

We are half-way through Jeremiah! Half-way through the number of chapters. This chapter 26, marks half-way through the 52 chapters.

Also half-way through the career of Jeremiah. Half-way through the years of ministry of Jeremiah. It has now been about 20 years since his call and appointment as a prophet, and in total Jeremiah ministered for 40 years.

Half-way through the message of the book. Up until now, we have been reading about unrelieved warning of a horrendous judgment to come, with only a few moments of hope. From here forward, things get worse, but paradoxically, the book of Jeremiah itself gets better!

The divine judgments of the first half of the book will be replaced by the inspiring hope of the second half of the book. The ocean of death of the first half of the book was replaced in the second half of the book by tidal waves of a hope and a future. A hope and a future that only God can create through His grace. Their future will be filled with restoration, life, and joy.

**God protected Jeremiah when the people were deathly hostile toward him for preaching God's Word.**

**1. How they reacted to God's Word. (v.1-6) (similar to Jer. 7:1-15)**

Verse 1, we begin this chapter with a flashback to about the year 609 BC, when God sent Jeremiah to preach to the people in the temple itself.

Verse 2, God told Jeremiah to stand in the temple to preach to the people who came to worship. Verse 3, God said maybe the people will listen, and God will not send disaster. Verse 4, God told Jeremiah to tell the people – if you will not listen, then verse 5, to the urgent message, then verse 6, God will make the temple like Shiloh. Shiloh was the place where God's tent and God's ark once stood, back in the days of the prophet Samuel. In other words, if the people will not listen, then the city of Jerusalem will be a curse for all nations of the earth, and a reminder of what happens to people who will not listen to God.

Can you imagine the courage it took for Jeremiah to stand and preach that?

The longer version of this sermon we studied in Jeremiah chapter 7, but here we are given the date of that famous Temple sermon.

They counted years in relationship to the king's rule, so verse 1 says, "*In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim...*" This association with bad King Jehoiakim is more than just settling the question when it happened. The association with King Jehoiakim is also showing the condition of disobedience and lack of faithfulness. Since Jeremiah already wrote this sermon out in chapter 7, basically a call to repent that summarized chapters 2-6, then why record it here again in chapter 26?

Because they still had not repented! And a second reason - chapter 26 is here to tell us that our prophet Jeremiah became a preacher in danger! Chapter 26 looks

back and summarizes the lack of repentance of the people, and Chapter 26 points forward to what Jeremiah will be experiencing next. That brings us to point two.

## **2. How they treated the preacher. (v.7-16)**

Verse 7, everyone heard Jeremiah's sermon in the temple. Verse 8, when Jeremiah was finished speaking what the LORD commanded Jeremiah to speak, the people arrested Jeremiah, and said "*you shall die!*" Why? Because they were protecting the temple, and Jeremiah's sermon was seen as a threat against the temple, when Jeremiah said that God would destroy the temple. The people heard that as blasphemy, because the temple is The Lord's Temple. We see this in verse 9, when they said to Jeremiah "*Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD, 'This house shall be like Shiloh...'*" Jeremiah was speaking against the worship and the institutions of the land, the city, and the temple of God, supported by all the people. They thought Jeremiah was a false prophet, because his predictions about the destructions had not happened ---- yet. And that God would never destroy their temple! God protected their temple, didn't He? Not without holiness.

Verse 10, they put together a speedy trial. Officials came from the King's palace over to the temple, and they took their seat in the entry of the New Gate. That was their location for court trials, like we have a courthouse. Verse 11, in this trial scene we saw priests, prophets, palace officials, and all the people gathered, and the charge is given – preaching against the city, and they were asking for the death penalty!

Verse 12, Jeremiah, in his own defense said that he was not guilty by reason of obedience! Jeremiah was only preaching what God told him to preach!

Verse 13 gives me a chuckle. Because even in these conditions, Jeremiah found a way to preach yet again the urgent message of God yet again – that the people should repent! A preacher uses any gathering to preach! It is not too late! Turn from the evil, and God will not destroy the temple and the city!

Verse 14, Jeremiah affirmed that He was a true prophet of God, and yet he was submitting to their court proceedings. In verse 15, Jeremiah gave a warning.

Jeremiah told the whole crowd that "*if you put me to death...*", they would make things worse for the city and for themselves. They would become guilty of innocent blood – killing an innocent man. Why? Because it was God who sent Jeremiah with that message.

Verse 16, their verdict? They concluded that Jeremiah did not deserve the sentence of death. Why not? Their reasoning was precisely because Jeremiah "*has spoken to them in the name of the LORD our God.*" So, see this irony. They were debating the smaller issue of how to treat the preacher, and basing their answer on the fact that he brought them a message from God. But they still did not grasp the bigger issue – their need to heed the actual words and message from God!

