

# Jeremiah 9-11 • Let him who boasts, boast that he knows me

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We're in Jeremiah, so open your Bibles, please, to Jeremiah, Chapter 9. We're going to do our best to get through three chapters tonight. We're still in the thick of the Lord's confrontation of the Southern Kingdom of Judah for their disobedience, rebellion, and idolatry. We've mentioned in the past that Jeremiah is called, "The Weeping Prophet." And this chapter is one of the reasons why we say that. You will see that as we go through here.

So, let's just pray quick. Father, as we get into Your Word tonight, we need Your grace. We need Your strength. We need Your insight to be able to lay hold of these verses. Because, Lord, when we talk about judgment and impending judgment and destruction, these aren't the kind of fun, warm, fuzzy devotional passages, Lord, that are things that we tend to want to cling to. And yet, Lord, this is Your Word. This is Your Holy Scripture, and you have given it to us for a reason. And we pray tonight that the ministry of Your Holy Spirit among us would bring application and understanding. And we ask that You would do this in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. Amen.

All right. Keep in mind, "Weeping Prophet." Verse 1: *"Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"* I want to remind you that Jeremiah is witnessing the destruction of the Southern Kingdom of Judah prophetically, meaning that it has not happened yet in the sense of the day-to-day chronology of events.

But for Jeremiah, because it has been given to him and revealed to him by the Lord, it is essentially a done deal. And he is already in a state of mourning over this thing. Verse 2: *"Oh that I had in the desert a travelers' lodging place, that I might leave my people and go away from them! For they are all adulterers, a company of treacherous men."* Now, the Lord speaks in verse 3: *"They bend (their bow or, excuse me,) their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land; (That sounds familiar, doesn't it? It sounds like our country. Falsehood has grown strong in the land. He says) for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, declares the LORD."*

*“<sup>4</sup> Let everyone beware of his neighbor, and put no trust in any brother, for every brother is a deceiver, and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer. <sup>5</sup>Everyone deceives his neighbor, and no one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves committing iniquity. <sup>6</sup>Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me, declares the LORD.*

*“<sup>7</sup> Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Behold, I will refine them and test them, for what else can I do, because of my people? <sup>8</sup>Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceitfully; with his mouth each speaks peace to his neighbor, but in his heart, he plans an ambush for him.*

*“<sup>9</sup> Shall I not punish them for these things? declares the LORD, and shall I not avenge myself on a nation such as this? <sup>10</sup>I will take up weeping and wailing for the mountains, and a lamentation for the pastures of the wilderness, because they are laid waste so that no one passes through, and the lowing of cattle is not heard; both the birds of the air and the beasts have fled and are gone. <sup>11</sup>I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a lair of jackals, and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant.’”*

Verse 12: *“Who is the man so wise that he can understand this? To whom has the mouth of the LORD spoken, that he may declare it? Why is the land ruined and laid waste like a wilderness. so that no one passes through? <sup>13</sup>And the LORD says: ‘Because they have forsaken my law that I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice or walked in accord with it,<sup>14</sup> but have stubbornly followed their own hearts and have gone after the Baals, as their fathers taught them. <sup>15</sup>Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will feed this people with bitter food, and give them poisonous water to drink. <sup>16</sup>I will scatter them among the nations whom neither they nor their fathers have known. and I will send the sword after them, until I have consumed them.’*

*“<sup>17</sup>Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Consider, and call for the mourning women to come; (now I want you to stop there for just a second. It goes on actually to end that verse saying,) send for the skillful women to come.’”* And we in our culture might not know what that is talking about, but in Israel, they used to pay people to mourn. And it was a fairly common thing when you had a loved one who passed away, the wealthier you were, the more you could afford to heighten the honor of the passing of your loved one by hiring mourners. And they would come and wail. Can you imagine being paid to go somewhere to wail and to weep? But of course, you know, the louder you wail, the more honor is extended—supposedly— to this person who has passed from the scene.

And they did it even in New Testament times, which is one of the reasons that passage of Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:41-56) always used to befuddle me, because it says that when Jesus got there, the women, the people, were wailing and weeping. And Jesus said to them, "Why are you wailing? This woman is not dead. She's just asleep." And it says, they laughed at him. And I always thought, What in the world? How can people go from wailing to laughing? Well, they were paid. They were paid. So I suppose you can probably turn it on at will. I always thought, Well, there were people there who were genuinely mourning over the loss of this little girl. Anyway, they were paid to do it.

