

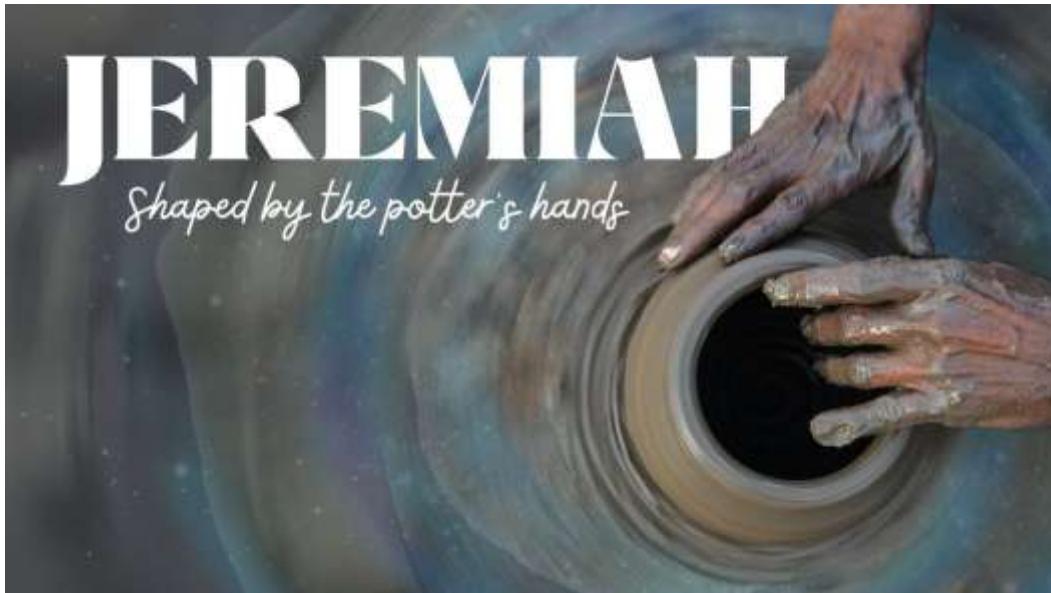
Jeremiah: Shaped by the Potter's Hand

Kenwood Baptist Church Fall Sermon Series

Pastor David Palmer

November 16, 2025

TEXT: **Jeremiah 50:1-4; 51:61-64**



Good morning, Beloved. This Sunday is the penultimate sermon in our fall series on Jeremiah—the next-to-last one. This book has built up my faith in the Lord and confidence in His Word. I don't know about you, but Jeremiah has shaped and inspired my own understanding of what it means to follow Christ faithfully.

This morning, Jeremiah's perspective shifts well beyond Jerusalem and Judea, the borders of his own nation, and we see that God's Word is in fact for all the world. The God who speaks in Jeremiah is the sovereign over all the earth. God called Jeremiah as a teenager to be a prophet to the nations. He has spoken God's Word to his own people for most of his ministry in what we have seen. This morning, we listen in as he announces God's Word to all the world. We will see that God's Word calls the surrounding nations in the very same ways that it calls His own, that God holds the nations accountable, that He receives all who repent.

These chapters, Jeremiah 46 to 51, are sometimes referred to as the oracles against the nations, and they in fact form the first part of a triple ending to the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah, in this vast collection, this long prophetic book, has three endings, and I want to list them here for you, so that we can keep our bearings:

- 1) Oracles against the nations (chapters 46-51) – God's Word to the rest of the world
- 2) Final prophetic sign act with the scroll (end of chapter 51)
- 3) Narrative epilogue (chapter 52)

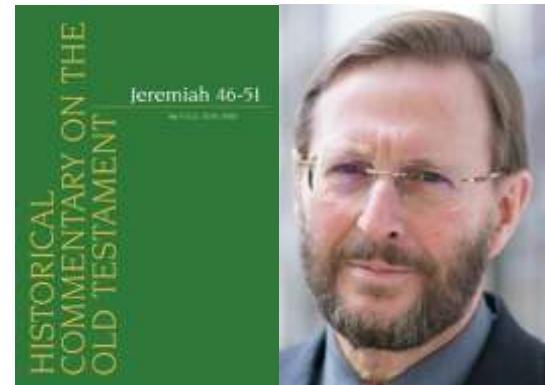
This triple ending will guide us. We are going to explore these three endings together. When we tie these endings together, they build upon each other to provide the theological ending in conclusion to the book.