## **3. Comparisons: other examples of faithful preachers in danger. (v.17-24)**

We are given examples of godly people who show God's will being done. Micah, Uriah, Ahikam, Jesus, and a fifth that I will name later.

First is Micah. Verse 17-18, the leaders supported the verdict for Jeremiah of not guilty, and not deserving of death. They wanted to compare the case of Jeremiah to another similar situation, with someone charged with a similar crime. Lawyers call this legal precedent. They brought up the case of the prophet Micah because it was similar to the case of Jeremiah. They quoted from the book of Micah, chapter 3, verse 12. Years earlier, Micah prophesied against the city of Jerusalem and the temple of Zion. What happened to Micah should have some bearing on what is done with Jeremiah.

Verse 19, they asked, Did the king at that time put Micah to death? No. Why not? Because the people repented, and the LORD delivered the city!

Two lessons were clear from the case of Micah that should apply in the case of Jeremiah: 1) they must not put Jeremiah to death, 2) the people should listen to Jeremiah's message and repent. But the people of Judah were only getting point one, not point two!

Verse 19, "*we are about to bring great disaster upon ourselves.*" That same irony is thicker here - they thought that not killing Jeremiah is all the correction that was needed in order to prevent disaster. No, they were still missing the point of decades of preaching! The people were distracted by asking the wrong question, 'will we, or will we not kill this prophet?' when the right question was 'will we, or will we not obey the word of God and live holy lives?'

Moving on to our second example of the prophet Uriah. Verse 20 says, "*There was another man who prophesied in the name of the LORD, Uriah...*" Verse 20 went on to tell about Uriah that he "*...prophesied against this city and against this land in words like those of Jeremiah.*"

Verse 21 the king wanted to put the prophet to death. But Uriah ran away to Egypt. That is a new problem, because it means Uriah was trusting in human power instead of God's power. There can be no going to Egypt! Uriah the prophet became a bad example of apostasy, turning away from the Lord.

So it turned out that Uriah instead of being just like Jeremiah, was the opposite of Jeremiah. Uriah's cowardice makes us better notice the courage of Jeremiah, in contrast. Jeremiah was a good example to follow. Uriah was not.

How did the story of Uriah end? Egypt failed to protect Uriah. It is sort of ugly. Verse 22 – the king sent men to Egypt to fetch Uriah, and bring him back. When Uriah got back, the king himself killed the Prophet Uriah with the sword, and gave him a common burial.

In contrast, how did the story of Jeremiah end? Verse 24, "*But the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah so that he was not given over to the people to be put to death.*"

This brings us to our third example, Ahikam. Who is Ahikam? The Son of Shaphan. Who was Shaphan? Remember when the people rediscovered the book of God's law during the reign of King Josiah in 2 Kings 22? They celebrated the discovery of the Bible again, and had a scribe read the law out loud to everyone. That scribe was Shaphan. And Shaphan had 3 godly sons who will show up in the book of Jeremiah. Here is the first one, named Ahikam. God used the hand of Ahikam to protect Jeremiah, and he is our third example of a godly person.

That brings us to our fourth example of a godly man showing God's will being done...Jesus Christ. Jeremiah's arrest and trial is supposed to remind us of Jesus. These people, this fickle crowd, supported the priests/prophets against Jeremiah (in verses 7-8), but later they changed and swung to support the opposite verdict and the crowd then took Jeremiah's side.(v.16). This was God's protection for Jeremiah. Compare this to the time of Jesus. The crowd in Jesus' day did the reverse for Jesus. On Palm Sunday, the crowd shouted, Hosanna (Oh, Lord save us!) and the crowd put palm branches and coats on the road to honor Him. Within a few days, that fickle crowd in Jerusalem were shouting to "*crucify Him!*"

A fickle crowd in Jerusalem! God provided protection for Jeremiah through Ahikam. But for Jesus...no such protection from any son of Shaphan was provided for Jesus as our Messiah. In fact, when the powerful man Pilate had the opportunity to protect Jesus, instead Pilate decided to wash his hands of Jesus, and Pilate allowed the execution of Jesus to take place. We read in Matthew 27:26, "*then [Pilate] released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, [Pilate] delivered [Jesus] to be crucified.*"

I promised five examples. Micah, Uriah, Ahikam, and Jesus was the fourth. Who is the fifth? Those who believe in Jesus like Jeremiah did, and are faithful despite danger. In the New Testament book of Hebrews, we have a list of some of them in chapter 11. By faith Abel, by faith Noah, by faith Abraham, by faith Moses. So, our fifth example is all Christian martyrs, and all those willing to die for Christ.

We have seen five examples, but Jesus stands out as unique.

Like Jeremiah, Jesus was a prophet handed over to the people to be put to death. Like Jeremiah, Jesus was put on trial in the city of Jerusalem. Like Jeremiah, Jesus was charged with treason against the temple for the things that He preached. Like Jeremiah, Jesus was innocent of all charges. Like Jeremiah, Jesus did not defend Himself at His trial.