So that is why the Lord is saying in verse 17, "Call for the mourning women to come, for the skillful women." And he says in verse 18, "<sup>18</sup>*Let them make haste and raise a wailing over us, that our eyes may run down with tears and our eyelids flow with water. <sup>19</sup>For a sound of wailing is heard from Zion; 'How we are ruined! We are utterly shamed, because we have left the land, because they have cast down our dwellings.'*" And of course, here, Jeremiah is hearing the voice of those who have been conquered, but this is before it takes place. He is hearing it prophetically, and this will actually happen again in these chapters we are dealing with.

So he says in verse 20: "<sup>20</sup>*Hear, O women, the word of the LORD, and let your ear receive the word of his mouth; teach to your daughters a lament, and each to his neighbor a dirge* (and of course, a dirge was a funeral song). <sup>21</sup>*For death has come up into our windows; it has entered our palaces, cutting off the children from the streets and the young men from the squares.*

"<sup>22</sup>*Speak: Thus declares the LORD, 'The dead bodies of men shall fall like dung upon the open field, like sheaves after the reaper, and none shall gather them.'*" We have talked about how important it was to Jews to have a proper burial, and he talks here about the fact that many will fall in the open field, and no one will be there to bury them.

And then I believe that what comes up here in verse 23 and 24, I believe this is one of the most powerful passages in all of Jeremiah. So, you ready? "<sup>23</sup>*Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might. Let not the rich man boast in his riches,<sup>24</sup> but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight,' declares the LORD.*"

Isn't that a great passage? When you think about all the things that people boast in, and I think probably today, we might have to add shameless fame to the list

of things that people boast in. Used to be people got famous because they were, they did, something significant. Today they become famous, or maybe we should say infamous, for all kinds of reasons that have no connection to fame from years gone by. So, whatever we might boast in, he says, let not them boast. If somebody is boasting in the fact that he is a very wise man, let it not be. If someone is boasting that he is powerful and mighty, let it not be. Let him not boast in the sight of the Lord. If a man is boasting in his abundant wealth, let him not boast in the presence of the Lord. But let those who boast— I love this— just boast that they know Me. That they know Me.

This is such an important element of understanding what God cares about most through the course of Scripture. We get to the New Testament and what does Jesus say is most important? To know the Lord and to be known, to have that kind of a relationship. Jesus said there is coming a time when some will be cast to the side saying, with the words, I never knew you. And that is obviously because they didn't know the Lord either. So knowing the Lord, oh, so incredibly important. It doesn't matter if somebody knows their Bible but doesn't know the Lord. I mean, what good is that? So, what impresses God? That we might know Him.

Verse 25: *“<sup>25</sup>Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh (and then He names those countries)-- <sup>26</sup>Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert who cut the corners of their hair (and that was a pagan practice, okay?); for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart.”* It is funny how many times people read things like this in the Word of God about cutting the corners of their hair, and they come to conclusions that, Oh, God cares about how we cut our hair.

We are going to look at another one here, coming up here in the coming chapters, where God talks about something, and people will end up looking at it and going, Oh, we're not supposed to do that. There is a passage in Leviticus (Chapter 19) about tattoos. And I have heard that quoted many times. See, it says in the Bible, do not get a tattoo. The Bible forbids getting a tattoo. Well, I'm not crazy about tattoos, to be completely honest with you. Actually, I'll go a little bit further, I think they're dumb.

But that's not what that verse says. That verse is not forbidding all getting of tattoos. It was something they did, again, that was connected to pagan practices and worship rituals. And that is what God was condemning. And so I get that question a lot. Pastor Paul, is there anything in God's Word about getting a tattoo?

And I always respond the same way. I say, no, actually the reference to tattoos is made once in the Bible, but it is made in relation to pagan ritual worship. So they go, so it's okay then? I go, well, ask God. The Bible says that your body belongs to Him. You are not your own. You have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20). So before you go marking up your body, why don't you talk to God about it? See what He says. Ask Him. Don't ask me. Ask Him.

