

## Jeremiah 1:11 – 15

### Coming Events

#### *The Vision of the Almond Branch*

<sup>11</sup>The word of the LORD came to me: "What do you see, Jeremiah?" "I see the branch of an almond tree," I replied. <sup>12</sup>The LORD said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled."

#### *The Vision of the Boiling Pot*

<sup>13</sup>The word of the LORD came to me again: "What do you see?" "I see a boiling pot, tilting away from the north," I answered. <sup>14</sup>The LORD said to me, "From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land. <sup>15</sup>I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms," declares the LORD.



In verses 1 through 3 of this chapter, the conservators of Jeremiah's ministry sought to summarize the external historical and spiritual context of the prophet's ministry and to certify by historical reference their validity. These were "the words of Jeremiah" that came to pass "when the people of Jerusalem went into exile."

Verses 4 through 9 are Jeremiah's personal testimony. They contain an account of his appointment to the office of prophet (4- 5), his ordination to that office over his feeble objections (6 – 7), and his consecration to that office (9 – 10). The scope of his office was far beyond Israel, though they were to be the main recipients of his oracles. He was "appointed ... as a prophet to the nations" (5c). In that context his ministry was generally described by six infinitives: "to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant." (10b) These powers were not inherent in Jeremiah. Rather, the word of the LORD that he was to pronounce was an expression of the LORD's power over "nations and kingdoms." How the LORD was going to apply His powerful word to nations and kingdoms, however, is not clear.<sup>1</sup> What lies beneath all these verses is the presence of the Word of the LORD as communicated to the prophet.

What follows in verses 11 – 16 are two visions and an oracle that give an overview of what is to follow in much of the rest of the book. Both visions relate to how the word of the LORD will be implemented.

**The Vision of the Almond Branch:** The almond tree is the first of the trees to send forth leaves. The name in Hebrew means "literally, 'the wakeful tree,' because it awakes from the sleep of winter earlier than the other trees, flowering in January, and bearing fruit in March."<sup>2</sup> The LORD explains the meaning of this parable to Jeremiah. The two terms "almond tree" and "watch" are a play on words. שָׂדֵה (pronounced shaw-kade') is the word for the almond tree. It derives from שָׂדָה (pronounced shaw-kad') which is a primitive root meaning to be alert, sleepless, to be on the lookout whether for good or ill, to watch. What the vision tells us about the word of the LORD is the precursor to the execution of His purpose, that He will "hasten my word" (KJV). As the tree seems to restlessly watch for the change in seasons so that it is the first to blossom, so the LORD is "watching to see that my word is fulfilled." But exactly what is the LORD is watching for? The LORD tells us through Isaiah, "So my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please ..."<sup>3</sup> So what is the LORD pleased to accomplish by His word to the nations and specifically in Israel. Does He wish to uproot the people and tear down their cities; to destroy the nation and overthrow their government? Or does He wish to build Israel up and to plant them in their own promised land? The implication of this parabolic vision is that the LORD is watching for the change of the spiritual season and for the fruit that

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<sup>1</sup> Israel was surrounded by three major nations at that time: Egypt, the Assyrian Empire, and the Neo- Babylonian Empire. There were other smaller kingdoms (Moabites, Edomites, Ammonites, etc.) also surrounding Israel.

<sup>2</sup> Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary on Jeremiah 1:11

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 55:10 – 11 "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

His word will produce in the hearts of those to whom he sends it. The ambiguity arises not because of the possibility of the LORD destroying or sparing. Both are within His power. The ambiguity arises because of His unwillingness to see His people judged for their persistent sins, and allowing them time to repent. As Peter tells us, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."<sup>4</sup> This vision creates a tension is that constrains us to watch and see how Israel will respond to the word of the LORD as spoken by Jeremiah.

**The Vision of the Boiling Pot:** The second vision speaks not to the LORD's watchful governance of His word, but to His righteous anger toward an Israel estranged from Him and worshipping idols. It also speaks of the instrumentality that can inflict judgment. The fact that the pot is boiling indicates the fierceness of the LORD's anger against Israel. The fact that it is "tilting" indicates that things have reached the tipping point. "Tilting away from the north" means that His anger is directed against Judah in the south and that the instruments of His judgment will come from the north. The reason north is mentioned lies in the geography of the near east. The human instrument of the LORD's judgment is to be Babylon. Between Babylon (which lies to the east) and Israel there is a great desert that the forces of Babylon would not be able to cross. To attack Israel, then, the forces must go around the northern end of the desert which means that they enter the land of Israel from the north. Here again there is an ambiguity, the pot is full and it is tilting, but will it tip over? The catastrophe rests on a knife edge and what will happen depends not so much on what the LORD intends as it does in how Israel will respond to His word.

In both these visions there is an important aspect of prophesy that we must understand. We tend to think of a prophetic utterance as a "done deed." One of the tests of a true prophet of the LORD was whether the prophet's utterances did in fact happen. That was the opening argument about the validity of Jeremiah's ministry. He prophesied that the people would be carried away captive and that happened in the fifth month of the eleventh year of the reign of Zedekiah. "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him."<sup>5</sup> While there were other tests of false prophets, a failure of a prophesy to materialize was certainly one of the critical tests of a false prophet. Yet not every prophet saw his words fulfilled. Jonah is one such example. "And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."<sup>6</sup> But Nineveh repented. "So, the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. ... And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not."<sup>7</sup> Prophesy is both foretelling events that will come to pass and forth telling what will happen if the spiritual and moral character of the people does not change. Again, as is clear in Nineveh's case, the LORD was watching and saw the fruit that His words produced: faith expressed in repentance. Jesus, whose preaching like John the Baptist emphasized repentance,<sup>8</sup> used this case as a condemnation. "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here."<sup>9</sup> The application is simple. God speaks to each one of us and watches carefully to see whether we will believe His word which is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,"<sup>10</sup> and repent of a life not yet in full conformity to His perfect will for us. Repentance is an integral part of our sanctification.

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<sup>4</sup> 2Peter 3:9

<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 18:22

<sup>6</sup> Jonah 3:4

<sup>7</sup> Jonah 3:5, 10

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 4:17 "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 12:41

<sup>10</sup> 2Ti 3:16 - 17 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."