But there is one difference between the trial of Jeremiah and the trial of Jesus. The verdict. At the trial of Jesus, no one heeded the warning that His death would bring the guilt of innocent blood on the killers. No official insisted that 'This man should not be sentenced to death!' No elder stepped forward to make the point the prophet Micah offered a legal precedent for Jesus to be set free. No one

was assigned by God to protect the life of Jesus the way that Ahikam protected the life of Jeremiah.

What was the verdict for Jeremiah? To not be given over to be put to death.

What was the verdict for Jesus? To be given over to be put to death.

The verdict of putting Jesus to death at his trial was overturned on appeal.

In the dying moments of His execution, Jesus appealed to the highest court in the whole universe. Luke 23:46, *“Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!’ And having said this, [Jesus] breathed His last.”*

God the Father accepted that appeal. The guilty verdict rendered by men to Jesus was overruled by the Holy God. But they had already executed Jesus and buried Him. God the Father rendered Jesus innocent of all charges, and the fact that Jesus rose again from the dead is the proof of His innocence. Jesus had been wrongly executed. The highest court demanded that He be returned back to life.

The sacrifice that Jesus offered for sin has been accepted by God. Once Jesus paid for your sins, the verdict against us was no longer able to stand. Because we trust that Christ died on the cross for our sins, we are rescued from death.

**Conclude:** take-home lessons

In our study today, Jeremiah was almost put to death by the people. Uriah the prophet was put to death for his faithful preaching. It all points ahead to Jesus, who is the true prophet who is unjustly murdered because Jesus also preached like Jeremiah - Jesus confronted sin head-on. Jesus said in Matthew 23:31, “...you are sons of those who murdered the prophets...” Similarly, the New Testament deacon named Stephen boldly confronted sin head-on in his sermon in Acts 7:52, *“Which of the prophets did your fathers NOT persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered.”*

1. **Repent!** Listen to God, in His Word, by His Spirit, as He calls us to repent and turn from our sins to the Messiah to receive forgiveness. God faithfully sends His Word around the world to be faithfully preached. God’s message is repeated. God’s message is urgent. God’s message is insistent. Turn from your sins! Repent! God’s law and God’s prophets have been consistently saying to human beings for all of these centuries that the God of the universe is holy and demands holy living from us. Because we have not lived holy lives in our thoughts, our words, and our deeds, we need to turn from our wrongs to the only One who can save us, and that is not Jeremiah, as holy as he was. Jeremiah was just a man and just a sinner. We turn to the only One who can save us who is Jesus Christ, who is God and also became man, so that He is both god and man in two distinct natures and one person forever. We must repent which means turning away from our sins and turning toward Jesus our savior. He alone has the holiness that pleases God the Father, and

that holiness is given to us by faith. He alone can take the punishment of wrath that is due to us for our sins and satisfy the justice of God at the cross. We repent of our sins, that is a clear and reiterated message in Jeremiah chapter 26. Repent.

**2. Expect both persecution and protection as counterparts.** God promised protection for His people, such as Jeremiah, but it does not mean an easy life. We are not guaranteed a life that is free from harassment, free from danger, free from persecution, and free from real possibility of execution. What Jeremiah got, the church today gets. A very heated response! Persecution. In your face. Brought up on charges. But there is another thing that Jeremiah got, that the church today gets. Protection. God's protection. That might mean being killed, and then being raised to life again in heaven. Or, it might mean being imprisoned, or feeling pressure from people and from groups. But in the end, God's promise to protect us is upheld. We are safe in God's hands, and we will live in heaven with God forever. Even now, we are protected but not in the way we think. Jesus said in John 16, "*In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*" Don't expect that our lives will be easy or that the lives of our missionaries will be easy or the lives of our Christian brothers and sisters around the world will be easy, all because of God's promise to protect us. No. Not easy. Not that kind of protection. You have to have a view of the church around the world in our generation that includes what we learn from Jeremiah chapter 26. It goes like this....the church around the world today receives persecution, with its counterpart of protection. And we receive protection, with its counterpart of persecution. That is our second take-away – expect both persecution and protection as counterparts.

**3. Ask yourself, would you be willing to die for the preaching of the Word of God?** The lesson from Jeremiah chapter 26 is that the answer should be yes. The gospel needs to be preached faithfully to the ends of the earth. Let me list some of the people willing to die for it. Moses, Jeremiah, Micah, Uriah, Jesus, Stephen, and a whole giant list in Hebrews 11. Our names need to be added to the list. There is nothing more important than the Word of God. We receive it with joy, repent with earnestness, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with our whole hearts, thankful that He who is the True Prophet, is the Word, is the Temple, and is the Savior, has rescued us from danger.