who was also a prophet, and he was of the tribe of Benjamin. Then it tells us this about him and about his book in verses 2 and 3 of Jeremiah chapter 1 says this, "The word of the Lord came to him in the 13th year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon, King of Judah, and through the reign of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah King of Judah, down to the fifth month of the 11th year of Zedekiah, son of Josiah king of Judah when the people of Jerusalem went into exile."

These two verses give us exact timestamps about when his ministry began and ended. Because of this. We know Jeremiah's ministry began in 626 BCE, and it lasted until the Babylonian captivity in 586 BC, that is 40 years. He prophesied for 40 years. So, is another reason why Jeremiah's book and his ministry are epic.

Let's continue now in Jeremiah chapter 1. Now, let's read verses 4 and 5. "The word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart, I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.'" So God tells him, I know you're young, but you're not too young, because I called you before you were even conceived in your mother's womb.

Now, how do we know he was young? The next couple of verses tell us that. Verse 6, "Alas, Sovereign Lord," I said, "I do not know how to speak. I am only a child." He was so young that he referred to himself as a child, he may have only been a teenager at the time. Verse 7, "But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say 'I am only a child', you must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you, and will rescue you,' declares the Lord. Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, 'Now, I have put my words in your mouth.'" Really important verses.

First of all, it tells us that Jeremiah was young, which is why he was able to have such a long ministry. Secondly, God put His words into Jeremiah's mouth. So we know that when Jeremiah speaks and writes, it is God speaking through him. Thirdly, what this tells us about is something that I like to call the rule of the reluctant prophet. And it's this true prophets never want to be prophets. People who want to be prophets aren't true prophets. So why is it that true prophets don't want to be prophets is really simple, because the real prophets are always treated badly, because they're always getting messages from God that nobody wants to hear. And we'll see that a whole lot through the book of Jeremiah and through the ministry of Jeremiah. So that's a little bit about chapter 1.

Then we'll read chapters 2 through 5 also this week, and in 2 through 5, God basically sets the foundation of his argument, why he's about to take all of the people in exile, he outlines some of their many sins, including idolatry, pride, deceit, prostitution, the robbing of widows and orphans and the poor. And meanwhile, these chapters tell us as all these horrible things are happening, and as the real prophet is saying, "You're in trouble because of this" there are a whole bunch of false prophets who are saying, "No, you're fine, God's not mad, you're good to go." Alright, so false prophets always give a message. People want to hear and make them feel better. So they end up getting rich, quite frankly, a lot of the time. But true prophets are always giving hard news, and are often hated for it.

In Jeremiah, chapter 6, the siege of Jerusalem begins and a siege in those days typically meant that the enemy surrounded the city, and often would wait them out for weeks, months, even years, while the people inside started getting more and more desperate, as they will start to starve to death. This begins to happen in chapter 6. Then, this week, we'll read in chapter 7 through 10, an amazing episode that happens, as Jerusalem is already surrounded by the Babylonian army, the siege has begun.

God tells Jeremiah this and we'll read it in chapter 7, beginning with verse 1. "This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, 'Stand at the gate of the Lord's house and proclaim this message'". And here's the beginning of the message, which goes through the next several chapters. "Hear, the word of the Lord, all you people of Judah, who come through these gates to worship the Lord." So what happens is this, they're under siege, they're literally surrounded by the enemy and trapped inside the city and God says to Jeremiah, "I want you to go to the front of the church, the front of the temple to the front door, with everybody passing by and everybody seeing it, and they will know since you're standing in declaring it from the temple, that you're declaring it from me." And here's just some of the message that God gives Jeremiah, to tell the people while standing at the gate of the temple, while the city is surrounded by the enemy.

Chapter 9, verse 11, "I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals, and I will lay waste the towns of Judah, so no one can live there." This is from God through Jeremiah to the people. 9:22 we'll read this, "Say, 'This is what the Lord declares: 'Dead bodies will lie like

ding in the open field, like cut grain behind the Reaper with no one to gather them"". This prophecy is so horrific, Jeremiah becomes overcome with this message and with his own sorrow. And chapter 9, verse 1 tells us this, Jeremiah speaking for himself says this, "Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears, I would weep day and night for the slain of my people." This is why Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet here. And in other places in Jeremiah, he talks about his tears, his sorrow, and having to deliver this horrible message from God to the people.