I want to tell you the ending of the sermon this morning upfront. The ending of the sermon is the theological message of the whole book of Jeremiah, and it's this:

- God watches over His Word.
- God disciplines us for our good.
- God is sovereign over all nations.

Let's explore this triple ending together.

The first ending is the oracles against the nations. These six chapters—Jeremiah 46 to 51—are some of the most difficult chapters in the Bible. I have been greatly helped in understanding them by a man I met this summer at the International Society of Biblical Literature Conference in Sweden. His name is Eric Peels, and he's a Dutch theologian, professor, and pastor. He retired just last year from decades of teaching and preaching. His farewell lecture gives a window into him. The farewell lecture was called "Then I Am Deeply Moved," with the subtitle "Our Images of God and Jeremiah's Image of God." His colleagues called him "the teacher of preferring to listen longer." His teaching motto was "I'd rather listen longer," and what he meant by that was that, when we read the Bible, we should not be too quick to impose our own dogmatic framework or moral grid on the text but listen longer to what the Bible says and then discover what it means and reveals to us about the Lord. He modeled this approach in his own scholarship, and the fruit of it was displayed in his recent book, which is an almost 700-page commentary on just these six chapters of Jeremiah. He worked on this commentary for 15 years, and I heard him present the fruit of 15 years of writing and listening longer. He was given 20 minutes, and I will tell you that at the end of those 20 minutes I was moved. So I want to acknowledge right up front my debt.



These six chapters give us God's Word to the surrounding nations. Jeremiah 46:1 says:

"The Word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations."

This is God's Word to everybody else. In these six chapters we have a chain of citations, and the prominent nations of Jeremiah's world are addressed in order: Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Edom, Damascus, Kedar/Hazor, Elam, and finally Babylon in climactic position. It's all the known



nations around him, bracketed by the superpowers of the day—Egypt to the south and Babylon to the east. We enter the oracles of the nations in the climactic address to Babylon in Jeremiah 50:1:

"The Word that the LORD spoke concerning Babylon, concerning the land of the Chaldeans, by Jeremiah the prophet."

Babylon has been a major character in the book of Jeremiah. Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has been called God's servant, and now God speaks to Babylon in Jeremiah 50:2:

"Declare among the nations and proclaim, set up a banner and proclaim, conceal it not, and say: 'Babylon is taken, Bel is put to shame, Merodach is dismayed. Her images are put to shame, her idols are dismayed.'

The ESV translation “proclaim” is reflective of the Hebrew idiom in the passage that should alert us to the message. What Jeremiah actually says is: *“Declare among the nations and cause them to hear [shema]...”* The great summons of the Bible is to hear who God is and respond in faith. Hear, ultimately, the Word of Christ and respond in faith. The nations are summoned to hear God's Word. God announces that He is Lord of all the earth. He treats the nations the same. The word that is announced is that *“Babylon is taken.”* The principal deity of Babylon is Marduk, also known by the title of Bel. Babylon, the superpower of the world, is taken—a shocking announcement. Her idols are shamed, powerless to save her. This is God's announcement. God's announcement through Jeremiah to Babylon is addressing Babylon at the absolute summit of her powers. She rules the world, and God says in one verse “she falls.” In Jeremiah 50:3, we read:

“For out of the north a nation has come up against her, which shall make her land a desolation, and none shall dwell in it; both man and beast shall flee away.”

If you have journeyed with us this fall, you will recognize that this is the very same language

that is applied to Jerusalem and Judah in chapter 1. The boiling pot was God's disaster from the north for Judah's idolatry. Babylon is subject to the same judgment. Christopher Wright says that Jeremiah affirms that, while God had used Babylon as the tool of His judgment, this did not exonerate Babylon from the violence that characterized its expansion.

Empires are human constructions, and they all tend toward aggression and violence. The principle articulated by Jesus applies not just to individuals, but to nations, cultures, and empires, that all who draw the sword will die by the sword. In the end God visits the evil upon the evildoers, such that they become the victims of their own wickedness, receiving back what they have done to others. This is a strong warning. It's a strong warning to all of us.

