

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

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Jeremiah's America - # 1

SUBJECT: PENDING JUDGMENT

TITLE: A BOILING POT

TEXT: JEREMIAH 1:13.

INTRODUCTION. I am going to do something today that flies in the face of conventional wisdom for preachers in our day. The first time I heard this wise counsel for preaching was when a former executive director of a state convention (now retired) was preaching in the church I was serving as pastor. He stated from the pulpit that if a pastor was going to give the people much Bible background or interpretation he had better make it brief and get right on to the application. He was calling for topical preaching to meet the needs of people - as though expository preaching does not meet those needs.

Twenty years later, "popular" preachers were offering the same advice -KISS - keep it simple stupid. Keep it light, and if you are going to get into serious Bible preaching or teaching save it for Wednesday evenings. After a certain fried chicken restaurant came out with the Ad, "We do chicken right," a church member told a guest speaker, "We do church right." Well, to be perfectly honest, a lot of people today would have to say, "We do church lite." However, if we do not "preach the Word" to people on Sunday morning, many church members are never going to hear it preached, and if they never hear it preached they are never going to understand it.

Sadly, some of the people who boast the loudest about wining the Battle for the Bible feel perfectly justified in not preaching it. An attorney who likes to be fed when he hears a sermon, instead of being entertained or psychoanalyzed, lamented the fact that one pastor had begun his ministry in a large church as a strong preacher, but several years later he heard him and found his preaching to be shallow.

If there is a message for us in the Book of Jeremiah we are going to have to give some serious attention to the Scripture. Some lost people will not understand some of the things we say - but the Lord may use their questions to lead them to salvation. No lost person can understand the deeper things of the Christian faith, but if Christians are to understand the Word of God, it must be preached from the pulpit.

When my wife planned a meal for our children when they were growing up, I never once saw her look outside to see who might have stopped by to play with John or Mark and make her decision based on the likes or dislikes of someone else's children. I never heard her say, "I would like to serve a well balanced meal for my boys, but I think I had better just serve pizza just in case some of their friends show up for dinner. She planned a meal for her own children, knowing what they

needed what they liked.

I am going to violate another bit of sage advice. They tell us that young people and young adults today do not want to hear anything negative. I hope they are not watching any political debates! Believe it or not there is nothing new about this. I had a deacon to tell me one time that he did not want to hear anything negative, he wanted to hear sermons on love, joy, and peace. But it goes back farther than that. In Jeremiah's day there were a lot of people who did not want to hear anything negative - and they could find plenty of preachers who would give them what they wanted. That is why Jeremiah was not the most popular preacher around. But he was the one to whom God spoke and through whom He delivered the "Thus saith the Word of the Lord" to a stubborn, rebellious, calloused people, a people He has chosen and blessed, according to His grace and not their merit.

I. JEREMIAH WAS CALLED TO PROCLAIM GOD'S MESSAGE, JER. 1:1-10.

A. Let Us Begin By Looking At the Call of Jeremiah, Jer. 1:1-8.

"The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month" (1:1-3, HCSB).

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, who lived in Anathoth, the home of many of the priests. Josiah, a godly king, in the mold of David and Hezekiah, has been on the throne for thirteen years when the Lord began speaking to Jeremiah. What we do know about this is that the Lord had one of His greatest kings and one of His greatest prophets ever working in Israel at this critical time. We do know that Josiah sought to bring a revival to the land, but the revival ended when he was killed by Pharaoh Necho on the Plains of Megiddo in 608 B. C. (and that is before Christ, not before the common era!).

We also know that Jeremiah continued to proclaim the message Yahweh God gave him for many years, often at the risk of his life. What we do not know is how Jeremiah and Josiah may have worked together to bring about a revival before Josiah's death.

"Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.' Then I said, "Alas, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, Because I am a youth.' But the LORD said to me, 'Do not say, 'I am a youth,' Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, And all that I command you, you shall speak. 'Do not be afraid of them, For I am with you to deliver you,' declares the LORD" (1:4-8).