So what's the people's response? Do they listen to the weeping prophet? Do they repent of their sin before God? No, Jeremiah, chapter 11, as we'll see, this week, we're going to read this. God basically reminds the people that he and they had a covenant, that he would be their God, as long as they would stay true to him. But he tells them in Jeremiah 11, that since they've broken their side of the Covenant, he is no longer obligated to honor his side of the covenant. So his blessing is now removed from his people. At this point do they repent? No. At this point, their response is so angry that they hate Jeremiah so much that they have plans to assassinate and kill the Prophet.

That's Jeremiah 11, will then get to Jeremiah 12 and 13 this week, where Jeremiah in response to this is so frightened and so angry at God for putting him in this position, that God has to reassure him. It's okay, I'm with you. Yes, this is my message, and I will take care of you. In chapter 12, we see two visuals of the linen belt and of the wineskins that teach us that the devastation and the doom that God has forecast and that Jeremiah is now prophesying, it will come to pass, it cannot be turned back.

Jeremiah 14 through 17 has a similar message that their doom is certain. The people at this point decide, well, if this prophet Jeremiah isn't going to say what we want to hear, then we're going to find more and more prophets who will say what we want to hear and they start gathering unto themselves prophets, who will just give them good news. So Jeremiah goes to God again angry. Why am I the one who's stuck giving bad news and everybody else gets to give them good news? And the answer in chapter 14 is basically God says, well, because you're the only one who's telling them the truth. Right? God even tells Jeremiah, you are no longer allowed to marry or to have any kids or to go to any kinds of celebrations. You can't even go to funerals, where you might be tempted to offer sympathy, because right now there's no sympathy left there. Doom is sealed.

God has no joy in this. But there is no pity in God's heart left anymore. Drought and famine and defeat are coming. And then we'll finish this week in chapter 18. Where in that we are going to read the book's most famous scene, Jeremiah is told to visit a potter's house where they make clay pots and so on. And he says, I want you to watch as the potter takes the soft clay, puts it on the wheel and forms it in his hand. This is what I'm doing right now. I am the potter, Jerusalem is my clay, I'm going to make sure that what is supposed to be done in my people will be done in my people. I am in charge now. God can do anything to his people. Because, like the potter owns the clay, he owns these people. That's what's happening here.

In fact, this week ends with Jeremiah sharing God's anger. And here are the last two verses you read. At the end of this week, 18:22 and 23 says this, "Let a cry be heard from their houses when you suddenly bring invaders against them. For they have dug a pit to capture me." This is Jeremiah speaking, they've dug a pit, but they want to throw Jeremiah in, "and they have hidden snares from my feet. But you Lord, know all their plots to kill me. Do not forgive their

crimes or blot out their sins from your site. Let them be overthrown before you deal with them in the time of your anger." The weeping prophet now becomes the angry prophet. He'll weep again later but right now he is so overwhelmed by the sin of his people, that he too, carries the same righteous indignation that God does.

So what do we look for, as we read this week, note a handful of things. First of all, note the reluctance of the Prophet to give bad news. The biblical prophet does not delight in the negative news but has to deliver it. Secondly, take note of the enormity of the sins of the people. God does not punish his people for no reason. Thirdly, note the sorrow of the Prophet as he has to deliver the news. Next, note that there is a plot against the Prophet which we'll see a whole bunch about in the coming weeks. But it begins here. They hate God's true words so much that they want to kill God's prophet who is telling them the truth about what is to come.

And then note, as we saw already, the eventual anger of the Prophet. And then as you're going through it, ask yourself this. What similarities does Jeremiah and the situation in Jerusalem show us to the situation that we have today? Especially as we look around? Do we see false prophets? People giving us news because it's good news, even though it may not be the right news? And how do we learn from Jerusalem to listen to the true prophets of God to listen to the True Word of the Lord, rather than piling up false prophets who tell us what we want to hear but what may not be true?

All right, that's what you're going to cover this week, the first of three epic weeks in this amazing book of Jeremiah, I hope you have a great time with it. I hope what we've talked about today will help you make your way through a clearer understanding of this challenging, but awesome book. Thanks for that. We'll see you next week.

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