

#23 Northside Natter

26 August 2020

Today I'm looking at **Jeremiah the Prophet**.

This story is about the Lord's marriage to the Hebrew nation and how their behaviour was seen as infidelity, adultery, immorality and treachery leading to a result that the Lord surely did not want.

Just for your information, Israel and Judah had already split into two kingdoms, in approximately 930BC. When Jeremiah's ministry began, around 626BC, Josiah was king. Jeremiah prophesied to an obstinate population through the reigns of four more kings: Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah.

Jeremiah was the son of a priest who lived with his parents in a little place called Anathoth (north east of the Mount of Olives), which sat in the land of Benjamin. In further terms of location, Benjamin was sandwiched between Ephraim to the north and Judah to the south. Its eastern border was the Jordan River and the tribe of Dan nestled to its west. It was in this setting that the Lord sent a young, and initially reluctant, Jeremiah to be his mouthpiece to the people.

Throughout history, Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet, mainly due to his book of Lamentations. He also authored the book of Jeremiah and both books of the Kings, so Jewish tradition states. He was helped in his writings by a scribe by the name of Baruch ben Neriah – who was also his disciple.

Jeremiah was told that an enemy was coming from the north, a huge army of mixed kingdoms, to besiege Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. This battle was going to be too close to home for Jeremiah, but his greatest battle would be with his own people.

The Lord told Jeremiah that this destruction was coming upon them because of their wickedness in forsaking their God, burning of incense to pagan deities and for worshipping the works of their hands. What were these works of their hands? They spent much time in chiselling and carving idols from stone and wood before bowing down to worship them. They had made their own gods.

Jeremiah's job was to reveal the sins of the people.

Isaiah 58:1 *Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.*

From Kings Josiah to Zedekiah, Jeremiah did exactly that. He continually told the people their sin and implored them to turn back from their backsliding ways. God promised that he would heal their backsliding if they listened and obeyed. But nobody liked to hear the word repent. They refused to hear what God's prophet had to say. Even when Jeremiah implored them more strongly as the threat drew closer to their door, they still refused.

In 587BC King Nebuchadrezzar II began his 13-year war in the land. Is it any wonder Jeremiah lamented? God had already divorced the northern kingdom of Israel and sent them

away from him at the hand of the Assyrian armies. Judah saw what God had done to them yet remained unmoved - even earning the commendation of being more treacherous than her sister.



Horace Vernet's rendition
Of the young prophet

Jeremiah grieved over the ruins of Jerusalem. He couldn't have done any more than he already had. The Hebrews fate was now sealed.

Prior to the battle, Jeremiah was accused of being on his way to defect to the enemy, as some already had. He was taken into custody and carted off to the princes. The princes became wroth with him and put him in prison.

When King Zedekiah heard of it, he secretly brought Jeremiah out to enquire of him. "Is there any word from the Lord?" Jeremiah answered, "there is," and went on to tell him that the king would be taken captive to Babylon.

King Zedekiah committed Jeremiah to the court of the prison instead of the dungeon and ordered that he be given a daily piece of bread from the bakers' street until the bread was spent. A small and temporary kindness. With the enemy almost at the gate, food was going to get scarce. Jeremiah continued to speak the Lord's words to the people, *"He that remaineth in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. But he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live; for he shall have his life for a prey and shall live."* (**Jeremiah 38:2**).

The princes of Jerusalem went before the king and demanded that Jeremiah be put to death for saying such things because his words made the people too faint for battle and it would only end in their hurt. It seemed all too hard for King Zedekiah because the princes were too strong for him. Therefore, they were permitted to do as they pleased with the prophet. They lowered him into a pit that had nothing but mire at the bottom and there they left him to die with no food or drink. Eventually, one of the king's eunuchs (a Cushite) saved Jeremiah by begging for the king's permission to help him.

The king was fearful of the Hebrews thinking that those already taken by the Chaldeans would give him up to the enemy and that he would be mocked by them. Jeremiah spent quite some time trying to convince the king that if he voluntarily surrendered, all would go well for him and the people in the city. In the end, King Zedekiah couldn't bring himself to do it. Instead, he escaped the city and took off along the plain towards Jericho, in south-east Benjamin, but was pursued and subsequently captured. The Chaldeans murdered the princes before King Zedekiah and put out his eyes before bounding him in chains and taking him to Babylon.

The Lord had given the king an easy way out but even he couldn't avail himself of it. It seems that man's nature is to stick to his pride regardless of the evidence around him.

For forty years Jeremiah pattered the pavement with his sandaled feet to perform the will of his God. To him, it must have felt like a life of wasted breath. Everything he loved, his culture, the cities, his own people and ultimately his freedom, all gone.

The Babylonians released Jeremiah and showed him great kindness, possibly because of his urging of the people to surrender to them. They allowed him to go wherever he wanted and

he chose Mizpah in Benjamin and went with Gedaliah who was made the governor of Judea. Unfortunately, Gedaliah was assassinated for working with the Babylonians and Johanan took his place. Johanan constantly refused to hear the word of the Lord through Jeremiah's counsel, and due to internal political unrest, eventually fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah and Baruch his scribe with him, along with King Zedekiah's daughters. **(Jeremiah 43:1-13).**

In Egypt, Jeremiah continued to prophecy to the Hebrews he found there (in Migdol, Tahpanhes, Noph and Pathros). As we saw in #17 Northside Natter, they refused to hear him and insisted on worshipping other gods. The Lord's response was to remove them from the face of the earth.

What a sad end to the special relationship God had set up with the nation centuries before. How disappointing for the too few that remained steadfast to his word. Not only did they lose their God, their lands and their culture, they were replaced by other races who took their heritage and made it their own.

In the face of opposition, belligerence, hate and utter apathy, Jeremiah unceasingly spread the word of the Lord amongst the people. He never stopped telling them of their sin and the remedy for it. Even with the enemy pounding at the gates, he continued to speak. Even in exile, he furthered the Lord's cause. He is a good example of how we too must be in our duty to the Lord regardless of what is happening around us. If we look, we will find opportunity.