

Jeremiah 46-52

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[0:00] Well, turn in Jeremiah, Jeremiah 46 to 52. If you've not got a Bible, it'd be great to get one. And let me say thank you. Thank you for turning up each week.

This series on Jeremiah has certainly stretched me, and it really has stretched you. And there's been times when I've been preaching on 1.75 speed, and you've been very, very patient with it. I hope it's done you good. It's done me a lot of good. Do pray. I'm off to Wales. Tomorrow, to preach, I'm at a conference. So each morning until next Sunday, I'm doing a series in Acts at the Reformed Presbyterian Global Alliance Conference, which sounds a lot more glamorous than it is. But, yeah, do pray that that would be a good time. And then I'm on holiday for a couple of weeks. Let's bow our heads in prayer again. Father, we ask that the same, your same Holy Spirit who inspired Jeremiah, Jeremiah, our Lord, that he would enlighten our hearts and minds, and that you would speak to us tonight at the end of this magnificent and yet difficult book.

And so we pray for your help in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I came across an article this week, which had a quotation from a book I'd never heard of, The Cantic for Leibovitz.

[1:21] I don't know if you've read it. The book envisages a dystopian scene far into the future, where the world as we know it is finally falling apart. And as they survey the wasteland that was Earth, a scientist asks the priest, how can such a great and wise civilization have destroyed itself so completely?

Perhaps comes the answer from the priest, by being materially great and materially wise and nothing else.

By being materially great and materially wise and nothing else. Sooner or later, individuals, nations, civilizations, that are materially great and materially wise and nothing else, do pay a heavy price. And we live in a part of the world which is materially great and materially wise and nothing else. In the UK, over the past 15 years, we have systematically made decisions which undermine the foundation of society as we know it, with barely a nod in the direction of serious and moral debate. We've redefined marriage. We've proposed and are proposing again assisted suicide. We have allowed abortion up to birth in certain instances with children with a disability.

[2:54] And we are proposing conversion therapy. And at the same time as all those things, we are still one of the most effective producers and consumers in human history.

But we're not bothered, are we, really, where the rubbish goes. We are materially great, materially wise and nothing else. And we are remarkably similar to the Babylonians and the Egyptians and the Philistines and every other nation that populates the pages of chapters 46 to 52.

On Sunday, May the 3rd, when we began that journey, and it was May the 3rd this year, when we started our journey in Jeremiah, we read these words from chapter 1 and verse 5.

Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. And before you were born, I consecrated you. I appointed you a prophet to the nations. And then verse 10, See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.

But having gone through the book, what is strange about those verses? What's strange about those words, especially in the light of the last 45 chapters?

[4:02] As you cast your mind back over the past 11 weeks in Jeremiah, can you remember much about the nations? And there has been, I think, the occasional throwaway comment, but Jeremiah's preoccupation and God's preoccupation has been entirely with Judah.

As the Lord pleads for those people to submit to the inevitable judgment, to take the pathway of grace, which will lead them into and eventually out of exile in Babylon.

And so in chapter 1, if Jeremiah was expecting foreign travel, he must have been a bit disappointed. God appointed him as a prophet to the nations, and he only gets to go to Egypt, dragged by his disobedient compatriots.

And so in chapter 46, after a very long wait, Jeremiah does eventually get to be a prophet to the nations, as God had said. Now, interestingly, the dates when you go through them at the start of some of these oracles show that this has been a feature of his ministry for many years.

But as Jeremiah and Barak shape Jeremiah's ministry into a book, they hold off on the material to the nations right to the end. Why? It's because in the final version of Jeremiah's book, the second half of chapters 25 to 31, 51, trace one of the most radical reversals in all of human history.

[5:28] Back in chapter 25 and 26, Judah is united. Babylon is the weapon in God's hands. And Jeremiah finally comes to terms with this.

And he emerges out of his angst to bring the word of God to the generations of the exiles. There's a new force, isn't there? A new freshness that helps them to look beyond the exile to God's dramatic intervention in the new covenant.

He calls them to repent, to face their sins, to throw themselves on God in faith. He explains that as they do that, then God will dramatically reverse their fortunes. In chapter 46 to 51, every nation, including both Egypt and Babylon, and every new Babylon that's going to emerge in the future, is punished and God's people are rescued.

This is the final message of the book. It's the final version of the book, which is then packed off in the diplomatic bag and sent to Babylon. And it isn't really a surprise it would have come as quite a comfort if you'd just been transported to Babylon in exile that these nations which have committed such heinous crimes will not get away with it.

These seven chapters, they are long, aren't they? If you read them, they are graphic and they are incredibly rich in imagery. They cover a huge geographical area and a significant time span.

[6:58] But their message they bring out is they bring our extraordinary journey to a close. It can be summed up in two things, really. These chapters ask two things of us as a church.