This is amazing! God called Jeremiah even before He formed him in the womb. That is incredible! How could that be? This certainly settles the issue of whether or not God can have foreknowledge of a person before he or she is born. We already know He knows events before they happen. The Bible is full of examples of that, but does this mean that Jeremiah had nothing to say about this call? No, it means that God knew before Jeremiah was formed in the womb that He would call him to proclaim His word, and that Jeremiah would be obedient to the divine call.

Jeremiah could hardly believe God was calling him to such an awesome ministry. His first response was that he was too young and that he was not a public speaker. The Lord had an answer for that: "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak."

B. What Jeremiah Needed God Would Supply, 1:9-10.

"Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, To pluck up and to break down, To destroy and to overthrow, To build and to plant."

C. Now, Let Us Look at a Little More Historical Background.

In the Eighth Century B. C., the Golden Age of Prophecy, God sent Amos and Hosea to warn the Northern Kingdom (Israel) that if they did not repent they would be conquered by the Assyrians and the people scattered among the nations. They did not repent and the Assyrians, under Sargon II, swept into the land in 722 B. C. and took large numbers of the people and settled them in other countries. They replaced them those captives with foreigners whom they settled in the land from which the Israelites had been moved. Foreigners, with their pagan religions and strange languages now lived in the land - Semitic people, but pagans. The Northern Kingdom was no more.

During the Eighth Century B. C., God sent Isaiah and Micah to proclaim His word in the Southern Kingdom, Judah (made up of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin). The message was simple, but powerful: If you do not repent you will be severely judged by the Assyrians. They will not destroy you as they will destroy the Northern Kingdom, but you will come under the judgment of the Lord. Through those prophets, God warned that if they still did not obey Him the day would come when He would raise up Babylon and cause them to defeat Judah and take large numbers into captivity in Babylon. Then He would return a remnant to the land and continue His covenant with them. After a century of rebellion, idolatry, greed, and immorality, God decided to act, but at the same time He gave them an opportunity to repent and avoid judgment. At the time Jeremiah was called their time was running out and there was no indication that they were about to repent.

God used the Assyrians to accomplish His purpose in the Northern Kingdom, and He told His people that He would use them and when he was finished with them he would snap their power like one snaps a twig between his fingers. And that is exactly what he did.

Jeremiah began his ministry a year or so before the city state of Babylon rebelled against Assyria and Nebuchadnezzar began the conquests that would make Babylon a great empire. Our God moves nations and empires as one moves pawns on a chess board. He did it then, and He knows exactly what He is doing today.

II. THERE WAS A BOILING POT READY TO SPILL OVER ON ISRAEL, 1:13-16.

“The word of the LORD came to me ...saying, ‘What do you see?’ And I said, **“I see a boiling pot, facing away from the north.”** Then the LORD said to me, **“Out of the north the evil will break forth on all the inhabitants of the land.** For, behold, I am calling all the families of the kingdoms of the north,” declares the LORD; “and they will come and they will set each one his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls round about and against all the cities of Judah. I will pronounce My judgments on them concerning all their wickedness, whereby they have forsaken Me and have offered sacrifices to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands.”

A. God Showed Jeremiah a Boiling Pot Ready to Be Poured Out Upon the Land.

That boiling pot was “facing away from the north.” They had been warned time and time again, and now the judgment of God is ready to be poured out upon the land of Israel like a boiling pot, a boiling cauldron. That pot that was facing away from the north symbolized the Babylonians who would be invading the land from the north after marching around the Arabian Peninsula.

After the fall of the Northern Kingdom, Judah would begin using the name Israel. Actually, they would use the two names interchangeably. That was appropriate because God’s covenant would be carried out through Israel, and through the Tribe of Judah, but also because Israel was made up of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, plus remnants from the Northern Kingdom who fled to Judah before the Assyrians captured them.