In these chapters against Babylon, God uses the same language that describes the just judgments on Jerusalem in the first half of Jeremiah. This means that God holds the nations of the world to the same standards. It means that Israel's relationship to the rest of the world is typological in this sense. It's representative. We see in the end that the violence of Babylon is avenged, that the arrogance of Babylon is brought low, that the gods of Babylon are powerless to save them. And in the end, we see that the fall of Babylon signals the return and restoration of the people of God. Immediately following the announcement of Babylon's fall, we read in Jeremiah 50:4:

"In those days and in that time, declares the LORD, the people of Israel and the people of Judah shall come together, weeping as they come, and they shall seek the LORD their God."

Remember the civil war that happened in the days of Solomon when the kingdom was shattered into two parts, north and south. This is an image of reconciliation. They come with weeping and seeking the Lord. The weeping may be sorrow or it may be tears of joy, but more probably in Jeremiah it's the right, godly sorrow of repentance.

That's the key to the whole narrative in the Bible about restoration and turning to God. It starts with a Holy Spirit-produced repentance and sorrow. You can tell if you are on the road to becoming a Christian when all of a sudden you start to feel bad about things that you did not feel bad about before. It's a prelude to your conversion. If you are here this morning, exploring faith in Christ, and all of a sudden you feel bad about something, that's good news. That's really good news, because that means the Holy Spirit is working, and the resolution of that is faith in the living God. You repent and grieve your sin, and it causes you to seek the Lord. This language of seeking the Lord echoes the earlier promise in Jeremiah 29:11:

"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to

Me, and I will hear you. You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart.”

This is what's being picked up here. In Jeremiah 50:5, we read:

“They shall ask the way to Zion, with faces turned toward it, saying, ‘Come, let us join ourselves to the LORD in an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten.’”

To “ask the way to Zion” is to turn the affections of our hearts away from our idolatries and seek the dwelling of God “with faces turned toward it” and joining in “an everlasting covenant.” The language of “everlasting covenant” picks up what Jeremiah had said earlier in Jeremiah 31, that God will make a new covenant. In Jeremiah 31:40, God describes this as “an everlasting covenant,” that He will never turn away from doing good to us.

The oracles of the nations announced first that God's righteous standard applies to all. The meaning of these chapters is that God's truth is for all the world. There is no other plan, no other Savior.

The second ending of Jeremiah is Jeremiah's final prophetic sign act. Don't you love these prophetic sign acts? Some of us are visual learners and we need to see the truth enacted in front of us. God knows that. He created us with the left side of the brain and the right side of the brain. He knows that some of us delight when we see a page of text, and others need an image or two in there, and some of us think, “Could you just act that out, and then I will see it?”

Remember some of the sign acts: the lesson from the potter's house, the theme of the whole series, and the smashing of the pottery jar in public as the last straw. What about Jeremiah's trip with the oxen yoke on his shoulders? That's an unforgettable picture. What about the prophetic sign act of purchasing the field that had already been taken by the Babylonian army? It's a powerful visual confirmation.

This is the last of the prophetic signs. It's fantastic. In Jeremiah 51:61, Jeremiah says to Seraiah, who is the brother of Baruch the scribe:

“When you come to Babylon, see that you read these words.”

Jeremiah tells his friend Baruch that, when he goes into exile in Babylon, “Don't go empty-handed. Take a scroll in your hand.” The Word of the Lord emerges as the main character in the narrative. Jeremiah says, “When you get there, read aloud all the words written on the scroll. Announce concerning this place.” We have to imagine in our mind's eye that Seraiah is taking this Word of God written on a scroll, and he's going to Babylon



at the very moment that Babylon towers over the world in splendor and architecture, monumental gates, ziggurats reaching into the skies. The walls of Babylon are so wide that you can turn around a horse and chariot on top of the walls. It takes six million bricks to build Babylon, and every single brick is stamped with the name of Nebuchadnezzar and his gods. Seraiah goes with the scroll. You can picture the wealth and power and grandeur of the city and put it on a scale next to a scroll. In Jeremiah 51:62, we read that Seraiah is to announce:

"O LORD, You have said concerning this place that You will cut it off, so that nothing shall dwell in it, neither man nor beast, and it shall be desolate forever."

In Jeremiah 51:63, we read that Jeremiah instructs him:

"When you finish reading this book, tie a stone to it and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates."

