

# **Jeremiah and Jesus: Who do You Say That I am?**

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## **Introduction**

In Matthew's gospel Jesus asked an important question. "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"<sup>1</sup> And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."<sup>2</sup> Peter responded with the correct answer, as he identified Jesus as the Christ and the Son of the living God. Peter's answer is the appropriate response for all true followers of Jesus. This paper is in no way refuting the biblical, historical, and orthodox understanding of the identity of Jesus.

What this paper will do is answer the question: Why did some of the people think that Jesus was Jeremiah? Additionally, this paper seeks to show that the people had good reason to think that Jesus could have been Jeremiah. This will be shown through the Scriptures, religious traditions of the time, and with the many striking similarities between Jesus and Jeremiah.

## **Historical and Cultural Setting**

To understand why anyone would have thought Jesus was Jeremiah, it is important that we look at the life of Jesus in his historical context. Byron Sherwin notes that within both Christian and Jewish theologians, there is a recovery of Jesus'

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1. Matt 16:13 NASB

2. Matt 16:14 NASB

“Jewishness”.<sup>3</sup> We need to recognize that Jesus was born a Jew, grew up as a Jew, and lived out of a Jewish tradition. It is in this environment that Jesus “kept increasing in wisdom and stature. . . .”<sup>4</sup> By all appearances, Jesus was brought up as any other Jewish boy of his time. It is very likely that during Jesus’ formative years he had role models from the Scriptures that made an impact on his life. As he grew into a man, he would have emulated those who made the most profound impression upon him. Matthew’s gospel indicates that Jeremiah was one of those individuals.

It is noteworthy that Matthew is the only Gospel that includes Jeremiah as a response of the people. Furthermore, Matthew is the only gospel writer to mention the name of Jeremiah in any context. “This is not surprising, for Matthew is the most ‘Jewish of the Gospels.’”<sup>5</sup> It is further argued that Matthew presents Jesus as the “fulfillment of the past Judaism.”<sup>6</sup> With the understanding of the Jewishness of Jesus and the people around him, we are better able to understand their thinking.

### **Resurrected Prophets**

“The reappearance of dead heroes was a well-known theme in contemporary Jewish thought.”<sup>7</sup> Both the Old Testament Scriptures as well as the Apocrypha make references to former prophets coming in a later generation. In all likelihood, both Jesus and those who surrounded him would have been familiar with these writings and traditions that were a part of the culture. “It was believed that, before the people went into exile, Jeremiah had taken the ark and the altar of incense out of the

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3. Beatrice Bruteau. *Jesus Through Jewish Eyes: Rabbis and Scholars Engage an Ancient Brother in a New Conversation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001) 36

4. Luke 2:52 NASB

5. David J. Zucker AJesus an Jeremiah in the Matthean Tradition@ *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 27 no.2 (Spring 1990): 292

6. Ibid

7. David Noel Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* v 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 194

Temple, and had hidden them away in a lonely cave on Mount Nebo, and that, before the coming of the Messiah, he would return and produce them.”<sup>8</sup> There was also a belief that Jeremiah could have been a forerunner of the Messiah based on 2 Maccabees 15:14-16.<sup>9</sup> Deuteronomy gives us some more insight to the people’s mind set: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.”<sup>10</sup> Origen had this commentary on the suggestion of Jesus being Jeremiah:

Some suggested Jeremiah was Jesus and not that Jeremiah was a type of Christ. This comes perhaps from a mistaken interpretation of the passage in the beginning of Jeremiah about Christ’s prophecy unfulfilled in the time of the prophet but beginning to be fulfilled in Jesus, whom God set up over nations and kingdoms “to root up, and to build up, and to transplant.”<sup>11</sup>

Certainly, Origen is correct in stating that the people misinterpreted the passage, however the fact that they were expecting Jeremiah to return and that during his ministry he spent little time building up and planting, gave them good reason to think that perhaps Jesus was Jeremiah. At that point in time Jesus himself had not revealed his Messiahship. Furthermore, Jesus tells Peter that it was not flesh and blood that revealed the truth of Jesus’ identity. It is after Jesus’ resurrection that he explains that all of the Scriptures are about him. “Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the

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8. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 2* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958) 150

9. William Holladay, Jeremiah 2. *Hermeneia*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 93

10. Deuteronomy 18:18 NASB

11. Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament In Matthew 14-18* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2002) 44

Scriptures.”<sup>12</sup> In reality, the people were not that far from the truth. It may very well be those who thought Jesus was Jeremiah or one of the other prophets, may have later become Christians. They were certainly open to the idea of a resurrection, as well as looking for to the promise of the Messiah.