B. Babylon Would Conquer Israel.

God raised up Babylon specifically for this purpose. No people had ever had so many powerful warnings, and no nation had ever had the opportunities to repent as these people had. Yet, they refused to repent. They were guilty of a whole plethora of sins, from immorality, to greed, to violence, to idolatry. Idolatry was the besetting sin of those early Israelites following the Conquest, and it remained a key sin that repeatedly brought the judgment of God upon them during the period of the Judges. For most of a millennium they had refused to give up their idols - at least, if one generation gave up their idols the next generation returned would turn again to idolatry. God would use the Babylonian Captivity to purge His people of idolatry. By the time of Jesus they were guilty of many sins, but idolatry was not one of them. During the Inter-biblical Period Jews would die before compromising in this area.

The Babylonian Captivity would last for seventy years. Why seventy years? Well, for one thing, God demanded that they observe a Sabbath Year. Guess how many times they have refused to observe the Sabbath Year? If you said, seventy, you get a star. The land did lie fallow - one year for every Sabbath year they had refused to observe - seventy long years. Let me tell you right now, you had better take the warnings of God seriously because He does!

C. The Babylonian Captivity Was God's Judgment Upon the Nation (1:16).

Make no mistake about it, this was the hand of God. He said, *"I will pronounce My judgments on them concerning all their wickedness, whereby they have forsaken Me and have offered sacrifices to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands."*

In the first place, God pronounced, through Jeremiah, His judgments on them. He pronounced His judgments before they happened. The test of true prophecy is one hundred per cent fulfillment. This should have caused the nation to repent in sackcloth and ashes. It did not. They were as arrogant as those people who today are trying to remove every symbol of Christianity from every public place in America. Their prophets were still prophesying, saying exactly what the people wanted to hear.

In the second place, His judgments were coming because of the wickedness of the people. There problem was not ignorance, it was iniquity. Today, many people will confess to "making bad decisions" but never see themselves as being wicked. The religion of the land for them is tolerance. The greatest sin is being judgmental, calling what someone else does a sin. Tragically, many of them can go to churches in America and never hear what they do called a sin, and never e challenged to repent.

The following quote comes from the pen of Mike S. Adams, a professor in the Criminology at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington, a regular contributor to Townhall.com:

"Nearly 2000 years ago, Jesus of Nazareth stated, "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."

"As I was re-reading those three verses yesterday, I was reminded of a speech broadcast live (and rebroadcast several times) on television from my school, the University of North Carolina – Wilmington. In the speech, the self-proclaimed religious expert strongly urged the audience to abandon the notion of the deity of Christ. To do so, he claimed, would be to fully appreciate what a great man Jesus really was.

"Such an assertion raises a number of issues. One issue is the weight of the ego of the speaker who urges us to believe that he is telling the truth about the deity of Christ

– while suggesting that Jesus was simply lying. In the conflict between the religious speaker and Jesus Christ there is, of course, a gap in credibility. One has been the subject of more books than any other who has ever walked upon the planet and also has the distinction of having time based upon His birth. On the other hand, I cannot even recall the speaker’s name.”

Believe me, America is reflected in the writing of the prophet Jeremiah. The sins and rebellions we read about in this great book of prophecy are evident everywhere in American right now.

Jesus asked what people were going to see when they went out to see and hear John the Baptist, “a reed shaken in the wind?” Sadly, I am afraid, from what I am hearing, there are many reeds out there shaking in the wind - leaning which ever way the moral and cultural winds are blowing. When Rev. Barry Lynn emphatically supports the removal of a display featuring the Ten Commandment on the grounds that it might make an atheist or a Moslem feel bad, we are in trouble!

In the third place, the source and cause of their wickedness was that they had forsaken the true and living God for gods that did not exist. A very special lady recently made a confession to me. She had spent many years in a church that majored in form, ritual, and ceremony, but she had never been born again. After she was saved and began attending a Sunday School class she heard her teacher, an elderly lady who was well grounded in the Word of God, read the Scripture in which God tells us that we are to put no other gods before Him. She made the statement, “Well if the Bible says there are other gods, that means that God is not the only God. There are other gods out there somewhere.” She has great respect for the teacher who taught her the truth. Now she knows there is only one God, and He is a jealous God. This may surprise some people, but our God is an intolerant God!

