



The **Fiery** Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 51:1-64

Topic

After reading aloud Jeremiah's prophecy of the destruction of Babylon, Seraiah [**Sa-ray-ah**] ties a rock to the scroll and throws it into the Euphrates River to illustrate the nation's sinking

Title

"The Original Sunk Rockers"

Introduction

Ever since Europeans came to America the idea of the United States as a land of special blessings has captivated us. John Winthrop, the Puritan governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, famously drew upon the Bible to describe the early New England settlers when he said, "We shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people upon us."

Certainly the United States of America seems to have been uniquely blessed by God. But what if I were to tell you that **every** nation on the earth, throughout history, was preappointed by God for His own special purposes?

You might not believe me, but you will believe the apostle Paul. In his famous sermon on Mars Hill, he said this about God and the nations.

Act 17:26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,

Act 17:27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

Every nation has been "preappointed" as to its time to exist and the "boundaries" of both its geography and power in order to serve God's purposes. One of those purposes is so that men in those nations "should seek The Lord" and "find Him."

Closing out the Book of Jeremiah are three chapters about the nation of Babylon. Our chapter today chronicles her demise. Her preappointed time to seek and serve God was ended.

Tucked within these sixty-four verses are two passages that can speak to us as believers in our preappointed nation.

I'll organize my thoughts on those two passages around two points: #1 God's Power Is Displayed So That Your Nation Will Seek Him, and #2 God's People Are Dispatched So That Your Nation Will Serve Him.

#1 God's Power Is Displayed So That Your Nation Will Seek Him

(v15-19)

Since we are going to focus on verses fifteen through nineteen and verses fifty-nine through sixty-four, let me give you a very brief overview of the entire chapter.

- In verses one through five God announced that Babylon would be defeated and destroyed for its treatment of Judah. God had raised them up to discipline His people but they had grown proud and refused to acknowledge The Lord.
- In verse six God told His people to flee Babylon ahead of the impending destruction.
- In verse seven God spoke of how terrible was Babylon's sin as a nation.
- In verses fifteen through nineteen you see that both Babylon and her idols would be destroyed.
- In verses twenty through twenty-four God called King Cyrus His "battle axe," His implement of destruction to crush Babylon.
- In verses forty-five through fifty-eight the Jews were told to prepare to flee with full assurance Babylon would be destroyed.
- In verses fifty-nine through sixty-four you are told that God sent this message of destruction to Babylon in a scroll Jeremiah penned. It was to be read aloud then tied to a rock and thrown into the Euphrates River to illustrate Babylon's demise.

Look at verses fifteen through nineteen. They transcend God's particular dealings with Babylon and speak to us about His dealings with nations generally.

Jeremiah 51:15 He has made the earth by His power; He has established the world by His wisdom, And stretched out the heaven by His understanding.

God is the creator of heaven and earth. We believe in what is called 'special creation' - the literal interpretation of the account of

creation in the Book of Genesis, accepting it as an accurate historical account of the creation of the universe in essentially its present form over the course of six 24-hour days.

Creation is here described using the words "power," "wisdom," and "understanding."

- "He made the earth" focuses on the material aspects of creation. In His "power" God spoke all things into being.
- "He established the world" means in His "wisdom" God put the material world into an orderly system.
- "Stretched out the heaven by His understanding" is interesting in that one of the meanings of "understanding" is *discretion*, which is *the freedom to determine what should be done*. It tells us that God spoke the earth into existence, set it in an orderly universe, and is at work on the earth to accomplish something.

What is He trying to accomplish? According to Paul, on Mars Hill, God is trying to encourage men to seek Him and be saved.

Jeremiah 51:16 When He utters His voice - There is a multitude of waters in the heavens: "He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightnings for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasuries."

Jeremiah used poetic language to say that if a person looks at the earth he or she will see that creation is speaking to them about the greatness and the glory of God. The witness of creation is everywhere.

Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Psalm 19:2 Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.

Psalm 19:3 They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.

Psalm 19:4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

Can it save? Can a person be saved without specifically hearing about Jesus Christ?

Before you answer, I should tell you that there is a lot of disagreement upon that question among solid Christians. There are three basic positions and differing views within each of them.

Restrictivism asserts that all unevangelized peoples are damned to Hell because they did not hear about Jesus Christ. Apart from human preaching there can be no salvation. R.C. Sproul follows a type of restrictivism. He acknowledges that people will be judged according to the light they have, and that they have a law written on their hearts, but unless the Gospel is actually preached to them by a human messenger they are consigned to damnation.

Universalism goes to the other extreme. It asserts that all unevangelized peoples will ultimately be reconciled to God and be saved. For some universalists this takes place after death in some sort of second-chance scenario. Universalism is based upon the unlimited atonement of Jesus Christ, God's will that none should perish, and the sovereign love of God.

Inclusivism asserts that some of those who do not hear the name of Jesus can nevertheless be saved before they die if they respond in faith to whatever limited revelation of God they do have, e.g., creation all around them and conscience within them.

Salvation is only in Jesus Christ, in His death, burial and resurrection, but you need not be aware of all the specifics in order to believe in the God of the Bible.