When Jesus asked Peter about who people thought he was, it is important to understand that when they answered, “Jeremiah”, they were impressed by Jesus. This was a compliment.<sup>13</sup> It may be confusing to us two thousand years later to understand their answer. It may even be easy to think they are rejecting Jesus. That is not at all the case. Jeremiah, although he did not receive the respect and honor that was worthy of his calling, at the time of Christ He would be thought of as a great prophet. For them to think Jesus was Jeremiah would mean they thought well of him.

Zucker believes that the Jewishness of Jesus is most valued by Matthew’s gospel.<sup>14</sup> He goes on to further state that, “the Matthean narrative reflects a tradition that many of Jesus’ words and acts were consciously patterned on those of Jeremiah. It is further suggested that the Matthean Jesus is portrayed as Jeremiah redivivus.”<sup>15</sup> Although Jeremiah redivivus is not the position of this paper, it is worthy to note that Jesus was in many ways influenced by the life and ministry of the prophet Jeremiah.

Just because there was a belief that Jeremiah or some of the other prophets could rise from the dead and/or revisit God’s people, in and of itself it is not sufficient reason for people to think that Jesus was Jeremiah. There must have been similarities between Jesus and Jeremiah. As already stated,

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12. Luke 24:27 NASB

13. Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 151

14. Zucker, *A Jesus an Jeremiah in the Matthean Tradition*, @ 290

15. Ibid

there is no intention here to claim that Jesus was Jeremiah redivivus. It is, however, the intention to show that the ministry, message, and life of Jesus greatly parallels and is influenced by Jeremiah.

### **Life Experiences**

In many respects, Jesus and Jeremiah experienced very similar life situations from birth until death. “Both Jesus and Jeremiah came from small towns, both suffered bitterly, both identified with the ‘little people’ of society, both incurred the wrath of Jerusalem’s civil and religious establishment, both foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.”<sup>16</sup> It should also be added that both preached hope for the repentant and obedient.

### **Call to Ministry**

Jeremiah’s call to ministry gives a great understanding of how God throughout the ages calls men and women to the ministry. As we look at Jeremiah’s call, it will be shown that Jesus followed the same pattern in regards to his understanding of his ministry.

Jeremiah’s call began with God’s intimate knowledge of him. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.”<sup>17</sup> “Knowing implies a personal relationship, indeed a very personal inward relationship.”<sup>18</sup> The Hebrew word for “knew” is “Yada”. This same verb “yada” is used throughout the Old Testament. It implies relationship. Later in the Old Testament, God spoke through the prophet Amos. “You

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16. Philip J King, *Jeremiah: An Archaeological Companion* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 7

17. Jer 1:5 NASB

18. Kenneth L. Barker, AJeremiah=s Ministry and Our=s@ *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127 (July/September 1970): 226

only have I known of all the families of the earth. . .”<sup>19</sup> God is not saying that he is unaware of other nations or that he has no knowledge of them. What he is saying is that it is you, Israel, that I have chosen. It is you that I have a relationship with. It is God who initiated this relationship with Jeremiah before he was even born. This intimate relationship that Jeremiah had with God was foundational to the ministry he was called to. Jeremiah, throughout his ministry, often went back to the recognition that God knew him and he knew God. As will be shown later, this was one of the complaints that Jeremiah had against the people and the false prophets. They did not know God because they had no relationship with him. Jeremiah continued to call the people to have an authentic relationship with Yahweh. Jeremiah, speaking on behalf of God, declared, “but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD.”<sup>20</sup>

