

OT LESSON #41

“I HAVE MADE THEE THIS DAY . . . AN IRON PILLAR”

Jeremiah 1-2; 15; 20; 26; 36-38

by Ted L. Gibbons

Introduction: You might consider teaching Jeremiah with ten different views of the same thing—a house, a man, a car. Each view could be associated with an important event or characteristic from the life of Jeremiah, and each would offer an opportunity to glimpse the soul of a prophet. And Jeremiah was an extraordinary prophet. Called to work with people though rampant apostasy and bitter opposition, he never faltered and rarely flinched throughout his ministry. His life and writings are exceptional treasures and worth a great investment of time and reflection. And some of the verses will require time and reflection. Jeremiah is distanced from us by language and idiom and circumstance and translation. But your knowledge of the plan of salvation and the unchangeableness of God will sustain you. Pay a price and the results will be spectacular.

The environment in which Jeremiah preached was one rife with political intrigue and implications. Babylon had defeated Egypt in 605 BC, and then had conquered Jerusalem. But Jerusalem would not submit

Even though Jehoiakim was now a vassal king to Babylon, for some reason not fully explained in the scriptures he still gave his allegiance to Egypt. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel warned that Egypt was weak and not to be trusted . . . Ignoring the prophetic warnings, Jehoiakim decided that Babylon wasn't nearly as strong as Nebuchadnezzar had claimed, and he openly switched his allegiance to Egypt and stopped paying tribute to Babylon (Religious Studies Monograph Series, Isaiah and the Prophets, Vol. 10, p.80).

This action, Jeremiah would ward repeatedly, was contrary to the will of God and would bring the judgements of God upon the covenant people.

Glimpse #1. A CALL TO SERVE.. Jeremiah was called to his ministry in Judah during the reign of King Josiah.

Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations (Jer. 1:4,5)

Why would it matter to Jeremiah to know that he was called and ordained before he was born? Why would the Lord want Jeremiah to know this? Why does it matter that you know it, about Jeremiah and about yourself?

Jeremiah, like so many others called and sent was afraid.

Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD (Jer. 1:6-8).

This was not important to the Lord. Jeremiah was not expected to do this alone. Everything he was to speak the Lord would give him.

Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth (Jer. 1:9).

Notice the two kinds of things Jeremiah was called to do:

See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant (Jer. 1:10).

Jeremiah was to root out, pull down, destroy, and throw down. He was also to build and to plant. Which do you think prophets would rather do? Which do they most often have to do? Consider the following verses and determine which Jeremiah would be doing most of the time:

For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (Jer. 2:13).

RUN ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it (Jer. 5:1).

You may remember that the Lord offered to spare Sodom if 10 righteous people could be found therein (see Gen. 18:32). Here he offers to save Jerusalem in any righteous can be found there.

It is in the framework of the Lord's awareness of the animosity that Jeremiah's call will generate that the Lord says to him,

Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee (Jer. 1:17-19).

Would these words, which are part of the call the Lord issued, have comforted Jeremiah? Would he be more confident against adversity knowing that the Lord had made him truly unbreakable—a defenced city, an iron pillar, and brasen walls—against the whole land?

Glimpse #2: PERSECUTION. In his call, the Lord warned Jeremiah that the kings, the princes, the priests, and the people would oppose him, and they did. But the antagonism against him become much more personal than that.

But I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, saying, Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered. But, O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause. Therefore thus saith the LORD of the men of Anathoth, that seek thy life, saying, Prophecy not in the name of the LORD, that thou die not by our hand (Jer. 112:19-21).

We learn in Jeremiah 1:1 that the prophet was from the village of Anathoth. Note in the passage above that “the men of Anathoth” seek Jeremiah’s life. These would be people who had known him for years, who had been friends and neighbors. But the prophecies of Jeremiah moved them to a homicidal rage.

