

The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 1:9-19

Topic

God tells Jeremiah that He will make him like a walled city

Title

"Jeremiah was a Bulwark"

Introduction

Jerusalem was a heavily fortified city.

After capturing Jerusalem from the Jebusites around 1000BC, David further fortified the city already known as "the strong hold of Zion" (Second Samuel 5:7). The later kings of Judah followed his example and continuously upgraded the fortifications. We're told, for example, in Second Chronicles that Uzziah "built towers" (26:9) and that his son Jotham continued the fortifications (27:3).

In 701BC, in the face of an impending Assyrian invasion and siege, Hezekiah heavily fortified Jerusalem against attack and siege:

2 Chronicles 32:5 And he strengthened himself, built up all the wall that was broken, raised it up to the towers, and built another wall outside; also he repaired the Millo in the City of David, and made weapons and shields in abundance.

The "Millo" that is mentioned consisted of earth-filled walls which served as the city's northern defense perimeter.

Even with such heavy defenses a protracted siege could gain the surrender of Jerusalem if the people ran out of water. Hezekiah devised a sophisticated tunnel system to make sure the city had an internal supply of

water (Second Kings 20:20; Second Chronicles 32:3-4, 30). In addition Jerusalem was literally honeycombed with massive reservoirs called cisterns that held millions of gallons of rain-water.

Hezekiah's son Manasseh "built a wall without the city of David... and raised it up a very great height" (Second Chronicles 33:14).

Everywhere they looked the inhabitants of Jerusalem could see the splendid fortifications of towers, gates, and walls that could protect them from the mighty armies of their enemies. In addition they had the added confidence that they could endure a long siege, if necessary, since they had access to a continuous water source inside their city through Hezekiah's tunnel and their system of cisterns. Finally, as we will see in a later study, they believed that the fact that the Temple was in Jerusalem insured them that God would never let the city fall to invaders.

They did indeed have mighty fortifications. But in their pride and idolatry they had forsaken the Almighty Who fortifies.

- They were trusting in the fortifications of Jerusalem and spiting God.
- They needed to trust instead in the Fortifier of Jerusalem and seek God.

God sent Jeremiah to these overconfident sinners. He had a message for them. He wanted them to hear His message, for sure, but He also wanted them to **see** it.

They would see it in Jeremiah. In verse eighteen God told Jeremiah, "For behold, I have made you this day a fortified city..." He was God's prophet to speak God's Word but as his ministry progresses we will see the people besiege Jeremiah over and over again. Each time God fortifies him as if he were a walled city and delivers him.

I can't help but wonder if God doesn't still do something along those lines today, with us? I can't help but wonder if He makes us a visual aid to the Gospel we are sharing?

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 God Has Set You Over Those Who Trust In Their Own Fortifications, and #2 Get Yourself Set To Show You Trust In The One Who Fortifies.

#1 God Has Set You Over Those
Who Trust In Their Own Fortifications
(v9-16)

The Christian life, at least on paper, is a walk of faith on a narrow path in which you keep yourself as unencumbered as possible while focusing on eternal rewards rather than temporal security.

To the extent we pull that off and actually live that way, actually 'walk the walk,' we are a stunning contrast to the nonbeliever who is immersed in the things of this world. It sets us "over" them, not in a sense of pride but of humility to give a visual to our proclaiming of God's truth.

Jeremiah was "set over" the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem and the Gentile nations surrounding them. He was God's visual aid, God's PowerPoint.

Jeremiah 1:9 Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.

God could have simply said to Jeremiah, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth," but He reinforced it by "touch[ing]" his mouth. Before God made Jeremiah a visual aid, He gave Jeremiah one of his own.

It's a good idea to keep in mind that as important as our words are, our lives also speak volumes. The way we live reveals what we truly believe, where we actually place our trust.

Jeremiah 1:10 See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plant."

God gave Jeremiah six things to do and four of them involved demolition. It makes sense; you can't "build" or "plant" until you've laid the proper groundwork or prepared the soil. But when the building and planting is

referring to people's lives, they don't always want to root out, pull down, destroy and throw down the things of the flesh and of the world.