Likewise, Jesus himself found his relationship with his father as foundational to his ministry. He claimed an intimate relationship with Yahweh. Jesus said, “even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father. . .”<sup>21</sup> And, like Jeremiah, he called people into this same relationship. “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”<sup>22</sup> It is through Christ himself that the New Covenant that Jeremiah proclaimed is fulfilled: “for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.”<sup>23</sup>

Second in Jeremiah’s call was that Yahweh consecrated him. He set him apart for the work of ministry. Barker paraphrased God’s sanctifying or consecrating of Jeremiah. “I *separated* you

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19. Amos 3:2 KJV

20. Jer 9:24

21. John 10:15

22. John 17:3 NASB

23. Jer 31:34

unto me', ie, 'I *set you apart* for the service or ministry of the prophetic office.'"<sup>24</sup> The emphasis in Jeremiah's call is that it is God doing the work. He is the one who has called and set apart.

In all of this, the prophet has a choice in responding to the call of God. Despite this fact, Jeremiah believed he had no choice and, in fact, thought that God had deceived him. "O LORD, You have deceived me and I was deceived; You have overcome me and prevailed."<sup>25</sup> Jeremiah later confessed, "Your words were found and I ate them."<sup>26</sup> Lundbom believes this reflection fulfills the promise of his calling.<sup>27</sup> It is important to recognize that Jeremiah had as much of a choice as the people to whom he was called to preach. They had a choice to repent or to continue on their own path. Jeremiah had a choice to speak what he heard in the council of the Lord or to remain silent. Most of the people chose not to repent and Jeremiah chose to speak what the Lord told him to say. Although Jeremiah wrongly accused Yahweh in this situation, it is worthy to note that Jeremiah seemed to exhibit a complete authenticity before God and the people. Perhaps it is this very authenticity that was attractive to those who listened to both his and, then later, Jesus' message.

In a similar fashion, Jesus had a deep understanding and conviction of his own purpose in Yahweh's plan. "But He said to them, 'I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.'"<sup>28</sup> "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life

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24. Barker, AJeremiah=s Ministry and Our=s,@ 226

25. Jer 20:7 NASB

26. Jer 15:16

27. Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*. The Anchor Bible (New York, Doubleday, 1999), 130

28. Luke 4:43 NASB

a ransom for many.”<sup>29</sup> Jesus, like Jeremiah, knew that a true prophet had a purpose for God and was sent by him. Similarly, both men were extremely faithful to the task they were sent for.

Theodore of Mopsuestia had the following to say about some of the people thinking Jesus was Jeremiah. “Perhaps they knew that the Lord had wisdom from his birth and was without peer in his teaching. Something similar was the thought of Jeremiah, in that as a child he was singled out for prophecy and without human training. . .”<sup>30</sup> Although it is true that Jesus had wisdom from an early age and Jeremiah was singled out for prophecy at an early age, I think it is a stretch to say that neither had any training. Certainly, both were supernaturally gifted as men.<sup>31</sup> It could even be said that they were gifted beyond any formal training they may have had. But, both show great evidence of being fully literate and trained in the rhetoric of their day. To deny all training is to misunderstand their Jewish upbringing.

Not only was Jeremiah known by God and set apart, but he was also ordained by God himself. He was ordained or appointed to be a prophet to the nations. Barker stated that, “Implied in the meaning, also, is an appointment that carries with it the impartation of spiritual gifts, the necessary gifts for the office.”<sup>32</sup>

Likewise, Jesus understood his appointment. He was the Messiah as Peter claimed in Matt 16:16 and later in Acts 3:20, “that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you.”<sup>33</sup> Both men knew who they were and the task they were called to. Perhaps most importantly, they knew it was none other than

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29. Matt 20:28 NASB

30. Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, 44

31. It should be noted that in referring to Jesus as a man, I do not mean to express that Jesus was merely a man. Jesus was fully human and fully divine.

32. Kenneth L Barker, *AJeremiah=s Ministry and Our=s,@ 226*

33. Acts 3:20 NASB

Yahweh himself who knew, sanctified, and ordained them.