Glimpse #3: LOVE. If we were to wait till the end of the Lesson to peek through this Glimpse, its impact would probably be more dramatic. But as it appears here in sequence,. We’ll mention it here in the hope that you will remember in throughout the lesson. Jeremiah had charity for his people, deaf and wicked and hateful though they were. He loved them. The following is one of the most touching passages in this great book.

Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud: for the
LORD hath
spoken. Give glory
to the LORD your
God, before he
cause darkness,
and before your
feet stumble upon
the dark
mountains, and,
while ye look for
light, he turn it into
the shadow of
death, and] make
it] gross darkness.
But if ye will not
hear it, 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. 13:15-17).

Have you ever grieved so much for an unrepentant loved one that you have wept in secret places? I have. After praying and pleading and hoping, I have gone away to weep. The first time I remember this happening was in the mission field when a particularly beautiful family who had seemed to love us and our message had withdrawn from us on the day of baptism and asked us not to visit them again. There was nothing left to do but cry.

Glimpse #4: DISCOURAGEMENT. Nearly everyone gets discouraged. Bad days come with distressing regularity. But Jeremiah's discouragement was on a different level. Things got so bad that Jeremiah seemed to regret having been born.

Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; [yet] every one of them doth curse me (Jer. 15:10)

Jeremiah must have begun to understand why he needed to be an iron pillar and a brasen wall . . .

O LORD, thou knowest: remember me, and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors; take me not away in thy longsuffering: know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke. Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts. I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced; I sat alone because of thy hand: for thou hast filled me with indignation. Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail? (Jer. 15:15-18).

If you have ever been discouraged while doing the Lord's work, consider these words the Lord revealed to Jeremiah at this time.

Therefore thus saith the LORD, If thou return, then will I bring thee again, [and] thou shalt stand before me: and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth: let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them. And I will make thee unto this

people a fenced brasen wall: and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I [am] with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith the LORD. And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible (Jer. 15:19-21).

Glimpse #5: NO SUCCESS. In our day, the Lord said frequently that the field was white, already to harvest (see D&C 4:4; 6:3; 11:3; 12:3; 14:3; 33:3; and 33:7). But in Jeremiah's day the field was useless and ready to be burned. No one was repenting.

Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words. Give heed to me, O LORD, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me. Shall evil be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul. Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, [and] to turn away thy wrath from them (Jer. 18:18-20).

Consider the following verses. They are only a few of the many in Jeremiah that tell us how hard-hearted these people were

2:24 "who can turn her away??"

2:30 "In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction"

3:3 "thou refusedst to be ashamed."

3:7 "And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not"

3:10 "for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart"

4:14 "How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?"

4:22 "but to do good they have no knowledge"

5:1 "if there be any that executeth judgment . . . I will pardon it"

5:3 "thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved. they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return"

5:23 "But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone"

6:15 "they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush"

7:13 “I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not”

7:24 “they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward”

7:28 “This is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the LORD their God, nor receiveth correction”

That will do, won't it? Here are other references you can check if you want to overwhelm someone with a detailed report on the rebelliousness of these people. 8:6-12,20; 13:11,23; 15:1,7; 17:23; 22:21; 23:14; 25:3-8; 26:3-5; 29:19; 32:33; 44:4,9,10.

Glimpse #6: TESTIMONY. Some people change paths when the road is too difficult, choosing instead a path that is not so steep and rugged, or even reversing directions entirely. Jeremiah had enough excuses and enough difficulty to consider such an alternative. But he could not turn away from the thing the Lord had commanded him to do.

Things got particularly bad when Pashur, “chief governor in the house of the Lord,” in an angry reaction to his prophesying, beat Jeremiah and put him in “stocks” (see Jeremiah 20:1,2). Even with the mistreatment and abuse, Jeremiah would not back down. He had been prophesying that the Babylonians were coming and that Judah would pay an awful price for her iniquities. Notice what he said to the man who beat him and put him in the stocks.