Chapter 10. Chapter 10 reads very much like a Psalm. I think you're going to see that as we go through it, but it begins this way. “(Hear the word of the Lord. Excuse me.) *Hear the word that the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel. Thus says the LORD: ‘Learn not the way of the nations, nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens because the nations are dismayed at them, for the customs of the peoples are vanity. A tree from the forest is cut down and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman. They decorate it with silver and gold, they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move.’*”

And you know what he is talking about here. He is talking about the building of their pagan idols. But I need to pause here for a moment and tell you that every single Christmas, I get emails from people, because I'll talk about Christmas. And again, I like Christmas, because I like celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. I think it's the best gift that man ever got, hands down, and ever will. And so I like Christmas. I've always liked Christmas. But every year, I get these very angry, condemning emails from people who say, don't you know what the Word of God says about Christmas and Christmas trees? And then they quote Jeremiah.

And they quote this very passage, and they say, don't you see what it says? You know what's interesting about that? This is one of those prime examples of cherry-picking certain phrases and words out of the Word of God to get it to say what you want it to say. Now you just read those verses along with me, I trust, but let me show you up on the screen what they see. When they look at this, they see:

*Hear the word that the LORD speaks to you. Thus says the LORD, "Learn not the way of the nations, for the customs of the peoples are vanity. A tree from the forest is cut down, they decorate it with silver and gold..."*

That's all they see. That's it. And so what do you come up with? God condemns having Christmas trees. Therefore, God condemns Christmas. Period. And I get it every year. Now, just for the sake of context— remember, we have talked about that— let me show you this passage now. I have highlighted the important contextual words and phrases. Here it is again:

### **Jeremiah 10:1-4 (ESV)**

*Hear the word that the Lord speaks to you, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL. Thus says the Lord; “Learn not the way of the nations, nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens because the nations are dismayed at them, for the customs of the peoples are vanity. A tree from the forest is cut down AND WORKED WITH AN AXE BY THE HANDS OF A CRAFTSMAN. They decorate it with silver and gold. THEY FASTEN IT WITH HAMMER AND NAILS SO THAT IT CANNOT MOVE.*

*“<sup>1</sup>Hear the word that the Lord speaks to you, O House of Israel.*

If this is talking about Christmas trees, why in the world is he talking to Israel? First of all, do you guys understand that the church doesn't even exist in the Old Testament? And God doesn't even mention it. But the point is, the Jews don't celebrate Christmas, okay? So this is a word that is specifically given to the house of Israel.

*“<sup>2</sup>Thus says the Lord, ‘Learn not the way of the nations, nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens because the nations are dismayed at them. <sup>3</sup>For the customs of the people are vanity. A tree from the forest is cut down, (but they leave this part out) and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman.”*

And that is talking about somebody who carves it into looking like an idol. They carved it into the likeness of their pagan gods, right? And then it says, *“<sup>4</sup>They decorate it with silver and gold and they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move.”*

You know that last comment there about the fact that it cannot move? That's one of God's favorite statements concerning pagan idols. He loved to bring out the fact that the pagan idols can't see, they can't speak, and they can't move. And He would say that to them almost in a taunting sort of way. He'd say, your god has a problem. He can't utter any sound. Your god can't even move. You have to pick him up.

You remember what He used to say through Isaiah (44:9-20)? He used to say, you guys are really a piece of work. You go out and cut down a tree. You take half of the wood and you roast your food with it. And the other half you carve into an idol. And you worship it. What's up with that? And he's just trying to reason with them in some sense of understanding.

But look at what he goes on to say in the context of this passage in verse 5:

*“<sup>5</sup>Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak;*

*they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, (fact of the matter is neither can they)... do good .” I like that.*

That's just kind of hitting them right where they live, you know? It's like, don't worry, they can't do anything bad, but you know what? They can't do good either. So, you get one with the other, you know what I mean? So you can see here in these first five verses that the context of the passage is clearly pagan idolatry and God's condemnation of the nation of Israel for their involvement in pagan idolatry and the making of pagan idols.

