

PREFACE

“Nowadays, our presiding pastor rarely confines his sermon to a single chapter. Today is an exception as he wants to introduce to us the profile, ministry and message of Jeremiah the prophet right from the commencing chapter of the book of Jeremiah. Our pastor answered us deeply on the relevance of Jeremiah’s prophetic message and the significance of Jeremiah’s ministry from his days to our days at these end times. Thank God for the special understanding given to our pastor on the different senses of the prophetic message of Jeremiah. It entails the perspectives of soteriology, ecclesiology and eschatology. Most commentators merely saw the value of Jeremiah’s prophecy to the Jewish nation. But our pastor has proven with ease and convincingly that it is extended to the Gentiles believers as well. As for the Jews, the prophetic message and warning of Jeremiah was for them not only during the fall of Judah in the Babylonian Empire but also during the Roman Empire that came a few centuries after. However the unbelieving Jews rejected the Lord Yeshua Christ as their Messiah and suffered the woeful Diaspora. Pastor has ably explained to us the question why Jeremiah is ordained as ‘a prophet unto the nations’ (Jeremiah 1:5). It is principally fulfilled in the ecclesiological sense in the gospelic era where the place and function of the law in the Gospel is enunciated. Jeremiah’s role and calling had been spelt out by God to root out, pull down, destroy and throw down before he could build up and plant (Jeremiah 1:10). As sharply stated by our pastor, it is to pull down and uproot the ethnic, cultural, nationalistic and even spiritual strongholds within us. The application of the law has to be strong, unsparing and thorough. Little wonder the preaching of Jeremiah was a hard saying to his hearers where the vast majority resisted and rebelled. In a way, like our Lord Yeshua Christ, the message and ministry of Jeremiah acts as the light that ‘shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not’. Jeremiah’s ministry is a statement on the world and the people of God. Both dwell in gross darkness and sins. This accounts for their natural repulsion, rejection and hostility. Herein pastor showed us the depth of man’s wickedness and depravity. It is the same with us today. This is why the man of God is always broken-hearted. Besides the soteriological significance, there is the eschatological relevance. The preacher pointed to us that the prophet Jeremiah had prophesied extensively on Babylon at his penultimate chapters that has its parallelism with the apocalyptic Babylon. Secondly, Jeremiah is the harbinger to the ultimate judgment upon Judah. Similarly, there would be a final prophet to forewarn the people of God’s consummate judgment at the second advent of our Lord Yeshua Christ. Pastor has further shown us the cyclical pattern that there had been a unique prophet raised of God for every major judgment upon His people. This casts light then to the identity and ministry of our pastor. I thank God also for our minister prying open the heart of Jeremiah to understand the reason for his perpetual sorrow. Jeremiah is known as ‘a weeping prophet’. He displayed the trait of our rejected Messiah for being ‘a man of sorrow, acquainted with grief’. Jeremiah sorrowed not for his own condition but for the state of God’s people. I was further struck that the godly sorrow of Jeremiah arose not so much because his message was not accepted but more so because the people of Judah were actually signing their own death warrant when they rejected his message. Jeremiah possesses such grace to absorb all the sufferings inflicted upon him by the rebellious people of God. But Jeremiah could not bear to see his audience being damned because of their unbelief and revolt. This is the same spirit and sorrow in the Lord Yeshua Christ when He wept over Jerusalem for forsaking her own mercies. It is also frightening when pastor showed us the reality that the message of Jeremiah will not be appreciated by the natural man. When our minister compared Jeremiah with Isaiah, he made us see that Jeremiah is really unique among the prophets. For Isaiah, his message to God’s people is a call to repentance so as to avert the ultimate judgment. But for Jeremiah, his message to God’s people is to accept the judgment and go through the whole course of the law so that they might perhaps experience the mercy and salvation of God. This is definitely a hard saying. Who can bear it? Hence Jeremiah’s message is very offensive to all people. Jeremiah was virtually alone for the prolonged forty years of rejection. I am moved to hear of the extent of his compassion and patience to preach on to a disobedient people. It highlights God’s mercy in raising up and sending His prophets before each final judgment. The ultimate relevance of the message is to our days. Thank God for raising up our pastor. In appreciating the charge of God to Jeremiah to be fearless and unsparing, it helps me to better appreciate why pastor has to be so stern in applying the law on us. Jeremiah’s calling is to flatten and not to flatter the hearers; and so his ministry was not appreciated by the Jews then. I fear that I will be no different from the majority of God’s people who will reject such a ministry. Moreover there is such hardness in me and I do not have tears for Jerusalem. I felt very crippled by the effects of the present evil times upon me. I am very far from the spirit of Jeremiah and that of my pastor. I am actually encumbering the good land. I confess I am guilty of all the sins that our pastor denounced today. Instead of clothing myself with sackcloth and ashes, I am filled with levity. I am not taking the message of the man of God seriously. I am

not preparing for the second return of our Lord Yeshua Christ. I pray God help me to stop postponing my repentance. I thank our pastor for his condescension in bringing this message to our level so that we may drink in the spirit of Jeremiah. He even wants us to read through the whole book of Jeremiah carefully so that we be afflicted with the solemnity of his message. However to hardened and superficial persons like us, it is so hard to be affected. Even when affected, the effect dissipates quickly. How dreadful this is when pastor quoted the alarming verse: 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved' (Jeremiah 8:20). Pastor rightly and sharply exposed us to be full of head knowledge but without the heart. Where can I find the mercies of God? I thank the man of God for directing me to the counsel of Jeremiah in Lamentations that 'It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth' (Lamentations 3:26,27). This is where I should strive to start with." Zephaniah Soh's response to pastor's exegesis on the book of Jeremiah; John Bunyan House, Johor Bahru, Malaysia; 31 July AD 2011