For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will make thee a terror to thyself, and to all thy friends: and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and thine eyes shall behold it. and I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive into Babylon, and shall slay them with the sword. Moreover I will deliver all the strength of this city, and all the labours thereof, and all the precious things thereof, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah will I give into the hand of their enemies, which shall spoil them, and take them, and carry them to Babylon. And thou, Pashur, and all that dwell in thine house shall go into captivity: and thou shalt come to Babylon, and there thou shalt die, and shalt be buried there, thou, and all thy friends, to whom thou hast prophesied lies (Jer. 20:44-6).

What was it that moved him to such courage? His testimony! Even when he wanted to hold his peace, he could not. The passage below presents one of the great descriptions of testimony in the standard works.

I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me. For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But *his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones*, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay (Jer. 20:7-9, emphasis added).

This witness of Jeremiah reminds me of the feelings of Brigham Young about preaching the gospel.

I wanted to thunder and roar out the Gospel to the nations. It burned in my bones like fire pent up.... Nothing would satisfy me but to cry abroad in the world, what the Lord was doing in the latter-days.... I had to go out and preach, lest my bones should consume within me (*Deseret News Weekly*, 24 August 1854, p. 1).

Does your testimony motivate you to that kind of determination?

Glimpse #7: COMMITMENT. The testimony of Jeremiah sustained him when his instructions were difficult, dangerous, and even deadly. That testimony became the foundation of his commitment to the work and the word of the Lord.

Thus saith the LORD; Stand in the court of the LORD'S house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD'S house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word: If so be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way, that I may repent me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings (Jer. 26:2,3).

Jeremiah's continuing message of the impending judgements of God antagonized nearly everybody in the land of Judah. Now he had been commanded to call Judah to repentance one more time. His message was direct and unambiguous. And he did not have permission to write it and mail it in from Moab or Mona. He was to deliver it in person in the court of the temple. And he did.

Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die . . . Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears. (Jer. 26:8,11).

He was not “worthy to die.” But he was willing. His commitment to the calling he had received was such that he put his obedience ahead of his life again and again. He must have known that his commitment to his covenants—his willingness to keep them regardless of the sacrifice required—would make him acceptable to the Lord.

Verily I say unto you, all among them who know their hearts are honest, and are broken, and their spirits contrite, and are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice—yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command—they are accepted of me (D&C 97:8).

When Jeremiah was in captivity again for his most recent message, he spoke again:

Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you. As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the LORD hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears (Jer 26:12-15).

Glimpse #8: SUFFERING. Jeremiah’s labors with Judah seem to have dragged him into a state of almost continuous suffering. We have already seen several examples. There are many others. Even with Nebuchadnezzar at the gates, Judah continued to resist the message of their prophet.

For then the king of Babylon's army besieged Jerusalem: and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the prison, which was in the king of Judah's house. For Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up,

saying, Wherefore dost thou prophesy, and say, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it . . . (Jer. 32:2,3).

In Jeremiah 36, the prophet sent his scribe with a message which he himself could not deliver.

Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah: and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD, which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book. And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, I am shut up; I cannot go into the house of the LORD: Therefore go thou, and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the LORD in the ears of the people in the LORD'S house upon the fasting day: and also thou shalt read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities. It may be they will present their supplication before the LORD, and will return every one from his evil way: for great is the anger and the fury that the LORD hath pronounced against this people (Jer. 36:4-7).

After the scroll had been read to the leaders of the Jews, they took it to the king. His reaction is interesting:

Now the king sat in the winterhouse in the ninth month: and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him. And it came to pass, [that] when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast [it] into the fire that [was] on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that [was] on the hearth (Jer. 36:22,23).

As is the reaction of Jeremiah when he heard what had happened. He not only rewrote the previous message; he added many words to it..

Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, after that the king had burned the roll, and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying, Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned. . .Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many

like words (Jer. 36:27,28,32).

