

# Jeremiah: A Parable of Jesus

## Introduction

Lent is the forty days and seven Sundays leading up to Easter. It is a time for serious reflection on our life in Christ. As the daylight hours of Spring lengthen, so our faith in Christ is meant to deepen. This year we turn to the prophet Jeremiah to bring us through Lent to Easter. We will see how he lived in the light of Christ's coming some 600 years before Jesus was born. And as we prayerfully reflect on his life, his faithfulness, obedience, and hope, we will be challenged to take our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ more seriously.

Jeremiah did not live an easy life, but he lived an intensely meaningful life. If we are tired of the mundane, ho-hum religious life, we could pick no better guide to lead us out of the doldrums than Jeremiah. As he grew older, his life did not shrink, it expanded. Instead of becoming feeble and frail, self-absorbed and petty, he continued to be as God promised, like a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall (1:18). Jerusalem's kings capitulated, her people gave in to every form of evil, and her prophets deceived, but Jeremiah persisted in living and proclaiming the Word of the Lord.

Of all the prophets, Jeremiah's life illustrated the message he communicated. He incarnated the truth he was called of God to deliver. He lived better than he knew. Long before the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, Jeremiah embodied the Gethsemane mind-set, took up his cross and lived in the hope of the resurrection. Isaiah prophesied that the suffering Servant would be led "like a lamb to the slaughter" (Isa 53:7) and John the Baptist proclaimed boldly, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes

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away the sin of the world," but it was Jeremiah who felt like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter (11:19). The complexities and tensions that the prophet Jeremiah experienced are not unlike the pressures and trials facing today's followers of Christ. If you are fed-up with Christianity without Christ, tired of P.R. pastors, overwhelmed with the challenges of living for Christ in a secular society and confused by the array of popular spiritualities, let Jeremiah be your Spirit-inspired guide.

Everyone seems to find the book of Jeremiah confusing, but a few pointers may make it easier. The fact that the book is not laid out like the alphabet drives linear thinkers to distraction. We like things neatly laid out in sequential order, but the book does not go from A-Z. It is more like a collage of powerful images meant to impress the reader with the word of the Lord from every angle. Detailing when Jeremiah said what he did is not nearly as important as what he said and where he said it. In one sense the political chronology is incidental to Jeremiah, but the substance of what Jeremiah communicated is absolutely vital. The book of Jeremiah may be an historian's nightmare, but it is a communicator's masterpiece. The message rules. Biting critiques that spiral into tornadoes of truth, judgment pronouncements that fall like hammer blows, soul-searching confessions and tear-driven lamentations, all add up to a powerful message. One really never finishes Jeremiah, nor was one meant to. The message doesn't end when Judah is forced into exile or when King Zedekiah dies, because the force of the prophecy was meant to be enduring until Christ comes again. The history that mattered to Jeremiah was Salvation History. He was fully aware that kings come and go and empires rise and fall, but it was the Word of the Lord that endured forever. That was what impressed him and he was preaching for the souls of the people.

More than with any other prophet, Jeremiah reveals his heart and soul. The human side of working out the divine calling is on every page. It is evident in the on-going dialogue between the Lord and Jeremiah. Jeremiah was not afraid to express his feelings and confront his fears. He lashed out in hot anger against his enemies and complained bitterly to the Lord. He disclosed the plots and betrayals, slander and ridicule that were directed against him, because he delivered an unpopular message. From his calling in 627 BC, during the reign of Josiah, to the fall of Jerusalem in 597 BC, Jeremiah never stopped proclaiming the word of the Lord, even though it was met with constant opposition. Like Job, Jeremiah cursed the day of his birth, but in the same breath claimed that the Lord was with him like a mighty warrior and that all his persecutors would fail and be thoroughly disgraced (20:11-18). In the eyes of the world, Jeremiah was a failure, but in the eyes of God, he was the prophet who came closest to revealing his one and only son's path to the Cross.

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