### **Call to Celibacy**

Jeremiah's call to celibacy would have seemed strange in his time. It would have been expected in that society that he would have married and had children. "Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus even went so far, at the end of the first century AD, as to compare deliberate abstention from procreation to murder."<sup>34</sup>

From the biblical account, we have no record of Jesus ever marrying. Although, orthodoxy has emphatically held to this view of Jesus, there have been some non-canonical writings that claim otherwise. These claims are to be rejected.

### **Prayer Life**

We know more about the inner personal life of Jeremiah than any other prophet in Scriptures. We know of his pain, fears, desires, struggles with the ministry, and relationship with God. Almost all of this we learn from his recorded prayers to God. From these prayers we see a man who struggles with God, a man who cares for and intercedes for the people whom he was sent to speak to. "We know our wickedness, O LORD, The iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against You."<sup>35</sup> Jeremiah is not the one who has sinned here. Although Lundbom found Jeremiah to be lacking in priestly theology, as a faithful intercessor it could be argued that Jeremiah takes on a priestly role.<sup>36</sup> He is confessing the sins of the people on their behalf before Yahweh. This seems to be consistent with the character of Jeremiah. Jeremiah appears to be more concerned with faithfulness, righteousness, and justice than he is with teaching theology. This same characteristic found in Jesus

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34. Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1973), 101

35. Jer 14:20 NASB

36. David Noel Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* v 3, 717

more than likely made an impression upon the people of his day.

Jeremiah's role as an intercessor should not go unnoticed. Yes, Jeremiah delivered a message of judgment and repentance. Jeremiah continued to plead on behalf of the people after they refused to repent. Balentine commented on Jeremiah's role as an intercessor.

On three occasions he is instructed not to pray for his people because God will not hear the prayer or respond to the petition for help which it carries within it (Jer. 7:1; 11:14; 14:11). . . Even after these prohibitions Jeremiah could not easily let go his role as intercessor, for twice more he reminds God that he has interceded on the people's behalf. . .<sup>37</sup>

We know in the Lord's prayer that Jesus taught the disciples both to pray for forgiveness and to forgive others. Some of Jesus' last words before his death were words of intercession. On the cross, near death, he stated, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."<sup>38</sup>

It is apparent that prayer was essential to the ministry of Jeremiah and Jesus. When in trouble, both went to Yahweh in prayer. Jesus, before he was crucified, spent much of the evening in prayer. When Jeremiah struggled with life and ministry he went to prayer. When Jeremiah was first called, he cried out in prayer to God. "Then I said, 'Alas, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, Because I am a youth.'"<sup>39</sup> Later when things became difficult in the ministry, Jeremiah again cried out, "But, Ah, Lord GOD!" I said, "Look, the prophets are telling them, 'You will not see the sword nor will you have

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37. Samuel Balentine, *A Jeremiah Prophet of Prayer* @ *Review and Expositor* 78 (Summer 1981): 332

38. Luke 23:34 NASB

39. Jer 1:6 NASB

famine, but I will give you lasting peace in this place.”<sup>40</sup>

Prayer was not limited to just crying out for Jesus or Jeremiah. Both praise God in their prayers. Prayer was a vital part of their relationship with God. In fact, one of the complaints that Jeremiah had against the false prophets is that they did not spend time in the divine council of God. In other words, he questioned how they knew the oracles of God if they never stood in his presence or if they never went before him and sought his will in time alone with God.

Throughout the New Testament Jesus woke up early or stayed up late praying. We are told in Luke 6:12 that when Jesus chose the 12 disciples, he spent the whole night in prayer. Those who knew of Jesus’ prayer life could very well have thought of Jeremiah’s commitment to prayer. This same Jeremiah whom the Lord had to tell three times not to pray for the people anymore.