And the first is that we go to all the world. We go to all the world. Every so often in the Old Testament, here at the end of Jeremiah, in Amos, in the middle of Ezekiel, the horizons suddenly expand and they take in not just Judah or Israel, all those little ex-Nation states in the southeast corner of the Mediterranean, but they take in every nation of the world.

Completely unexpectedly, Jeremiah speaks about the fate of Egypt in chapter 46 and the once great Philistia in chapter 47 and Judah's second cousin Moab and Ammon in Edom and then Damascus and Kedor and Hazer and Eon and the much less significant Babylonian vassal states before embarking on a sweeping condemnation of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon and every superpower that will arise in its wake and the very fact that God addresses all the nations and God commands all the nations is something that you and I can easily miss and it's so staggeringly, breathtakingly, politically incorrect but the God of the Bible is unapologetically the God of all the nations that God, the creator of the cosmos retains his authority over all nations as they spread across the earth from the table of nations in Genesis chapter 11 to its dismissal of Pharaoh's hubris in the Exodus to his holding

Moab and Edom and Ammon to account for the way that they treat his people as they walk through the wilderness in numbers to his judgment on the Canaanite tribes in Joshua to the toppling of the Philistine god Dagon and his giant henchman Goliath in 1 Samuel over and over and over again God asserts I am the Lord over all the earth and there is no other look with me at chapter 46 and verse 7 Egypt may huff and puff but listen to what God says 46 verse 7 who is this rising like the Nile like rivers whose waters surge Egypt rises like the Nile like rivers whose waters surge he said I will rise I will cover the earth I will destroy cities and their inhabitants and God says bring it on advance of horses rage of chariots let the warriors go out men of Cushham put who handle the shield men of lured skilled in handling the bow but that day is the day of the Lord God of hosts a day of vengeance to avenge himself on all his foes the sword shall devour and be sated and drink its fill of their blood for the Lord God of hosts holds a sacrifice in the north country by the ravine Ephraites the Philistines they may strut their very aggressive stuff but God will overpower them and overcome them in a flash through the Egyptians of all people chapter 47 verse 3 at the noise of the stamping of hooves of his stallions at the rushing of his chariots at the rumbling of their wheels the fathers look not back to their children so feeble are their hands they're too scared to look out even for their own kids because of the day that's coming to destroy all the Philistines to cut off from tyre

and side and every helper there remains for the Lord is destroying the Philistines the remnant of the coastland of Kaphtor and then one of the most disturbing statements in the whole book of Jeremiah in verse 5 boldness has come upon Gaza boldness is seen as a judgment in the Bible Moab is a madman brought to silence 48 verse 4 Ammon will be terrorized by God driven out forever 49.5 Edom will be made small among the nations 49.15

[11:07] Damascus is reduced to feebleness 49.24 the tiny states Cador Hazel will follow suit before Elam scattered to the four winds 49.36 and Yahweh the God of Judah is the Lord of all the earth and if we were in any doubt about that at all then the sweeping condemnation of Babylon in chapters 50 to 51 make that clear and of course Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon is condemned isn't it for wreaking havoc in Judah and enjoying it far too much but these chapters go far beyond that just look at how Babylon is described in 1523 for example how the hammer of the whole earth is cut down and broken how Babylon has become a horror among the nations now strictly speaking Babylon wasn't the hammer of the whole earth Babylon did not become a horror among all the nations but this is not just exaggeration it is the start of a depiction of Babylon that is the archetype of human rule and rebellion against God and the judgment of Babylon is a message to everyone who will ever oppose God in time and space and so chapter 50 and verse 46 says at the sound of the capture of Babylon the earth shall tremble and her cries shall be heard among the nations and the poetic language is there which tells us how God will use Babylon and call it to account in chapter 51 it's a further suggestion that Babylon is already a symbol as it was back in Genesis 11 in the tower of Babel of all that is wrong in the world it is the city of man which will one day be destroyed chapter 51 verse 25 behold I'm against you or destroying mountain declares the Lord which destroys the whole earth