I said "they," referring to people we might minister to, but I need to also say "me." As I walk with the Lord, over time things tend to creep back into my life; or I foolishly invite them back. They seem harmless enough - a small "plant" here or there. But if it's not *from* the Lord, if it's not *for* the Lord, I find that what I believed a harmless plant is really a toxic weed, spreading through the Lord's garden, breaking up the foundation of my life.

Is there something in your life that needs rooting out? Pulling down? Destroyed? Thrown down? Do it; do it today; *do it right now*, so you can build and plant.

Jeremiah 1:11 Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" And I said, "I see a branch of an almond tree."

Jeremiah 1:12 Then the LORD said to me, "You have seen well, for I am ready to perform My word."

Jeremiah was probably walking along a footpath in his village of Anathoth. He saw an almond tree. The almond tree was known as the 'waker' or the 'watcher' because it was the first to bloom. God spoke to him from his observation.

God wants to show us lots of things from our common observations. We just need to develop our sensitivities to His still, small voice.

God had called Jeremiah in verses one through eight and had given him some idea of what his ministry as a prophet would involve in verse nine and ten. Jeremiah was probably wondering what kind of preparation, what kind of schooling, would be required. After all, as the son of a priest he knew that at age 25 you trained for five years before you could start serving in the Temple at age 30. Surely being the Lord's prophet would entail a much greater preparation.

It must have been quite a shock for God to tell Jeremiah that his service was to begin *right now!* There was no training, per se; just the touching of his lips.

The Christian life always involves on-the-job training. You are to be serving God all the time and, as you do, He is training you, preparing you, to do more later on. More-and-more, never less-and-less.

Jeremiah 1:13 And the word of the LORD came to me the second time, saying, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a boiling pot, and it is facing away from the north."

This would be another common sight in rural Judah. A boiling cooking pot was standard issue in the homes. It would sit on a ring of stones with an opening in the stones to add wood to the fire below it. This pot was about to boil over from the north and spill on the ground.

Jeremiah 1:14 Then the LORD said to me: "Out of the north calamity shall break forth On all the inhabitants of the land.

Jeremiah 1:15 For behold, I am calling All the families of the kingdoms of the north," says the LORD; "They shall come and each one set his throne At the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, Against all its walls all around, And against all the cities of Judah.

Jeremiah 1:16 I will utter My judgments Against them concerning all their wickedness, Because they have forsaken Me, Burned incense to other gods, And worshiped the works of their own hands.

Jerusalem would be besieged from the north by the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonians were geographically east of Judah but all invasions came from the north because of how Jerusalem was situated.

The sins of God's people could be summarized as having forsaken God for idols. As we get deeper into the book we'll see more specifics of what they were doing and not doing.

God would besiege Jerusalem using the Babylonian armies of King Nebuchadnezzar. Jerusalem would fall as the people trusted in their fortifications rather than repenting of their sin and returning to the Lord.

To simplify, we could say that judgment was coming and therefore God was calling for repentance.

In a broad, general, but very real sense, judgment is coming upon our world. God is indeed longsuffering, not willing that any should perish but

that all would come to eternal life. Nevertheless His longsuffering cannot wait forever.

God has made known His plans for the future of the earth. He's going to bring upon the earth a time of terrible trouble the likes of which have never been felt before. The cauldron of the Great Tribulation is going to boil over. It will be His final call to repentance before the Second Coming of Jesus to establish His kingdom on the earth.

But we don't need to look into the future. *No one has any guarantee they will live another hour.* It is appointed to men once to die and then afterwards there is a judgment.

People don't like to admit it but they are besieged by sin and death. They choose to ignore the siege, trusting in some other fortification. They might trust in a religion; or in science; or in politics; or in their material possessions. The list is pretty long.

Nothing can deal with their sin or overcome death except faith in Jesus Christ.

So, you see, if you are a Christian, God **has** in fact set you 'over' those who trust in their own fortifications. **You** are their Jeremiah to warn them that they are besieged by relentless enemies whom they cannot defy or defeat apart from a personal relationship with the Living God through His Son, Jesus. Your ministry as one who speaks forth God's Word began the day you received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Every day since then has been on-the-job training for where you are 'set' **right now**.

#2 Get Yourself Set To Show You Trust In The One Who Fortifies (v17-19)

Siege warfare was the order of the day. All you had to do was outlast the invading armies surrounding your well-fortified city.