### **Critics and Opponents**

Jesus had many of the same enemies as the former prophet. Jesus, like Jeremiah, found that opposition came from his own hometown. Vermes writes, “But strangely enough, the first opposition came from those closest to him his family and fellow-citizens in Nazareth.”<sup>41</sup> Jesus himself said, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household.”<sup>42</sup> The proverb that Jesus quotes exists for good reason. Elijah was chased by the king; Jesus was nearly stoned by the villagers of Nazareth (and would eventually be caught and crucified) “and Jeremiah would be thrown into jail for his efforts to warn Judah of impending

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40. Jer 14:13 NASB

41. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 33

42. Mark 6:4 NASB

destruction.”<sup>43</sup>

Both Jeremiah and Jesus found themselves at odds with government authorities. Jeremiah’s problems had more to do with his words directed toward Kings such as Jehoiakim. Jeremiah thought that “he was generous when it came to erecting cedar buildings in Jerusalem, but he cared nothing for the weightier matters of Justice and righteousness.”<sup>44</sup> Jesus’ problem with government authorities had more to do with his religious enemies. Pilate seemed indifferent toward Jesus at the worst.

It was the religious authorities whom Jesus and Jeremiah seemed to have the most trouble with. This should not come as a surprise since they both preached against the hypocrisy and the superficial religiosity of their time. “At the announcement of the destruction of the Temple it was the priest and prophets who were the most offended and called for the death of Jeremiah.”<sup>45</sup>

Jeremiah’s ministry was marked by opposition from false prophets. When Jeremiah said that the exile would last for 70 years, false prophets would come along and say it will only be a few years. They continued to proclaim, “All is well.” after God told Jeremiah the destruction was inevitable. Jeremiah declared, “They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, Saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ But there is no peace.”<sup>46</sup> Jeremiah further complained that these false prophets never stood in the council of the Lord. The false prophets either made things up from their own dreams or they stole words from one another. Jeremiah received the message he spoke from Yahweh himself. It is this relationship that enabled him to withstand his

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43. Gregory L. Glover, *At a Loss for Words*, 2004 Available from <http://www.southminster-pcusa.org/Sermons/Feb012004.htm>. [Internet] Accessed 23 May 2005.

44. Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* v 3, 714

45. *Ibid*, 688

46. Jer 6:14 NASB

many enemies. “Neither the persecution of political enemies nor the misunderstandings of familiar friends could shake Jeremiah’s trust in God. Even his severe complaints about Gods will seemed eventually to strengthen his faith, as did the doubts of false prophets like Hananiah (ch. 28).”<sup>47</sup>

The people of Jesus’ day knew very well the struggles that Jeremiah had with the false prophets. When Jesus warned about false prophets to come<sup>48</sup> or to beware of false prophets<sup>49</sup> this must have reminded them of Jeremiah.

### **Preaching Style**

As shown already, Jesus and Jeremiah had similar backgrounds, lifestyles, critics, and understanding of the ministries that they were sent to accomplish. It is the messages that they spoke that most likely gave the people good reason to identify Jesus with Jeremiah. It will be shown that Jesus spoke in the tradition of Jeremiah both in terminology as well as major concerns. Early in Jeremiah’s ministry he confronts the people with this accusation from God, “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water.”<sup>50</sup> Jesus used the same words “living water,” as he spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well.<sup>51</sup> Interestingly enough, he speaks to this woman about the “broken cisterns” that she has been going to in her life rather than worshiping God in Spirit and in truth.<sup>52</sup>

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47. David Allen Hubbard and William Sanford LaSor. *Old Testament Survey: The Message, form, and Background of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eardmans Publishing Co., 1996), 352

48. Matt 24:11

49. Matt 7:15

50. Jer 2:13 NASB

51. John 4:10 NASB

52. John 4:24 NASB

Late in the book of Jeremiah, God refers to his people as lost sheep. “My people have become lost sheep. . .”<sup>53</sup> This same terminology is used by Jesus in his ministry. “In the NT, portrayal of people as ‘Lost sheep’ is made memorable in Jesus parable of the ‘Lost sheep’ (Matt 18:12-14; Luke 15:4-7).”<sup>54</sup> Jesus’ understanding of his ministry is profoundly connected to the people that are identified as “lost sheep.” “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”<sup>55</sup>

