

Jeremiah, My Story

Part 1

Young people, I am glad to be here and I am thankful for the invitation of your leaders to come and speak with you and tell you a little of my story. I hope that my telling you a little bit about my life will help each of you to have the courage to stand for God and that each of you will resolve to be forever faithful to Him. My name is Jeremiah, and my story and the story of God's people being taken from the Promised Land, happened six centuries before Jesus came to this earth to save us. Each of you can learn important lessons as you study this story, lessons about how you should relate to God and how important it is for you to obey Him. As you listen and as you study this story for yourselves in your Bibles please consider how much God wanted to save His people and how much He wants to save you. I hope that love for God will fill your hearts as you think about how much God loves you. And I ask each of you to consider that the warning message God had me give to the people of Judah in the last days before the nation of Judah was judged is related to the warning message God has given you, those who are living in the last days of earth before God cleanses the earth from all sin and sets up his glorious kingdom.

Now, I'd like to apologize up front that I sometimes have trouble remembering details and sometimes when I get going I get a little sidetracked on what I want to speak about. So I had my good friend Baruch help me put my thoughts down on paper, just to make sure I don't leave any important parts of the story out. Back in the days when I travelled through Judah with messages from God, some people called Baruch my scribe, because he wrote the words that God spoke to me in a book and read the words to the people. I never thought of Baruch as my scribe; he was a very loyal, true, friend who had good penmanship. I am thankful God sent him to help me, his support and encouragement helped me through some very difficult times.

Now, before I tell you about how I came to be honored by God and allowed to speak His words, I think it might be a good idea to tell you about some of the things Judah was struggling with when I was growing up. Those of you who have studied Chronicles remember that Judah had a king named Manasseh. You probably remember that Manasseh was as wicked and evil as any king could be for most of his life. The great power in Manasseh's world was the Assyrian Empire. Manasseh got so big in his own mind that God sent the Assyrian army to get his attention. The Assyrians carried him away to Babylon and put him into prison. As you may remember, Manasseh repented while in prison and was restored to the throne of Judah. He tried to make up for his past sins, but his people had watched him be so wicked and had gotten so used to being wicked themselves, that most of them just didn't want to love and obey God. There are a few lessons in Manasseh's life for us. One is that God loves us and He wants to save us no matter how wicked and evil we are. The second lesson is that when we make a lot of mistakes and then turn our lives over to God, God willingly saves us and helps us, but we still have to live with some of the earthly consequences of our sins. We're forgiven, but all the hurt and sorrow we've caused others usually stays around to cause trouble. If we've murdered someone, they are still dead. If we've stolen something, it doesn't magically go back from where we took it. If we've told lies, the lies are still waiting for the truth to find them out. Even after we give our hearts to God, we have

things we still have troubles with, but, praise God, He gives us strength to do what is right and He loves us as we deal with the troubles.

I guess I'm getting sidetracked, I apologize for that. Let's see, where was I, that's right, the struggles of Judah. Well, Manasseh had got Judah heading in the wrong direction and his best efforts before he died to make amends did not turn Judah all the way back towards God. His son Amon reigned only two years, but he did everything he could to lead Judah away from God and towards the worship of false gods, idols. Since the majority of the people wanted to go the way Amon was heading, he was pretty successful in leading Judah down the wrong path. By the time Amon's son Josiah became king, Judah was not a very good place to be if you wanted to follow God. It was just about as wicked as it had been back before Manasseh decided to turn his life over to God.

The politics of the countries around Judah were changing too. Back in Manasseh's day, Assyria was the most powerful nation around. Their empire ruled most of the Near East. By the time Josiah began his religious reforms in Judah in about 628 B.C.; Assyria had reached its peak of power and started to decline. Egypt and Babylon both became stronger. Egypt eventually managed to overthrow Assyrian control, and then Babylon managed to do the same. Nineveh fell and was completely obliterated in 612 B. C. Egypt and Babylon battled for supremacy of the Near East, and who was smack in the middle between them? That's right, Judah. Only God and His power would be able to save Judah in the clash of the empires. Unfortunately, the people of my homeland did not want God to protect them if it meant allowing God to be in control of their lives. They were willing to allow God to be one of many gods that they worshipped, but they weren't willing to allow God to be the one and only God, supreme ruler over their lives and over our nation. The nation of Judah was in a period of rebellion against God and they weren't about to let God rule over them. They wanted to things their own way.

I was born during the reign of Manasseh, and by the time I was old enough to know much about anything, Manasseh had turned his life over to God and was trying to do what was right. But everyone still remembered and talked about all the wicked things he had done before he learned to trust in God. A lot of folks thought Judah was better off when they had followed Manasseh's wickedness and they had worshipped the false gods made from wood and stone. A lot of the Jews still used Manasseh's former wicked lifestyle as an excuse to act however sinful they wanted to be. After Amon became king, even though we were a family of priests, my family was afraid to openly do a lot of things that we knew to be right because they were afraid of what some of the wicked neighbors might do to us. I expected I would be a priest and serve God when I finished growing up, though sometimes I wondered if anyone would still be serving God by the time I was old enough to serve at the temple. We lived in Anathoth, which was about 3 miles north of Jerusalem in the land of Benjamin. While I was still young my father Hilkiah, and my mother raised me to trust in God and they taught me to truly love God with all my heart and not just with my words. Even many of the priest families were not faithful to God, so I was fortunate that my parents remained faithful as they continued to serve God as best they could. Prince Josiah, the oldest son of Amon, was only a little older than me, but he became king when he was just 8 years old after some of the palace servants assassinated his father. I didn't know Josiah when he first became king, since our paths had not crossed. When Josiah was about 16 years old, he began to visit with different priests outside of Jerusalem and ask lots of questions about God and about what we in Judah should do to serve God with a loyal heart. I became acquainted on a personal level with Josiah during this time. In Josiah's 12th year he became a man possessed with the idea of cleaning out all the idols and