Norman Geisler expresses a conservative inclusivist position when he writes,

Those who did not hear the Gospel could have, for God rewards those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:16). When people respond to the light of creation (Romans 1:19-20) and/or conscience (Romans 2:12-15), God provides the light of redemption. He knows exactly who will be where when the Gospel is preached (Acts 17:26) and He knows that no one who would have received salvation did not have the opportunity.

The passage we referenced in Acts 17 is clearly inclusivist because it tells us God has scattered nations all over the earth with the express purpose that men might seek Him.

God preappointed Babylon as a nation to discipline His people. Another one of His purposes in doing so was so they would seek Him.

Instead of seeking Him they turned to idols.

Jeremiah 51:17 Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge;
Every metalsmith is put to shame by the carved image;
For his molded image is falsehood, And there is no breath in them.

Jeremiah 51:18 They are futile, a work of errors;
In the time of their punishment they shall perish.

Babylon's idols were made of metal, stone, and wood. An idol can be an idea or an ideal; it can be a person or a pursuit.

In Babylon's case, God had given them creation and conscience, but He also provided His people and their testimony.

Jeremiah 51:19 The Portion of Jacob is not like them, For He is the Maker of all things; And Israel is the tribe of His inheritance. The LORD of hosts is His name.

God was "Maker," i.e., creator, AND the Jews gave testimony to Him.

The existence of the nation of Israel is a powerful testimony to all the nations of the earth that there is a God Who is at work in history to redeem lost mankind.

God is at work, throughout history, all over the earth, in every nation that was, is or will be, to reveal Himself so men will seek Him and be saved.

Getting back to our own great nation, we have definitely been blessed, as Winthrop said, as the "city on a hill."

What I didn't know was that in the very speech in which he spoke about the "city upon a hill," Winthrop qualified it by cautioning that, "if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword throughout the world."

Historian Donald Scott wrote,

In the decades following Winthrop's speech most New England [ministers] preached less about New England's divine mission, than issue deep laments about how far New Englanders had fallen from fulfilling the requirements of their covenant with God... "Jeremiads," subsequent historians have called them...

And that segue's nicely to our second point, that **we** be 'Jeremiads.'

#2 God's People Are Dispatched So That Your Nation Will Serve Him

(v59-64)

Jeremiah gave his people several object lessons:

- Jeremiah buried a linen belt and dug it up to show that God would save the remnant of his people (13:1–11).
- He bought a clay jar from the potter and smashed it outside the city walls to show that God would destroy Jerusalem (19:1–15).
- He bought a field in enemy-occupied territory to show that God would bring his people back home (32:1–44).

Now he had an object lesson for the Babylonians.

Jeremiah 51:59 The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah [Sa-ray-ah] the son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, [Ma-see-ah] when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign. And Seraiah [Sa-ray-ah] was the quartermaster.

Chronologically these events took place in chapter twenty-nine.

Against Jeremiah's better judgment (27:1–22) King Zedekiah tried to rebel against Babylon in 594BC. When the Babylonians got wind of the rebellion they ordered Zedekiah back to Babylon to declare his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. He took his quartermaster, Seraiah, [Sa-ray-ah] with him.

When Jeremiah heard about Seraiah's [Sa-ray-ah's] mission he gave him the latest edition of his prophecy about Babylon.

Jeremiah 51:60 So Jeremiah wrote in a book all the evil that would come upon Babylon, all these words that are written against Babylon.

Jeremiah 51:61 And Jeremiah said to Seraiah, [Sa-ray-ah] "When you arrive in Babylon and see it, and read all these words, Jeremiah 51:62 then you shall say, 'O LORD, You have spoken against this place to cut it off, so that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but it shall be desolate forever.'

King Nebuchadnezzar thought he was demanding that Zedekiah come to grovel before him. From our perspective as believers we understand that God was dispatching Seraiah [Sa-ray-ah] to rebuke him.

Who was he to rebuke the world's most powerful ruler? He was God's ambassador.

As a simple believer in Jesus Christ you possess great authority. My favorite picture of this, in the Bible, is Phillip talking to the Ethiopian eunuch in the Book of Acts. That man was a high ranking official in the government of Ethiopia. He was being carried back home by slaves in a caravan.

Yet Phillip was the person with real authority to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ and bring that man to repentance and faith.

Then, as the Ethiopian was baptized, Phillip was raptured away to another city. That's real first class travel.

Jeremiah 51:63 Now it shall be, when you have finished reading this book, that you shall tie a stone to it and throw it out into the Euphrates.

Jeremiah 51:64 Then you shall say, 'Thus Babylon shall sink and not rise from the catastrophe that I will bring upon her. And they shall be weary.' " Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.

What a great visual. Babylon was sunk.

Did Seraiah [Sa-ray-ah] read "all these words" to King Nebuchadnezzar? Did he read them publicly, like a street preacher with people passing by?

If he did either of those he likely was punished afterward and it therefore attests to his boldness in The Lord.

Perhaps he read these words to the Jews who had already been taken captive - like Daniel and his three friends. If so, what an encouragement to them.

Each of us, in some small or great measure, are called to be a Seraiah [Sa-ray-ah] or a Phillip. God dispatches us to people in order that we might let them know we are here on this earth to seek Him, to be saved by Him, and to serve Him.

We are only the "city on a hill" to the extent believers are the "light of the world."

Matthew 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Matthew 5:15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

Matthew 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.