The word “fishermen” is used in Jeremiah, clearly referring to action upon men and not fish. “Behold, I am going to send for many fishermen’, declares the LORD, ‘and they will fish for them; and afterwards I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them from every mountain and every hill and from the clefts of the rocks.”<sup>56</sup> The use of this particular figurative language is unique to Jeremiah of all the Old Testament prophets. Jesus, in a different context, used similar words. “When he called Simon Peter and Andrew to become his disciples, he promised, ‘I will make you fish for people,’ paraphrasing a line in Jeremiah where the earlier prophet similarly spoke of ‘fishermen’ . . .”<sup>57</sup>

A fourth term or phrase that is paralleled in the lives of both Jeremiah and Jesus is found in Jeremiah 11:19, “But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter.”<sup>58</sup> Here is part of Jeremiah’s chief complaints to God. Jeremiah has done nothing wrong toward the people. He has been faithful to deliver the word of God to them. He has pleaded with them. He has even interceded on their behalf, and yet he is the one who was persecuted.

Although Jesus did not call himself a sheep or a lamb, he was

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53. Jer 50:6 NASB

54. Jack R. Lundbom *Jeremiah 37-52* (The Anchor Bible. New York, Doubleday, 2004), 378

55. Matt 15:24 NASB

56. Jer 16:16 NASB

57. Zucker, *A Jesus an Jeremiah in the Matthean Tradition*, @ 297

58. Jer 11:19 NASB

introduced as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”<sup>59</sup> Jesus did have a clear understanding that he was going to give his life for the people. When speaking with the Ethiopian, Philip identified Jesus as the sheep led to the slaughter.<sup>60</sup>

Another key phrase comes from the sixth chapter of Jeremiah. “Thus says the LORD, ‘Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it; And you will find rest for your souls.’”<sup>61</sup> The prophet had just finished proclaiming destruction and judgment and now he was calling the people to follow what they have been told through the prophets and the law. The way to experience rest was through obedience to what Yahweh had already told the people.

In parallel fashion, in Matthew 11, Christ was denouncing unrepentant cities. He then prayed briefly to his father and announced, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.”<sup>62</sup> Without missing a beat Jesus followed the same pattern with the exception of applying the rest of the soul to coming to and learning from him.

Lastly, another interesting repetition of Jeremiah’s exact words comes in what has been called the cleansing of the Temple. Both Jesus and Jeremiah claimed that the Temple had become “a den of robbers.”<sup>63</sup> This will be discussed further in the Themes and Message section. Jeremiah often was asked by God to use prophetic symbolism in delivering his message to the people. Holladay list a few below:

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59. John 1:29 NASB

60. Acts 8:32 NASB

61. Jer 6:16 NASB

62. Matt 11:29 NASB

63. Jer 7:11 NASB, Matt 21:13 NASB, Mark 11:17 NASB, Luke 19:46 NASB

... but he communicated Yahweh's will through symbolic actions as well, actions like burying of the linen loincloth (12:1-12aa) and the breaking of the flask (19:1-15), prolong signs like the wearing of the throngs and yoke-pegs (27:2;28:10), abstentions like the abstention from marriage and from attending funerals and weddings (16:1-8). . .In this way the prophet becomes himself a sign of Yahweh's revelation.<sup>64</sup>

It could be said that Christ's entire life was prophetic symbolism. His very atoning death is the ultimate symbolism of our salvation purchased by the blood of Christ. Many of his miracles, including turning water into wine, could be considered a prophetic action. Certainly, the last supper is filled with prophetic acts and symbolism. Not all of these acts had occurred before some people began to think that Jesus may have been Jeremiah. However, some did and, based on future events, it is quite possible that Jesus performed other acts that we are unaware of. "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written."<sup>65</sup>

### **Themes and Message**

Judgment and repentance are major themes for Jeremiah. Jeremiah lived in the time when many reforms were brought about through the King Josiah. It appears, at least early on, Jeremiah was in favor of these reforms. Although, the Lord showed Jeremiah that the reforms were superficial and they had put their trust in these outward signs. "Many were foolishly and erroneously reasoning that because of these outward religious reforms, Judah would now be secure and exempt from divine judgment."<sup>66</sup> The reforms proved to do nothing in