I'll stretch out my hand against you and roll you down from the crags and make you a burnt mountain verse 29 the land trembles and writhes in pain for the Lord's purposes against Babylon stand to make the land of Babylon a desolation without inhabitant finally verse 47 therefore behold the days are coming when I will punish the images of Babylon her whole land shall be put to shame and all her slain shall fall in the midst of it then the heavens and the earth and all that is in them shall sing for joy over the fall of Babylon for the destroyer shall come against them out of the north Babylon must fall for the slain of Israel just as for Babylon have fallen the slain of all the earth the fall of Babylon at the end of Jeremiah at the hands of the Medes represents the eventual fall of every evil empire because the sovereign lord of the universe Jeremiah tells us will ensure that justice is done Babylon will fall now what on earth does this have to do with us these chapters in the Old Testament are the equivalent of Revelation chapter 18 these chapters are Jeremiah's exposition of the universal unchanging sovereignty of our God and so here is how John picks up on these chapters to describe his vision in Revelation 18 remember Babylon encapsulates every anti-God force in the world and it's dealt with like this after this I saw another angel coming down from heaven having great authority and the earth was made bright with his glory and he called out with a mighty voice fallen fallen is Babylon the great she's become a dwelling place for demons a haunt for every unclean spirit a haunt for every unclean bird a haunt for every unclean undetestable beast it picks up the language of Jeremiah for all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living this is a nation being described that is materially wise and materially great but having nothing else and God's people are called to come out from her before she's judged along with the kings of the earth for this reason her plagues will come in a single day death and mourning and famine and she will be burned up with fire for mighty is the Lord God who's judged her and the kings of the earth who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury willow with weep and wail over her and when they see the smoke of her burning they will stand far off in fear of her torment and say alas alas you great city you mighty city

Babylon for in a single hour your judgment has come what does this matter it matters because ultimately this is the foundation for our mandates to go out into all the world as Christ's church this matters because this is the reason we must go out into all the world because our God is the Lord of all the world when Jesus says all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me go therefore to all nations make disciples baptizing them in the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to do all I've commanded what is the authority with which Jesus speaks it is the authority of God displayed in Jeremiah 46 to 51 and elsewhere it is the authority of

the Lord of the nations which the Father has devolved to the Son and so Philippians 2 tells us doesn't it therefore God has exalted him Jesus and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father and so as we come to the end of this academic year as we come to the end of this series we can reflect I think in Jeremiah on how God has enlarged our view of him as the sovereign Lord and his glory and that we are his and that he is the Lord of the universe of the cosmos and because of that we must go where he sends us as a church one writer says this the highest of all missionary motives is neither obedience to the great commission importance that is nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing strong as that incentive is especially when we contemplate the wrath of God but the highest of all missionary motives is zeal burning and passionate zeal for the glory of Jesus Christ only one imperialism is Christian and that is concern for his imperial majesty Jesus Christ and for the glory of his empire or kingdom before this supreme goal of the Christian mission all unworthy motives wither and die salvation that's the first part of the message of these chapters that we are to go into all the world because God is the Lord of all the world and the second is not complimented as you go as his church preach salvation and judgment which comes through Christ if any book of the Bible is about this great biblical theme of salvation through judgment it's got to be Jeremiah in fact the first two thirds of the book the unique thing about this book is the way in which it details the prophet's own struggle to embrace this how Jeremiah had to internalize his own message he had to understand that salvation would come through judgment there's no other book in the Bible [19:01] I think that exposes us to the gut-wrenching way the heart-rending quality of the judgment of God and then we are flooded with relief by Jeremiah with the realization that God the judge is also God who's working through salvation it's a book isn't it that details infidelity as we've listened to Jeremiah and heard the sins of Judah recounted the sins of Egypt and Babylon they're displayed for all to see the anguish of the prophet is played out before us and of course the dominant note in all of the oracles against the nations is judgment it's crazy to suggest otherwise it's why it makes Jeremiah overwhelming we've seen enough of the text to get that we want to cry enough Lord enough telling us about the judgment we know that but there are minor notes that often we miss in Jeremiah there are grace notes which keep sounding through these thunderous messages so look with me at 46 verse 25 and the Lord of hosts the God of Israel said behold

I am bringing punishment upon Ammon of Thebes and Pharaoh and Egypt on her gods and her kings upon Pharaoh and upon all those who trust in him I'm going to deliver them into the hand of those who seek their life into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon and his officers and afterwards Egypt will be inhabited as in the days of old declares the Lord and this 48 verse 47 yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab in the latter days declares the Lord 49 verse 6 afterwards I will restore the fortunes of the Ammonites declares the Lord 49 verse 39 in the latter days I will restore the fortunes of Elam declares the Lord and these chapters are all the more remarkable because when you look at the language of 48 and 49 of talking about restoring it's the same language that's used in chapter 3 verse 7 and 17 and 1215 and 16 it's precisely the same language that God used about restoring the fortunes of Judah after the exile so alongside the judgment of the nations who oppose God

Jeremiah holds out hope to people from Egypt and Moab and Ammon and Elam he holds out hope presumably to those who will bow before him it's noticeable but it's not explained that there's no such hope held out to the Philistines Damascus Kedor Hazor or Babylon this is not a universal salvation if I can put it like this in the end of Jeremiah it is the God of mercy saving those who are drawn to him in faith in fact it's impossible to read Jeremiah I think it's impossible to read the Bible and come away without getting the idea that when God speaks some respond and are rescued and some reject the very same words and they are lost and it is our job as a church to go and proclaim this message which produces salvation and judgment in the Lord

