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| Series: Jeremiah: Faith During Opposition | Reference: Jeremiah 50:33-40 | Title: Story Behind The Story | Date: 09.05.2021 |
| Website Writeup: | | | |
| Does it feel like the Enemy's winning as you look around at life? Maybe there's a story behind the story where God is working, and His purposes & promises are being fulfilled over time, but that we must simply remain faithful, even in difficulty. | | | |

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

Artist & writer Makoto Fujimura, in a commencement address at Belhaven University, described the experience of seeing the play, *Our Town*, by Thornton Wilder in New York City. He described a scene which conveyed a memory when the character Emily goes back to her 12th birthday. The back stage opens up to reveal another stage, full of light, with color & the smell of bacon & eggs cooking which they wafted out over the audience. "Emily's memory...is depicted as more real than the 'reality' of the main stage" by using all senses. Fujimura asked, "What if there's a Stage behind the stage of our life?"¹ What if there's another story that, while less tangible or physical, is more real & alive than the one we think we're living?

Let's read Jeremiah 50:33 & 34. *"This is what the Lord Almighty says: "The people of Israel are oppressed, and the people of Judah as well. All their captors hold them fast, refusing to let them go. ³⁴Yet their Redeemer is strong; the Lord Almighty is his name. He will vigorously defend their cause so that he may bring rest to their land, but unrest to those who live in Babylon."*

Beginning in v35 God outlines the absolute destruction He'd bring upon Babylon ending in v40 by saying...*"As I overthrew Sodom & Gomorrah along with their neighboring towns," declares the Lord, "so no one will live there; no people will dwell in it."*

English poet, Percy Shelley, once wrote a poem called Ozymandias, which is the Greek title for Pharaoh Rameses II. It begins with describing a broken statue of a great leader half buried in the sand. **In the 2nd half of the poem he outlines irony of the inscription...**

*And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless & bare,
The lone & level sands stretch far away.*

Shelley's sonnet witnesses the fall of an empire. It mocks the pride of Ozymandias, who styled himself as king of kings. His name no longer strikes fear into anyone's heart...his

¹ Makoto Fujimura, "The Aroma of the New" [commencement address, Belhaven University, Jackson, MS, May 2, 2011], <https://www.makotofujimura.com/writings/belhaven-university-commencement-address/>.

kingdom lies half-buried in the desert.² Like Ozymandias' fall, in the same way Jeremiah's prophecy came to pass regarding Babylon. Jeremiah knew the greater narrative of God's faithfulness in the midst of judgment, he saw the story behind the story, part of his ministry was to reveal it.

Likewise...**Our present & future reality in Christ strengthens faith for difficulty today.** It's exactly because God's real & active, we can look for the story behind the story in the suffering & waiting of life. The question may be, do we spend more energy looking at the negative details on the front stage of life, than we do at what God's doing behind the scenes? Jeremiah chapter 50 gives us many of the behind the scenes truths which should govern our hearts, instead of the darkness of our situation.

This passage gives us a glimpse into the story behind the story Jeremiah was sent by God to tell. Earlier in the book, God acts as **Righteous Judge** bringing charges against His people & detailing the consequences of their sin, but now acts as their **Defender**, bringing destruction to their oppressors. God used Babylon to serve as a corrective force for Judah & Israel, now He'd dismantle them. It's within His sovereign right to do so. As Israel wouldn't be allowed to sin without consequence, neither would Babylon. Jeremiah's the Scriptural equivalent of 'what goes around comes around', since God says in v15 in chapter 50...*"Since this is the vengeance of the Lord, take vengeance on her; do to her as she has done to others."*