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64. William Holladay *Jeremiah 2*. Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 74

65. John 21:25 NASB

66. Barker, AJeremiah's Ministry and Our=s,@ 223

changing the hearts of the people. God, through Jeremiah, called for an inward change of the heart. McKane stated that, “repentance and a cleansing of the heart. . . are conditions of the renewal of a fruitful relationship with Yahweh.”<sup>67</sup> Jeremiah was very concerned with the demands of the covenant and repentance and obedience from the heart. It should be noted that Jeremiah did not preach against rituals but against empty ritual.

In general, therefore, we sense that Jeremiah was not the enemy of the material and external aspects of religion, but more than anyone in his age (and perhaps among all the prophets of Israel) he asserted that God, who is spirit, cannot be worshiped by the material, whether sacrifice, circumcision, temple, cultic furniture, etc., unless these are means to point the worshiper to God.<sup>68</sup>

Jesus, at a core level, spoke out against empty ritual and tradition. He often rebuked religious leaders for their hypocrisy in this area. In Matthew 23, we find some of the harshest words of Jesus in all of the New Testament. In the following section of that chapter, we find one example of Jesus confronting the religious leaders, not on their commitment to tradition, ceremony, or the law, but the emptiness of it. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”<sup>69</sup>

The modern reader often can misunderstand both Jesus and Jeremiah. Jeremiah could be viewed as one who taught all law and no grace. Jesus on the other hand can be seen as the

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67. W. A McKane *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah I-XXV* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1986), 88

68. J. A. Thompson *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 70

69. Matt 23:23 NASB

picture of grace who divorced himself from the law. Both of these opinions could not be further from the truth.

Jeremiah preached a message of repentance with mercy. “. . . Jeremiah maintains that mercy accompanies and may be a correlate of judgement, and a prerogative of God.”<sup>70</sup>

The message was in hope that the people would repent. “Despite moments of deep despair, Jeremiah seems not to have lost faith completely in Yahweh’s ability to save.”<sup>71</sup> This is demonstrated in the following passage: “Perhaps they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the calamity which I am planning to do to them because of the evil of their deeds.”<sup>72</sup> Jeremiah and, arguably, Yahweh himself suffered in great agony because of the people’s unwillingness to repent. This is illustrated in here: “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!”<sup>73</sup> It seems undeniable that the speaker here is both full of grief and mercy. Yet God to be true to his word is unable to let sin go on unchecked.

Jesus, years later, becomes the fulfillment of both the New Covenant and the mercy desired by Jeremiah. “While Jesus demonstrates a new power in the remaking of men and women, the principle of compassionate service was established long before His day; it is one expression, as it is one result of the agony of Jeremiah’s soul.”<sup>74</sup> It is in the remaking of men that both God’s justice and mercy come together through Jesus. Although Jeremiah redivivus is not the position here, it is very apparent that Jesus continues and fulfills the ministry of

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70. Robert Dobbie. AJeremiah and the Preacher.@ *Canadian Journal of Theology* 4 no. 1 (1958): 43

71. Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* v 3, 690

72. Jer 26:3 NASB

73. Jer 9:1 NASB

74. Dobbie, AJeremiah and the Preacher,@ 43

Jeremiah.

Jesus, like Jeremiah, had a high view of the law. Jesus came preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”<sup>75</sup> “. . . when Jeremiah speaks about genuine faith, he must also speak of the law. It is no doubt for the same reason that Jesus gives such strong support to the law; his mission is not to ‘abolish’ but to ‘fulfill’ it.”<sup>76</sup> The law does not become invalid after Jesus, but changes position. “The metamorphosis consists in the circumstance that the new covenant will not be broken and also in its inwardness, written on the heart not on tablets of stone (Sinai) or in a book (Deuteronomy).”<sup>77</sup> Jesus, being a faithful Jew, upheld the law and kept it to perfection. His keeping of the law with an emphasis of obedience would have made him a very probable candidate for Jeremiah. “If total obedience to the Lord of covenant grace is the major lesson of Scripture, no one in the Old Testament taught it better than Jeremiah.”<sup>78</sup>