Jesus Christ and as Sunday by Sunday you come and hear God's word you need to know and I need to know that it will save some and it will harden others which tells you that it's not work for the faint hearted when you tell the gospel in Little Stars or the language class or Club 16 or Ignite or in Sunday school or in house group God's word will do two things it will save some and it will harden others for Jeremiah his message to the nations in the short term at least was bad news in these chapters he says the violence of the nations particularly against God's people will be avenged the arrogance of the nations will be brought low the gods of the nations will be powerless to save the

nations in turn will be devastated by other nations but there will also be a stunning reversal for Judah

Jeremiah 51 ends like this from verse 59 after all the poetic extravagance there's something pretty prosaic the end of verse 59 51 the word that Jeremiah the prophet commanded Saraiah the son of Neriah the son of Massiah when he went with Zedekiah king of Judah to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign Saraiah was the quartermaster he was in charge of the stores and Jeremiah wrote in a book all the disaster that should come upon Babylon all these words that are written concerning Babylon and Jeremiah said to Saraiah when you come to Babylon see that you read all these words and pray oh Lord you have said concerning this place that you'll cut it off so that nothing shall dwell in it neither man nor beast and it shall be desolate forever when you finish reading this book tie a stone to it cast it into the middle of the river Euphrates and say thus shall Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster that I'm bringing upon her and they shall become exhausted thus far are the words of Jeremiah that's how his word finish he's told read it out pray perform a dramatic sign throw it in the river and probably run off and that's it for Jeremiah all we get at this point whether it's

[25:00] Jeremiah or Baruch they stick in a large section of 2 Kings 24 and 25 detailing the events of the exile he doesn't change anything at all he just wants to underline everything that God has said through Jeremiah played out exactly as he announced and the fact that Jeremiah's message the salvation and the judgment that he proclaimed would one day be brought to life in real time by one man who is a descendant of Jehoiachin it's funny that the book ends with him is that he really was a hopeless king he ruled for three months and he spent the next 37 years in captivity in Babylon politically speaking Jehoiachin was an idiot but he was a Davidic idiot and just like two kings Jeremiah ends like this in the 37 year of exile Jehoiachin king of Judah in the 12th month on the 25th day of the month evil

Moradach king of Babylon in the year that he began to reign graciously freed Jehoiachin king of Judah and brought him out of prison there's this harmless king and the new guy in charge wants to look gracious so he wheels out Jehoiachin he speaks kindly to him he gives him a seat above the seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon Jehoiachin changes his prison clothes he eats at the king's table he gets an alliance it's not much but it's enough it's the hope of a king from David's line a Deuteronomy 17 kind of king a king who will bring in the new covenant of Jeremiah 30 to 33 the hope of the new covenant is flickering because of Jehoiachin or Jeconiah as he's also called he's alive and God's plan is still on track and so several hundred years later another Jewish man Matthew was able to write these words at the start of his gospel and after the deportation of Babylon Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud and Abiud the father of Eliakim and Eliakim the father of Atol and Azal the father of Zadok and Zadok the father of Achim and Achim the father of Eliud and Eliud the father of Eliezer and Eliezer the father of Mathen and Mathen the father of Jacob and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born who is called Christ.

Jeremiah preaches salvation through judgment. Not salvation through judgment is embodied and achieved and acted and proclaimed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we have to do the same. To preach Jesus Christ and call people to repentance come what may in the face of coming judgment. We push Jesus to the center of church life and we call on people to respond to him by faith and we know that that will either lead to hardening and judgment or salvation.

[28:23] salvation. And that brings us to the end of this most personal of books where Jeremiah lays out for us how the prophet of God had to get this message of God's glorious sovereignty revealed in the coming of Christ in judgment and salvation under his skin and he had to feel it and he had to live it and he had to submit to it.

He had to swallow it and then he had to preach it and he had to get it under his skin. And we have to get the gospel of salvation through judgment under our skin so that we can never be the same again.

So that it is burnt into our hearts and our minds so that it motivates every corner of church life. So that we live in it by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And if tonight we don't have that God given resolve, let's throw ourselves on God. The God who loves us and gave himself for us and ask him to give us the grace that we need to proclaim Christ to our children, to the ministries that we have in this church and to the nations that are in this city.

Because 2 Corinthians 4 verse 1 says therefore having this ministry by the mercy of God we do not lose heart, we don't give up. But we've renounced disgraceful and underhanded ways, we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word and we won't pretend to be something that we're not. [30:06] But by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God and even if our gospel is veiled, it's veiled to those who are perishing, in their case the God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

For what we proclaim is not ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God who said that light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And so let us go into all the world because God is the Lord of all the world. And let us preach Christ salvation through judgment. Let's pray.