A boiling pot of divine judgment was about to be poured out upon the land because they people had (1) rejected the true God, and (2) turned to false gods and embraced the wickedness associated with idolatry.

III. AMERICA MAY BE FACING ITS OWN BOILING POT RIGHT NOW.

A. America Has Been Attacked in the Past.

December 7, 1941. The date that will live in infamy. The Empire of Japan launched a vicious, deceptive, and unprovoked attack against the United States of America. German U-boats began attacking American ships in the Atlantic. Doves in Congress sought peace at all cost, without understanding the kind of enemy that was attacking us from either side. Nazi Germany knew that to accomplish their purpose they needed to neutralize America. Japan wanted to defeat America and some official reportedly declared that Japan would not accept the surrender of America in California, they would only accept our surrender on the steps of the White House in Washington, D. C. These were enemies who were committed to victory at all cost and that meant the destruction of the United

States.

These were vicious enemies who were known for a type of brutality one might identify with the ancient Assyrians. They raped, pillaged, murdered, burned, imprisoned people, carried out unspeakable experiments on human beings, and humiliated and abused people in manners we can hardly imagine, even after all the reports of the Holocaust and the Japanese prison camps and death marches. America had fought the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the Spanish American War, and the First World War - the war to win all wars. But there we were, fighting another world war - in a come from behind situation, in part because of isolationists in congress, and in part because America could comprehend the kind of enemies we had.

B. There Is Today a Boiling Pot Facing Toward America.

1. Nine-eleven is another date that will live in infamy.

You know where you were when you got the news. I will never forget it. I drove across the grounds at Glorietta Conference Center in New Mexico, to the area where committee meetings were scheduled for the September, 2001 meeting of the Board of Trustees of LifeWay Christian Resources. As I parked my car and got out I noticed that other board members were in a somber mood, speaking with each other in a very serious manner, in hushed tones, unlike the greetings one expects at a meeting like this. I walked over to three or four ladies who were speaking in subdued voices and asked what had happened. Janet Henley, a very gracious African American lady from Silver Spring, MD, told me that an airplane had crashed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. We went inside and learned that this was no accident. Nor was it a lone attack. We were soon watching a second attack and then heard of a third attack, this on the Pentagon, and an aborted fourth attack in which passengers attacked the hijackers, forcing the plane to crash.

2. There is a boiling pot facing away from the Middle East today.

That boiling cauldron is facing toward Israel and it is facing toward America. Little did we know how much militant Islamic peoples hated us, and sadly, many still do not comprehend the fact that this pot is boiling over today. The news media has spend the last two years trying to glorify Islam and penalize Christianity. You mention the Twin Towers and they tell us that the man who set off the bomb in Oklahoma City was a Christian. Well, let me stress one thing before we go any further - no Christian can quote any Scripture that tells him to commit atrocities such as this. One who professes to be a Christian may set off a bomb and kill a lot of innocent people, but he can never justify it by pointing to Scripture.

If I understand some authorities on Islam, the very existence of the state of Israel makes a lie of Islam. Muslims are taught that when Judaism became corrupt it was replaced by Christianity, and when Christianity became corrupt Alla replaced it with Islam. Of course this information comes from a pedophile who married one of his wives when she was six years old and consummated the marriage when she was nine years old.

Islam is a boiling pot and Muslim leaders keep the heat turned up so that it will continue to boil and spill over in a murderous rage from time to time. President George W. Bush, with the approval congress, launched a war against terrorism, which is now being prosecuted in various places around the world, including Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as America. One general, General Jerry Boykin, has been loudly criticized for announcing that he believes God put President Bush in the White House for such a time as this. Whether you agree or not, if you know the Word of God you know that we need to pray for our president and his staff, for the military leaders, and the soldiers on the field as they defend us. They are standing in the face of that boiling pot and many have paid the supreme sacrifice for our freedom.