Verse 6: *“There is none like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is great in might. <sup>7</sup>Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For this is your due; for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like you.*

*“<sup>8</sup>They are both stupid and foolish; the instruction of idols is but wood! Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz. They are the work of the craftsman and of the hands of the goldsmith; their clothing is violet and purple; they are all the work of skilled men.”*

So you can see what he is doing here. Jeremiah is drawing a contrast between the living God, which he is going to do more in the remainder of this chapter, but this contrast between the living God and these dumb and deaf idols that can't move. And so what he is basically talking about, he is talking about the difference between the idols, which are the work of man's hands and the God who created man's hands. It's really something similar that Paul wrote to the Romans. I love this. Look, check this out.

#### **Romans 1:24-25 (ESV)**

*Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*

And you know, we have talked about the fact that you don't have to be a pagan idol worshiper to worship the creature. You don't have to bow down to a little statue in your home or somewhere else. You can worship the creation or the creature in some other way. So we have to be careful of that.

Verse 10 (Here's the argument): *“But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation. <sup>11</sup>Thus shall you say to them: ‘The gods who did*

*not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.'*

*“<sup>12</sup>It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens. <sup>13</sup>When he utters his voice, there is a tumult, (and that means a loud noise that causes confusion or possibly even fear,) of waters in the heavens, and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, and he brings forth the wind from his storehouses.*

*“<sup>14</sup>Every man is stupid and without knowledge; every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols, for his images are false, and there is no breath in them. <sup>15</sup>They are worthless, a work of delusion; at the time of their punishment, they shall perish.*

*“<sup>16</sup>Not like these is he who is the portion of Jacob. for he is the one who formed all things, and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance; the LORD of hosts is his name. <sup>17</sup>Gather up your bundle from the ground, O you who dwell under siege! <sup>18</sup>For thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I am slinging out the inhabitants of the land at this time, and I will bring distress on them that they may feel it.’”*

Wow, it is tough things. But I want you to notice beginning in verse 19 and following, we begin once again to hear the cry of those who are under the coming Babylonian invasion. And this is the cry of those who will, in Jeremiah's future, still feel the sting of God's discipline.

They cry saying, *“<sup>19</sup>Woe is me because of my hurt! My wound is grievous. But I said, ‘Truly this is an affliction, and I must bear it.’ <sup>20</sup>My tent is destroyed and all my cords are broken; my children have gone from me, and they are not (which is a euphemism for death); there is no one to spread my tent again and set up my curtains.*

*“<sup>21</sup>For the shepherds (in this case it refers to the leaders of Judah) are stupid and do not inquire of the LORD; therefore they have not prospered, and all their flock is scattered. <sup>22</sup>A voice, a rumor! Behold, it comes!-- a great commotion out of the north country (and that speaks of the Babylonian army) to make the cities of Judah a desolation, a lair of jackals.*

*“<sup>23</sup>I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.”* And what Jeremiah is saying here is, he is confessing to the Lord that the coming of the Babylonian army is not their own doing. He is saying that the Lord is behind it. He is confessing and admitting



that this coming destroyer is a work of God's hand because of the sins of the people of Judah. And that is what he means in verse 23.

Verse 24: *“Correct me, O LORD, but in justice; not in your anger, lest you bring me to nothing. <sup>25</sup> Pour out your wrath on the nations that know you not, and on the peoples that call not on your name, for they have devoured Jacob; they have devoured him and consumed him, and they have laid waste his habitation.”*

And again, all these are things that Jeremiah is seeing before they take place. But notice here at the end of this chapter, he begins to pray now for the judgment of the nations who will actually be used as God's spanking spoon.

So Chapter 11: *“<sup>1</sup>The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup>Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.*

*“<sup>3</sup>You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Cursed be the man who does not hear the words of this covenant <sup>4</sup>that I commanded your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you. So shall you be my people, and I will be your God, <sup>5</sup>that I may confirm the oath that I swore to your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey as at this day. Then I answered, ‘So be it, LORD.’*

*“<sup>6</sup>And the LORD said to me, ‘Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. <sup>7</sup>For I solemnly warned your fathers when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently. even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. <sup>8</sup>Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart. Therefore (I brought them, rather) I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not.*