As a matter of fact, just as God prophesied through Jeremiah the destruction of Jerusalem would come from the north back in the beginning of this book, He now says the same about Babylon. And in 539bc came the first blow by the army led by Cyrus the Persian who snuck into the city from the north in a dry river bed after he'd diverted the waters weeks earlier to a lake. He attacked while the Babylonians were all partying at a festival. In time Babylon reflected Shelley's poem of Ozymandias. And later *"...under Augustus, Babylon had become so desolate, that it might be called a vast desert.... From this time onward, Babylon ceases almost to be mentioned; even its ruins haven't been discovered until within the last two centuries...."*³ **Ironically, Saddam Hussein, who thought he was reincarnation of ancient king Nebuchadnezzar, was rebuilding it just before he died - it's located in Iraq.**

If we're spending too much time becoming upset about our current political/cultural situation, if it feels like the Enemy's constantly winning the culture war, remember there's always a story behind the story, a greater reality. It's vital we view our world through the lens of God's promises & plan - to have a Biblical worldview, which says God will punish sin & right all wrongs in the end.

² Philip Graham Ryken, [Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 686-687.

³ Philip Graham Ryken, [Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 693.

In v28 Jeremiah prophecies people bringing news back to Jerusalem saying,...*Listen to the fugitives & refugees from Babylon declaring in Zion how the Lord our God has taken vengeance, vengeance for his temple.* News of God's glory would go out to all nations! God brings down the proud, humiliates the arrogant & destroys the violent. Although Babylon ruled over the ancient world, God had the last word, as He always does. Listen to vv31 & 32: *"See, I am against you, O arrogant one," declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty, "for your day has come, the time for you to be punished. The arrogant one will stumble & fall & no one will help her up; I will kindle a fire in her towns that will consume all who are around her."*⁴ The Enemy doesn't win the war (as we said last week).

But turning our attention back to Judah & Israel we see this progression as the constant theme when it comes to God's relationship with wayward people. For them, it switches from God as Righteous Judge & Defender, to **God as Kinsman-Redeemer**, one who had the responsibility to rescue members of his family from slavery & avenge their enemies. Boaz served as a kinsman-redeemer in rescuing Ruth from poverty & slavery (Ruth 4:1–12; cf. Job 19:25). God also described Himself as a redeemer in bringing His people out of Egypt (Exodus 6:6; 15:13).⁵ Christ redeemed His people when He paid for their sins on the cross, releasing us from the bondage of guilt, bringing us back from sin, death & the devil's rule -all accomplished by His blood.⁶

Jeremiah's ministry was another retelling of this story which eventually culminates in Jesus's redemption of the world. This chapter details the future hope the Israelites have, their captors will be defeated & their false prophets will be revealed for what they are. We can similarly take heart, because, even while in exile, there's hope for future & true justice. By destroying what had seemed strong & revealing as foolish what had seemed wise, God's not only redeeming His people, but exposing the futility of the things we're tempted to trust in, or which torment us. As it says in 1 Co 1:25...*For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.*

Writer Amy Simpson wrote, "Blessed are the Unsatisfied," explaining for most of her childhood, her family was living in poverty, depending on food pantries, public assistance & expired food. Her mother was ill. Amy & her siblings had to shoulder more responsibility for the family than most children. When she grew up, got a college education, a good job & a happy family, she thought she'd feel satisfied. When she wasn't, she was confronted with the truth that we're not made to be satisfied with a

⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, [Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 693–694.

⁵ Philip Graham Ryken, [Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 695.

⁶ Philip Graham Ryken, [Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 696.

fallen broken world. We'll always hunger for more, this hunger's what pushes us to place our hope in the future redemption of the world in Christ.⁷

Israel & Judah had learned their lesson in exile as indicated by v4... *"In those days, at that time," declares the Lord, "the people of Israel & the people of Judah together will go in tears to seek the Lord their God.* We first had God as Righteous Judge, Defender now Kinsman-Redeemer, **which all leads to Repentance!** Tears reveal sorrow for sin & gratitude for salvation! If we feel we're under some pressure corporately as a people, or personally as an individual, will we allow the sense of exile to do its corrective work in our hearts in order to turn our face back to Jesus? In Nehemiah 8:9 it says the people wept as they listened to the words of the Law read to them! Ezra 10:1 says, *"While Ezra was praying & confessing, weeping & throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites - men, women & children - gathered around him. They too wept bitterly."* This was corporate repentance!