In Jeremiah 37:12-14, as Jeremiah tries to leave Jerusalem, he is accused of treason and arrested again. After spending “many days” in a dungeon (Jer. 36:16), King Zedekiah removed him secretly and asked if there were any new revelations. Jeremiah assured him that there were, including the oft-repeated message, “thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon” (Jer. 37:17).

Jeremiah was then sent to a new (more comfortable?) incarceration, with the injunction from the king that he be fed daily as long as there was bread in the city (Jer. 37:21).

But the princes (elders) of the Jews would have none of it. Now that the very thing Jeremiah had prophesied had happened, they were angrier than ever. They prevailed upon the king to allow them to decide the fate of Jeremiah, and

Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire (Jer. 38:6).

His confinement this time was in what is often called a *pit prison*. The only way in and out was through a hole in the top, through which he was lowered with cords. Since there was no drainage, the bottom was a sea of mud into which Jeremiah sunk.

One of the King’s servants begged the king for permission to rescue Jeremiah from a situation in which he would probably die from hunger (see Jer.8:9). He was accordingly drawn from the prison with cords and remained

in the court of the prison until the day that Jerusalem was taken: and he was there when Jerusalem was taken (Jer. 38:28).

He offered Zedekiah one final opportunity to save his life, and to save the city from the torch (see Jer. 38:17-23), but Zedekiah refused to hearken.

Glimpse #9: ENDURING. In chapter 39, Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. Lehi was by this time somewhere in the Saudi-Arabian Peninsula, free from the danger of the Chaldeans and trying to get his family to the Promised Land.

Jeremiah was set free by the conquering army and given permission to stay in Judah or go to Babylon at his will (see Jer. 40:2-5).

In Jeremiah 42, the leader of the remnant of Judah came to Jeremiah for direction. Should they remain in Judah, or should they go to Egypt? The people entered into a covenant to do whatever the Lord told them to do (Jer. 42:5,6). Jeremiah prayed about this for ten days and then brought them the word of the Lord. If they stayed in the land of Judah, the Lord would bless them and protect them, but if they went to Egypt, they would die by the sword and by famine and by pestilence (see Jer. 42:13-22).

What do you think happened next? Judging from the previous obedience of the Jews, do you think they will follow the prophet this time, even though every word he spoke to them before has been fulfilled?

Of course they went to Egypt, and they took everybody, including Jeremiah, with them (see Jer. 43:8,9).

Glimpse #10: LAMENTATIONS. We will not take time to examine the content of this book. The title alone is a fitting conclusion to the lesson. Every word of Jeremiah was fulfilled. Many times the people and the princes and the priests imprisoned him. Often they determined to kill him. But when the judgements of which he had prophesied had finally come, what did he do? He lamented over the loss of his people.

I love Jeremiah. I hope you do too.

CONCLUSION: Jeremiah looked forward with great anticipation to our day. He knew it would be a greater day for Israel than even the day when the Lord led his people from Egypt toward the promised land.

Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that they shall no more say, The LORD liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land (Jer. 23:7,8).

Jeremiah speaks of this latter-day gathering at least five times, in chapters 16, 23,

30, 31, and 33. He identifies the two great professions of latter-day disciples.

Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers. Behold, *I will send for many fishers*, saith the LORD, and they shall fish them; and after will *I send for many hunters*, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks (Jer. 16:14-16).

It is my impression that in Jeremiah's day, most fishing was done with nets. People who fished for converts used nets, like Peter and John and Andrew. They were not interested in a fish or two. They wanted multitudes. Wilford Woodruff in England; Dan Jones in Wales; Zebedee Coltrin in Winchester, Indiana—they were all fishers, baptizing hundreds. But *after* the fishers, the Lord would send for many hunters. Hunting is more precise work. You don't usually hunt a heard, You hunt individual animals, "from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks."

The call for fishers and hunters has gone forth. Have you responded? Are you willing to be like an iron pillar and do your part of the same work Jeremiah did?

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