Today, December 18, 2004, there was a report that the State Department has warned Americans to leave Saudi Arabia because of the threat of attacks against Americans. There is no telling how many attacks have been thwarted in America since nine/eleven.

3. We are in danger from that boiling pot today.

We do not know when or where they will strike again, but we can be sure various militant Islamic groups are busy plotting against America and Americans right now. We are told that they would love to set off a dirty bomb at a major sports event. They are looking at dams, power plants, and other utility companies. Hospital and government buildings are logical targets. These people want to kill Americans, first because we support Israel - at least some of us do. They want to kill Americans because they identify America with Christianity, and teach their children that we are crusaders out to destroy them. Any time a camera pans a street in some Muslim countries it seems that thousands of young men are ranting and raving against America. What I want to know is who is feeding, clothing, sheltering, and arming these people who never seem to work.

I am afraid we are going to have to deal with this boiling pot until Jesus returns for His church. They are not going away - not any time soon, anyway. Someone has speculated that if Iran gets too close to developing a nuclear weapon Israel would attack, and that if they attacked they would know that they would be attacked by other Arab nations unless they attacked them first - which, according to the speculation, could break the power of Islam for a long, long time.

C. America Needs to Try to Determine Why That Pot of Judgment May Be Boiling.

1. In ancient Israel, the people had rejected the sovereignty of Almighty God.

There are forces in America that are waging a war against Jesus Christ and His church today. Authorities have been forced to handle minorities with kid gloves, but they are treating Christianity with an iron fist. In Florida one city permits the display of a minora, but refuses to permit the display of any Christian symbol. Children are being taught to substitute the word winter in songs for the word Christmas. Real persecution may be just around the corner. As a matter of fact, if you look at what has happened to former Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore, you may agree that it may have begun already.

Francis Shaeffer was convinced that England entered the post-Christian era of their history in 1895 and America in 1935. We may make the case that in the Bible Belt the date might be placed a little later, possibly after the Second World War. Which ever date we select, the point is that America has rejected Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and the New Testament foundations upon which this nation was founded.

2. Ancient Israel was judged because of wickedness.

While Jeremiah does not list specific sins in our passage, we can glean enough from our study of the prophets to know that they were guilty of greed, violence, murder, lying, stealing, idolatry, and gross immorality - so gross that I prefer not to mention some of the things Amos mentions - okay, I will mention it. Fathers and sons took cloaks taken as collateral for a loan to a poor person so he could feed his family bread for that day, but instead of returning his cloak as the law required so that he would have a cover for his bed that night, they took it to a pagan temple and spread it out on the floor and there they committed adultery with the temple prostitutes before an altar to Baal.

That is bad. It is also bad when Hugh Hefner is interviewed on a prime time news show and given an opportunity to present his depravity as some sort of contribution to the American culture. There is a lot of wickedness in America today. I doubt that there is any sin attributed to ancient Israel of which America today is innocent. America is filled with drunkenness, drug addiction, immorality, violence, corruption of every sort - and the whole assortment of sins mentioned in the catalog of sins in Romans One.

We are guilty of wickedness. What our forefathers called garbage we call entertainment. What our grandmothers called filth we license and defend in court. Look at our music, our movies, our TV shows (even in the family viewing hours). Internet pornography is nothing if not wicked and evil. If there is a pot of divine judgment boiling over - about to be poured out on America - is it not possible that the reason might well be wickedness. Sadly, not all the wickedness is out there in the world. The church is the bride of Christ, but the bride is not without spot of blemish today.

CONCLUSION. If we are facing the judgment of God, what can we do about it? Well, there was a time when God commanded Israel to repent. Then when they refused, he said to Jeremiah, "Do not pray for these people, because I will not hear you." What must we do? We had better begin praying earnestly and fervently for a spiritual awakening. We must not delay until God turns a deaf ear to us. Our response to the threat of judgment is repentance - beginning with the church. They we may pray for others. Let me read 2 Chronicles 7:14.