Repentance leading to **Reconciliation** is rightly tinged with sorrow. Israel & Judah had been separate nations & hostile enemies since the civil war which followed Solomon's reign (931/930 BC). Israel as a political entity disappeared in 722 BC when the Assyrians destroyed the country. Yet now the images of restoration in Jeremiah show the two nations back together in unity.⁸

Turning from our sin we should be like the tax collector in Luke 18:13... *"He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast & said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'"* Or Peter in Matthew 26:75 when... *"he went outside & wept bitterly."* Repentance is good for the soul & good for community! But, since our hearts tend to be wayward, sometimes we need the corrective hand of God to bring about the necessary anguish needed for our sin & the damage it does in alienating us from God, others & even ourselves.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks (Q. 87), *"What is repentance unto life?"* The answer is: *"Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief & hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience."*

We have here the blessing of a Righteous Judge, Defender, Kinsman-Redeemer, then **Reconciliation & Repentance**, but another blessing, found in v5, is **the Everlasting Covenant** we have with God... *They will ask the way to Zion & turn their faces toward it. They will come & bind themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten.*

⁷ Amy Simpson, "Blessed are the Unsatisfied," Christianity Today, February 8, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2018/february/blessed-are-unsatisfied.html>

⁸ J. Daniel Hays, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 313.

Phillip Ryken says...“A Christian is someone who’s bound to God by covenant. A Christian becomes a member of the church, God’s covenant community, is baptized in God’s Triune Name & thus receives God’s covenant sign. A Christian takes Communion, sitting down to God’s covenant meal & is identified as a Christian by living the covenant life. These are all ways of keeping covenant with God. When Jeremiah mentioned the Everlasting Covenant, however, he wasn’t talking about our covenant with God. He was talking about God’s covenant with us.

Jeremiah was the prophet of the New Covenant. He showed God’s people how they’d broken the Old Covenant, announcing its terms & its curses in 11:1–13. In 22:9 he explained that God’s people were banished from their city because they’d *“forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God & worshiped & served other gods.”* In 31:32 he lamented these events as the breakup of a marriage covenant...“*They broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord.*”

However, Jeremiah also announced the coming of a New Covenant written on the mind & in the heart in 31:31–34. The New Covenant would establish a bond of friendship, God’s people would belong to God & God would belong to His people. The New Covenant, we learn in Jeremiah 50, would be *“an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten”* (v. 5b; cf. 32:40). The problem with the Old Covenant was forgetfulness. God’s people forgot God & their covenant with Him. But the New Covenant will last forever. It can’t be forgotten because it comes to us in Jesus Christ.⁹

Jeremiah was prophetically pointing to Christ when he said, *“In those days, at that time.”* The New Covenant in Christ doesn’t depend on us, rather on the person & work of Jesus. We enter it in & through Him. He keeps covenant for His people. He became man, obeyed the Law perfectly, bore the curse for our sins, died on the cross, was raised from the dead, ascended to heaven, prays for His people & keeps us to the end. **As Hebrews 13:20 says...***“May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever & ever. Amen.”*

So, we have our Righteous Judge, Defender, Kinsman-Redeemer, Repentance, Reconciliation, an Everlasting Covenant - now we see God as **Good Shepherd** in chapter 50. God lamented all the bad shepherds who’d led them astray over the years in vv6 & 7...“*My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray & caused them to roam on the mountains. They wandered over mountain & hill and forgot their own resting place. Whoever found them devoured them; their enemies said, ‘We are not guilty, for they sinned against the Lord, their true pasture, the Lord, the hope of their fathers.’”*

⁹ Philip Graham Ryken, [Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 698.

