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SERMON TITLE: The Word of the Lord: *Life & Times of Jeremiah*
SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 1:1-10
DATE: September 1, 2019
Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Read also Revelation 15:3-4.

We read from Revelation how great and powerful God is. God is the King of the nations; God is just, true, and holy. The words are a song being sung to God. It was a song that goes back to Moses. From the beginning of the Bible to the last book people sing this song. It's called "The Song of the Lamb." Today the choir sang the same words, "The Majesty and Glory of Your Name!"

How is it that God was worshiped by people who lived 3,300 years ago, still worshiping 2,000 years ago in the time of Jesus, and still now?

I have a book penned by my great grandfather, and he recorded my family's history that goes back 400+ years to 1609. The family tree carries on, recorded largely by records the church keeps of marriages and baptisms.

The Bible records genealogical records of the kings who reigned in Israel. After 130 years the monarchy divided into the Northern kingdom, which lasted about 200 years, and the Southern kingdom of Judah, which lasted almost 345 years.

Both kingdoms fell. Jesus said, "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall" (Luke 11:17).

Israel, the Northern Kingdom, fell to Assyria in 722 B.C. The Southern Kingdom, Judah, with the capital, Jerusalem, fell in 586 to Babylon.

While many Jews returned and the temple was rebuilt late in the 5th Century B.C., Israel was ruled by the Hellenists, the Romans, the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Mamluks, the Ottomans, and the British.

Israel was only reunited as an autonomous nation some 2500 years later.

Here's the conclusion of the writer of Ecclesiastes:
"To everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to uproot. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build up" (3:1-3).

So we enter an uncertain and difficult time in Israel's history. During the life and times of Jeremiah, one half of their divided nation had already been conquered and now the other half, the Southern Kingdom was under threat.

The kings under whom Jeremiah served are:

1. King Josiah – began at 8 years old. Reigned 31 years. A good king in God's eyes, he sought God; purged Judah and Jerusalem of idols. 2 Chron. 34:1-7
2. King Jehoiakim – began at age 25. Reigned 11 years. He did evil in God's eyes. He was conquered by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (36:5-6)
3. King Zedekiah was 21 years old when he became king, and he reigned 11 years. He did evil in God's eyes and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke the word of the Lord. (36:11-13)

Scripture informs us: (36:14)

"Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the Lord, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem."

It would be like they set up a Buda on our communion table.

So the kings thought they were in charge of this nation. The two bad kings and the people they led lived like they wanted to; followed whatever religion fancied them; divided against themselves; and generally forgot all about God. *But there was Someone else in charge, Someone who foresaw all of this happening, and had a plan.* Although we may forget about God, that doesn't mean God forgets about us!

Let's listen and see the plan. READ Jer. 1:1-10

These are the words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests from the town of Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. The Lord first gave messages to Jeremiah during the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah. (Josiah would have been age 21.) The Lord's messages continued throughout the reign of King Jehoiakim, Josiah's son, until the eleventh year of the reign of King Zedekiah, another of Josiah's sons. In August of that eleventh year the people of Jerusalem were taken away as captives. (v. 1-3)

It was a sad day in the nation.

When names, dates, and years of kings are documented in Scripture—August of King Zedekiah's 11th year—it puts it in verifiable history. This really happened.

Jeremiah also records a personal word from the Lord: The Lord gave me this message: "I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations." "O Sovereign Lord," I said, "I can't speak for you! I'm too young!" The Lord replied, "Don't say, 'I'm too young,' for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you. And don't be afraid of the people, for I will be with you and will protect you. I, the Lord, have spoken!" Then the Lord reached out and touched my mouth and said, "Look, I have put my words in your mouth! Today I appoint you to stand up against nations and kingdoms. Some you must uproot and tear down, destroy and overthrow. Others you must build up and plant." (v. 4-10)

What can we learn from this ancient passage? Scripture was for Israel and Judah, but it is also relevant for us today. It is relevant personally, and relevant collectively to our nation. What might it be saying to us?

Let's review, and then it will be easier to apply. During the time of these three kings, the people had poor spiritual leadership and they began falling out of faith:

- ~ They no longer supported the temple
- ~ They abandoned the law of God
- ~ Unjust judges
- ~ Many gods, and superstitions
- ~ Abandoned dependence on God and leaned on other nations instead
- ~ Let their pastors and singers go due to lack of tithes and offerings

People were led astray due to national leadership who forgot about God. But the One who was really in charge had anticipated this and He was there with a plan because His plan blesses the world.

He is overseeing even though He is unseen.

He's planning for positive as they are abandoning His ways.

He knows us so well that God planned His solution even before Jeremiah was born. "*I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations.*" When he talks about nations it means future nations, like the USA in 2019.

So, do you and I need Jeremiah's message in this day and time? Does our nation need to hear the Word of the Lord today? Do we need help?

- ~ Grace Presbytery has closed over 30 churches since 2008.
- ~ Has our own culture abandoned the law of God?
- ~ Are our judges just?
- ~ What gods does our culture worship?
- ~ Is our culture dependent on God?

- ~ Has the church in America declined due to lack of tithes and offerings?

As a result, God gave Jeremiah this message: *Today I appoint you to stand up against nations and kingdoms. Some you must uproot and tear down, destroy and overthrow. Others you must build up and plant.*

Now why would God present this challenge of being uprooted, torn down, and overthrown vs. building up and planting?

It is best expressed by a story from a friend who lives in Germany. He often writes my husband and me of happenings with him and his wife. He recently wrote:

Miracles happened! During (my wife's) "frequent visits" in the hospital this year I had to look after her plants in house and garden. It seemed I did my job well; they survived in house, and garden. But, "oops," one I forgot completely—a flower, being a present from her son, standing near the window in the living room. Typical man: We see everything, but the obvious! So the plant expired. When B. came back home we decided to "bury" the remains in the compost. So far so good.

A few weeks later I went there to dump wet garbage in the composter, opened it—and oh, wonder, the plant has risen. It was even growing bigger than before. So we took it out again, gave it a flower pot, and a new place near the house. No idea what the real name of this plant is; we call it the "Jesus Plant" now.

What God was saying to God's people is that even though we occasionally fall away, and everything "dead" in us must be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed, in God's hands we will again be planted and built up.

God's people could have turned at any time, listened, and avoided the coming hardship. So we must assess ourselves. Shall we fall away or turn back and live by faith? As we go through the life and times of Jeremiah, coupled with Jesus' words from the Gospels we will be presented with the same challenge. How shall we respond?

My prayer is that we see our God as way out in front of us, helping us. May you and I, and our nation be like my friend's Jesus Plant and experience new and fruitful life.

AMEN