## Temple

No discussion of Jeremiah and Jesus would be complete without looking at what has been called the Temple sermon. God commanded Jeremiah to stand in the gate of the Lord’s house and declare, “Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’”<sup>79</sup> The repetition here has been suggested to correlate with Jesus’ prohibition on vain repetition in Matt

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75. Matt 4:17

76. Fredrick Carlson Holmgren, *The Old Testament and the Significance of Jesus: Embracing Change & Maintaining Christian Identity: The Emerging Center in Biblical Scholarship*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 88

77. William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah XXVI-LII*. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 818

78. Hubbard, *Old Testament Survey*, 352

79. Jer 7:4 NASB

6:7.<sup>80</sup> This may be true; however, Jeremiah seems to be striking at a much deeper cord. They had put their trust in the words “Temple of the Lord,” rather than in the Lord himself. Jeremiah “Insist that to put one’s security in such words is vain.”<sup>81</sup>

Through the reforms, the people seem to believe that if they keep up the appearances of a faithful people God will spare judgment. After all, they don’t expect God to destroy his own Temple. “They seem content just to know that the temple sits on Zion and that Salvific liturgies are spoken in worship; they care nothing, however, for the weightier matters of executing justice and living in accordance with covenant demands.”<sup>82</sup>

Jeremiah then offers hope to the people. If they will amend their ways, God will show mercy upon them. He then began to list many of the abominations that they had committed against God. After it is made plain that the people have no intention on repenting, the question came on behalf of Yahweh, “Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight?”<sup>83</sup> This is followed by an announcement proclaiming the destruction of the Temple.

This proclaim put Jeremiah’s life in danger. In a parallel passage the people responded to Jeremiah’s announcement as follows: “When Jeremiah finished speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, ‘You must die!’”<sup>84</sup> Thus, Jeremiah’s repayment for speaking the word of the Lord is death.

Jeremiah has not done anything deserving death, but what is

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80. William Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*. Hermeneia ( Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 242

81. Ibid

82. Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* v 3, 688

83. Jer 7:11 NASB

84. Jer 26:8 NASB

one to say concerning Uriah, about whom we will hear shortly (vv20-23), also years later concerning Jesus and Stephen (Mark 11:15-29 and parallels; Acts 6-7), who hit directly at gross evil and announced God=s judgment on people, the land, and precious symbols of the faith?<sup>85</sup>

Luke 19 records the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem. His account is strikingly similar to Jeremiah’s experience at the Temple. As he approached the city, he wept over it. That in and of itself is very much in the spirit of Jeremiah. He then announced destruction. “Jesus’ preaching about the destruction of the temple also brought him into conflict with the religious authorities and was a key factor in bringing him to trial (see Matt 26:57-68; Mark 14:58). Jesus thereby stands in the tradition of Jeremiah.”<sup>86</sup> After this, Jesus drove out the people who were buying and selling in the Temple. He then said to them, “It is written, ‘AND MY HOUSE SHALL BE A HOUSE OF PRAYER, but you have made it a ROBBERS’ DEN.’”<sup>87</sup> Those who thought that Jesus was Jeremiah would have been very convinced upon observing this series of events. Jesus truly did stand in the tradition of Jeremiah.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, the promises of renewal prophesied by Jeremiah found their fulfillment in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus was not Jeremiah. He made no claim to ever be him. He did however live an authentic life before Yahweh that in many ways paralleled and even seemed to copy the life of Jeremiah. Some of the people of Jesus’ time took notice of the

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85. Jack R Lundbom *Jeremiah 21-36*. The Anchor Bible (New York, Doubleday, 2004), 290

86. Terence E. Fretheim, “Caught in the Middle: Jeremiah=s Vocational Crisis@ *Word & World* 22, no.4 (Fall 2002) : 370

87. Luke 19:46 NASB

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many similarities that Jesus had with the great Prophet Jeremiah and, for many of the reasons shown, thought Jeremiah had returned.

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