groves and high places where the people worshipped false gods. He wanted all Jerusalem and Judah to worship the true God, and only the true God. Josiah was a man of action and personally led his officials and soldiers in the destruction of idols, not only in Jerusalem and Judah, but he also went into the territory of the former kingdom of Israel and destroyed the idols and such in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, and even as far as Naphtali. He destroyed all idols and those who worshipped idols, cleansing the land of all false gods and all who openly rebelled against God. I was impressed with Josiah's zeal towards God and I began to think that I should try to help him. I wanted to see my country be faithful to God again, worshipping our God with love in our hearts and obeying God with our actions and not just our words. While I was thinking about what I could do to help Josiah, something happened that changed the path my life was to take. In just a moment I'll tell you what that was, but first I'd better get a little history out of the way.

See, God knew that while Josiah's reforms were causing some to turn their hearts to worship Him in truth and love, many were only giving outward obedience to Him because Josiah was leading the country in that direction, inside their hearts they were just as wicked as they ever had been. They just pretended to love God and did the right things only because they knew they were being watched. Many kept idols hidden away and secretly worshipped them. For too many of the people, following the true God was only a pretense, because they thought it was expedient and politically safe. After Josiah made the mistake of opposing Necho II and died fighting the Egyptians at Megiddo, most of the people went right back to their wicked ways and worshipped idols instead of worshipping God. Meanwhile, Babylon was becoming stronger and Egypt was dominating Judah. Nebuchadnezzar was crown prince of Babylon and he was ready to lead the armies of Babylon against Egypt. Two empires stood on opposite sides of Judah, and it seemed 3 choices were before the country. Judah could align with Egypt, side with Babylon, or stand with God and obey Him in whatever he said to do. God wasn't an option for most of the people, so they chose to side with Babylon by making Josiah's son Jehoahaz king because he was viewed as being pro Babylonian. Jehoahaz lasted for 3 months as king; then the Egyptians led by pharaoh Necho, attacked Judah and deposed him and took him to Egypt and put Jehoiakim, another son of Josiah, on the throne of Judah. In 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar and his army and Necho and his army fought the famous battle of Carchemish, where it was decided which empire would rule. The Babylonians defeated the Egyptians who fled back to Egypt leaving Babylon in control of Palestine and a true world empire. Nebuchadnezzar became king soon after the battle of Carchemish and Jehoiakim swore allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon.

I told you earlier that something happened around the 13th year of King Josiah that changed the path my life was to take. I had thought I could maybe help Josiah in his reforms. I knew from talking to Josiah that he hoped to cleanse the temple and restore worship there once he had finished the work of ridding all the land of idols. Josiah started cleansing the land in his 12th year and it took Josiah almost six years to finish cleansing the land of idols, so in his 13th year he was just getting started. I hoped I could help him. Then it was that something happened that changed my life forever. God spoke to me. God told me He had a mission for me. God told me something that I had never known; a great truth that once I understood it made me willing to do what God wanted me to do, even though I was terrified at just the thought of following through on the mission God said He wanted me to do. This great truth that God taught me has allowed me to understand that each one of you young people and I have something in common. Do any of you know what that is? God has a plan for each of our lives, and God has had that

plan before we were even born or even before we are conceived of. God told me that He sanctified me and ordained me to be a prophet to the nations before I was born. God has a plan for each of you young people just as He had a plan for me. While my parents were teaching me to pray a simple bedtime prayer, God had a plan for me. While I was playing pranks on my friends, God had a plan for me. While I was wondering how I could serve God and thought about ways I could help Josiah in his work of reforming Judah, God had a plan for me. When God finally decided I was ready and told me His plan, calling me to be a prophet to Judah and the nations, I was afraid. I exclaimed to God that I was too young to speak. Some of you here today are almost the same age as I was when God spoke to me. You may be able to relate to the fear I felt as I thought about having to stand in front of the king of my country and the rulers and the elders and the priests and tell them of the warning that God wanted passed along to them. Why would they listen to me, I was too young to be respected by anyone. But God told me not to say "I am a youth" and use that as an excuse to not obey Him. God said that I would go to all to whom He sent me and I would say everything that he would tell me to say. God said I did not need to be afraid of the leaders when I spoke God's words to them. And do you know why I would, why I could, do what God told me to do? Because God said He would be with me to deliver me. I didn't need to be afraid, God promised to be my strength and my help. Then God did something special. He put forth His hand and touched my mouth. God touched me! I was just a boy, and God touched me! And God said "Behold I have put My words in your mouth. 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." I was still afraid, but the Lord touched me, put His hand on my mouth and promised to deliver me from all my fear and from all who opposed me, no, all who opposed the message that God had for me. I could not deny Him. I decided I would have the courage to stand for God despite my fears and my uncertainties, I would trust that God would make me forever faithful to do His will and speak His words. I accepted the plan God had for my life and the mission that God had for me. I would do my best to give final warnings to the people of Judah, my people, God's people. Each one of you can choose today to accept the plan God has for your life. When God gives you the call for the mission He has for you, will you have the courage to stand with Him? Will you be forever faithful to the mission God gives you?