The Assyrians had decimated the northern tribes in 722 BC & the Babylonians had come to finish the job. They needed a good shepherd, and God was exactly that, as seen in vv18 & 19...*Therefore this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "I will punish the king of Babylon & his land as I punished the king of Assyria. But I will bring Israel back to his own pasture & he will graze on Carmel & Bashan; his appetite will be satisfied on the hills of Ephraim & Gilead."*

These verses also look forward to everything the Bible says about Jesus, the Good Shepherd. When the sheep are scattered, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who has compassion on them because they're *"harassed & helpless, like sheep without a shepherd"* (Matthew 9:36). When the sheep are lost, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine in the open country to *"go after the lost sheep until he finds it"* (Luke 15:4). When the sheep are in danger, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who *"lays down his life for the sheep"* (John 10:11). When the sheep are hungry, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who supplies whatever they need.

Jeremiah promised, Israel's "appetite" would be "satisfied" (50:19). Literally, he said Israel's soul would be satisfied, which echoes Psalm 23:1-3a: *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.*¹⁰

So, we have our Righteous Judge, Defender, Kinsman-Redeemer, Repentance, Reconciliation, an Everlasting Covenant & a Good Shepherd. There's one last promise Jeremiah prophecies here. **Which is full atonement of sin** as found in v20...*In those days, at that time," declares the Lord, "search will be made for Israel's guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for I will forgive the remnant I spare.*

All Israel's sins, in sordid detail - homicide, infanticide, adultery, idolatry, lying, cheating, stealing & all the rest...forgiven!¹¹ Due to their repentance God forgives their sin, counting it against them no more. In our Prison Fellowship ministry we have numerous multiple murderers. You wouldn't know it to talk with them. Even they aren't beyond God's forgiveness! Their sin weighs heavily on them hopefully bringing tears & repentance leading to Grace in Christ. One person our team said, "We're not our mistakes." Instead, in Christ, we're a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Co 5:17). In Him every sin, past, present & future, are covered no matter how heinous due to His person & work, and the Everlasting Covenant we have in Him! If it were up to us, grace wouldn't be grace, but as it is, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ! (Ro 8).

¹⁰ Philip Graham Ryken, [Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 700-701.

¹¹ Philip Graham Ryken, [Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 701.

Philip Bliss Wrote a hymn outlining this wonderful atonement called, *Man of Sorrows! What a Name*. The middle verse says...*Guilty, vile & helpless we; Spotless Lamb of God was He; Full atonement! Can it be? Hallelujah! What a savior!*

Like those who heard Jeremiah's warning, many in the United States today want to believe what is will always be. History & Scripture, Ozymandias, Rome, Babylon & the Assyrian Empire, however, tell us otherwise. We too are destined to go the way of all flesh. The question isn't "Will it happen?" but "*When* will it happen?" Knowing that, Christians must put their trust not in the things of this world but in its Creator & His word.¹² The story behind the story, less tangible or physical, but more real & alive than the one we think we're living.

If there's anything we can learn from Jeremiah's ministry, it's the value of faithfulness in the midst of suffering & uncertainty. Whether that characterizes us or not, life on this earth will include suffering & doubt about the future. We'll wonder if it's worth it & how to keep going on at times. Jeremiah's life is evidence of what deep & abiding faith in God looks like, even when His promises have yet to be fulfilled.

"It's often been remarked that Jeremiah's life was finally a failure. He was alone for most of his ministry. It seemed no one gave any heed to his words. He was dragged off finally to live his last days in exile against his own will. He was a failure as the world judges human achievement. But a more balanced assessment of him would be that his very words of judgment saved Israel's faith from disintegration, and his words of hope finally helped his people to gain hope in God's future for them."¹³

Our present & future reality in Christ includes a Righteous Judge, Defender, Redeemer, Sweet Repentance leading to Reconciliation, an Everlasting Covenant, a Good Shepherd & full atonement, which all strengthens our faith for difficult times today. Look for the less tangible or physical, but more real & alive story in the background. Look for what God is doing as we seek His glory through His mission together as His people!

¹² J. Daniel Hays, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 317.

¹³ Thompson, The Book of Jeremiah, 106.