Jerusalem seemed impregnable, especially when you factored in the presence of God in the Temple. But the people had forsaken God. He

wanted to show them that they needed Him, the Fortifier, rather than their fortifications. He would show them in Jeremiah ‘a mighty fortress is our God.’

Jeremiah 1:17 "Therefore prepare yourself and arise, And speak to them all that I command you. Do not be dismayed before their faces, Lest I dismay you before them.

“Prepare yourself” could be translated “gird up your loins.” Men wore a long outer garment in those days. In order to do strenuous work they’d have to tuck-in their outer garment to their belt.

We are all about preparation but can sometimes forget God is about action. “And arise,” used simultaneously with “prepare yourself,” is God’s way of saying that His Word is His immediate enabling and empowering.

“Do not be dismayed before their faces.” “Dismayed” means *discouraged* or *afraid*.

Jewish culture was very expressive. There was a lot of tearing of the clothes and throwing dust in the air - things like that. When Jeremiah spoke it would be obvious the people were against him.

“Do not be dismayed.” Is it really that easy? Can I just change my mind and not be discouraged or afraid? The answer to that is a qualified “Yes.” It’s qualified by the fact that I see so many of the heroes of the faith, in the Bible, afraid and discouraged but then see how God is with them to bring them through their trouble to a deeper, greater, fuller walk with Him.

God frequently says “Fear not.” It implies His followers *will* fear but that He will be with them to overcome their fear.

To Jeremiah He added, “lest I dismay you before them.” It almost sounds like when my dad would tell me not to cry or he would give me something to cry about! Is that really what God was telling Jeremiah?

I don’t think so. It’s like this. I can believe God’s Word is my empowering, giving me boldness. Or I can stand in my own strength, in which case I will

show fear and discouragement. It isn't that God will abandon me but that I quit trusting Him.

Jeremiah 1:18 For behold, I have made you this day A fortified city and an iron pillar, And bronze walls against the whole land - Against the kings of Judah, Against its princes, Against its priests, And against the people of the land.

Jeremiah was God's "fortified city." Kings, princes, priests and the people would all be against him, but he would stand and withstand their onslaught. To those who had spiritual insight he would be a visual representation of the simple truth they had abandoned - that the Fortifier is more important than the fortifications.

We live in precarious times. I only have to watch a news broadcast for about ten minutes before I feel fear washing over me. Whether it's the environment or the economy, it seems the outlook is bleak at best.

For example it is estimated that there are over four million 'preppers' in America. They are those who, for various reasons, are converting spare rooms into storage pantries, learning how to grow survival gardens and stocking up on everything from gas masks to auxiliary generators.

I'm tempted to put all my efforts and energies into fortifying myself. While all of us must determine just how much we will prepare for a disaster, **it's so easy to forget that a mighty fortress is my God.**

Jeremiah 1:19 They will fight against you, But they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you," says the LORD, "to deliver you."

I can tell you all day that I trust God, that He is my strength, that all things work together for the good, and that I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me.

But until I am in some trouble or trial, I can't **show** those things to you. So God carefully and meticulously plans out my path so I will be in situations that **show** He is with me to deliver me when I am besieged.

Missouri is the “show me” state. Christians are like Missouri. We are the “show me” saints. God puts us in a situation and says, “show Me a saint, someone who knows My presence and can reveal it by receiving a peace that passes all understanding and by revealing a joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

If I’m Jeremiah, I’m content to stay a country-boy who serves God at my convenience as a well-trained priest in my normal course of activities. I am content to serve between the ages of thirty and fifty then retire and give godly advice to folks back in my home town.

It seems like a good life, a godly life, does it not?

But God had another plan, another path. He wanted to show others His glory so He made Jeremiah a fortified city that withstood the siege that God’s Word brought upon him.

You know your situation better than anyone. What kind of a visual aid does God want to make you in order to reveal Himself to onlookers? A city where God fortifies you against some siege?

Maybe you are a hospital where God must be trusted as the Great Physician.

Whatever it is, the perilous times in which we live call for strong visuals to nonbelievers. We should think beyond just clocking-in and clocking-out of serving the Lord in ways that are comfortable and at our leisure. We still need to do those kinds of things, for sure, but we also need to step-up and walk in ways that show that we are on an altogether different path than nonbelievers.

Studies in the Book of Jeremiah