*“<sup>9</sup>Again the LORD said to me, ‘A conspiracy exists among the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup>They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused to hear my words. They have gone after other gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers. <sup>11</sup>Therefore, thus says the LORD, Behold, I am bringing disaster upon them that they cannot escape. Though they cry to me, I will not listen to them.*

*“<sup>12</sup>Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry to the gods to whom they make offerings, but they cannot save them in the time of their trouble. <sup>13</sup>For your gods have become as many as your cities, O Judah, and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up to shame, altars to make offerings to Baal.*

*“<sup>14</sup>Therefore do not pray for this people or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble. <sup>15</sup>What right has my beloved in my house, when she has done many vile deeds? Can even sacrificial flesh avert your doom? Can you then exult? <sup>16</sup>The LORD once called you a green olive tree, beautiful with good fruit. But with the roar of a great tempest he will set fire to it, and its branches will be consumed.*

*“<sup>17</sup>The LORD of hosts, who planted you, has decreed disaster against you, because of the evil that the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done, provoking me to anger by making offerings to Baal. <sup>18</sup>The LORD made it known to me and I knew; then you showed me their deeds.’” Stop there for a moment. I want to tell you what he is saying here in verse 18.*

Notice it's almost kind of a mysterious statement on the surface. He says the Lord made something known to him. And then the Lord showed him what was behind what he had made known to him. And what we are going to discover in the following verses is that the understanding that Jeremiah received from the Lord was that the men of his own city, the city of Anathoth, wanted to kill him if he refused to stop prophesying in the name of the Lord.

So these are his own townsfolk, and they are putting together a determination on their part to snuff out his life. And so Jeremiah says, *“<sup>19</sup>But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. I did not know it was against me they devised schemes, saying, ‘Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more.’*

*“<sup>20</sup>But, O LORD of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause.”* And so, knowing what the Lord has given to Jeremiah in the way of a revelation of the men of Anathoth, Jeremiah then prays and says, Lord, judge them. And he says, let me see your vengeance brought upon them.

And then the Lord responds. *“<sup>21</sup>Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the men of Anathoth, who seek your life, and say, ‘Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD, or you will die by our hand’ – <sup>22</sup>therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Behold, I will punish them. The young men shall die by the sword. their*

*sons and their daughters shall die by famine, <sup>23</sup>and none of them shall be left. For I will bring disaster upon the men of Anathoth, the year of their punishment.”*

Wow. So the Lord responds to Jeremiah and to his prayer and says, I will do as you asked, and I will bring judgment upon them.

This chapter, this last chapter here, Chapter 11, is where the Lord goes through and recounts— not in detail— but about the covenant that He made with the people of Israel saying, I gave you *“this covenant, <sup>4</sup>(that) I commanded your fathers when I brought them out of Egypt, (and out of the furnace) (from) the iron furnace, (said telling them,) (saying) Listen to my voice...”* and that they would prosper if they did.

And I confirmed my oath with them and brought them into *“a land flowing with milk and honey,”* and so forth and so on. But he goes on to say in verses 6 and 7 that, even though I warned them persistently about the breaking of this covenant, they ultimately refused to listen to me.

And so now the Lord is saying, therefore, I'm bringing upon them all the words, all the promises of the covenant, because you'll remember the promises of the Mosaic covenant were both curses and blessings. They were both promises. God said, if you obey me and keep my covenant, I promise to do this. If you walk away from Me, if you rebel against Me, if you worship other gods, I promise that I will do this. Curses and blessings. And He made it very clear to the people. And so He is emphasizing once again the covenant and the fact that the people, rather than following the covenant of the Lord, walked in the stubbornness of their own evil hearts.

I bring that up because on Sunday morning we are going to be continuing our study in Hebrews. And as we get into chapter 8, the writer of Hebrews is going to compare the covenants, the Mosaic Covenant with the New Covenant. And he is going to compare them in such a way as to talk about the blessings and the promises that go along with them. And he is going to talk about why the New Covenant is so superior and so much better than the Old.

And so I think that as we read through the difficulties that are laid out here by Jeremiah, and as we get into our study of Hebrews on Sunday morning, you are going to see a great contrast here that is going to help us to really appreciate the covenants as they are laid out in the Word of God. So that is where we are going to stop for tonight.