As a lover of God's Word, my initial reaction to this is: Don't do that with the Bible. But following Eric Peels' advice, read longer. This is a prophetic sign act. Remember that the king of Judah had destroyed the scroll with fire. And what did God do? "Just grab another scroll and add the words."

This is a prophetic sign act, a dramatic enactment. Seraiah hurls the Word of God into the



Euphrates River. Remember that the Euphrates River is the river that courses through the heart of the city of Babylon. The city is built on either bank of the Euphrates. It's a smooth flowing river. That's the meaning of its name. *"Ephratos"* in Greek means to flow smoothly. It's a good flowing river, just as "evangelion" is a good word. Seraiah throws it in, and he says that Babylon will sink and rise no more. The

Word of God is deposited there as a testimony, hidden, placed at the bottom of the river.

And then we read in Jeremiah 51:64, at the very end:

"Thus far are the words of Jeremiah."

This is the end of Jeremiah's words. The opening words of the book in Jeremiah 1:1, "These are the words of Jeremiah the prophet," are also found in Jeremiah 51:64. This is the second ending.

The third ending to the book is the narrative epilogue. It is probably added by Baruch the scribe. I am going to give you a rapid summary of this epilogue. Baruch narrates in staccato-like fashion that Nebuchadnezzar came in the ninth year of his reign and besieged the city of

Jerusalem for 18 months, and the city fell. Baruch narrates in staccato-like fashion that Zedekiah the king, who refused to listen to God's Word through Jeremiah when the city was about to fall, fled from the scene and escaped through the southeast corner of the city and fled to the Arabah in the desert, but the army of the Chaldeans overtook him in the plains of Jericho. They captured the king and his sons. Nebuchadnezzar took Zedekiah and set his sons in front of him. King Nebuchadnezzar slaughtered all of Zedekiah's sons before his eyes, and then he gouged out Zedekiah's eyes, so the last thing the king saw was the death of his sons.

Baruch narrates in staccato-like fashion that the temple and the city and the royal palace were burned, that great plunder was taken from Jerusalem, that the rest of the vessels of the sanctuary were carried into Babylon, and that Judah was taken into exile in Babylon. We are left gasping as readers until we pause and remember that all of this is exactly what Jeremiah had prophesied would happen. Again in staccato-like fashion, Baruch the faithful scribe adds this appendix to the book to narrate for us that everything that Jeremiah had said would happen if we refused to listen to God's Word happens.

We as readers are left with the overwhelming impression that everything God speaks comes to pass, not just because He knows it in advance. It invites us to a strong, robust biblical faith that God is the one carrying out His will among the nations, that He really does rule the world, and if He rules the world and He holds all people accountable, then surely we can trust Him with our own lives.

Set inside this narrative epilogue are the very final four verses of the book. These final verses sound the final notes of 52 chapters, of four decades of serving God, and these final four verses function like the final chords in Frederick Chopin's Nocturne Number 20 in C-sharp Minor. This famous piece of music is deeply moving. Throughout this nocturne, these melodic and sonorous chords alert us with very moving tones. It's a deeply moving piece of music. It's sometimes referred to by its tempo marking: *lento con gran espressione*, slowly with great expression. If you search for this piece, you will recognize it, the Nocturne in C-sharp Minor. Listen and your heart is moved and moved and moved, and in the very last four seconds Chopin switches from C-sharp minor to C-sharp major. The last notes of the piece burst through the clouds with sunshine. That's what the very end of Jeremiah is like. Baruch adds this, and listen to it closely as we read in Jeremiah 52:31

"And in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth day of the month, Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, graciously freed Jehoiachin king of Judah and brought him out of prison."

Jehoiachin was taken into Babylon when he was 18 years old, in 597 BC. He reigned for just three months. He's been in prison for 37 years, throughout the entire duration of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. The last rays of sunshine in Jeremiah alert us to the fact that there's a new king in Babylon, and the king of Judah is released from prison. In Jeremiah 52:32, we read of the new king:

"And he spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat above the seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon."

And in Jeremiah 52:33-34, we read of Jehoiachin's final days:

"So Jehoiachin put off his prison garments. And every day of his life he dined regularly at the king's table, and for his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, according to his daily needs, until the day of his death, as long as he lived."

As readers, we are left wondering for just a moment, "What is God doing?" The confirmation of all these things receives startling archaeological verification from a three-inch cuneiform clay tablet. That's small. This three-inch tablet was discovered beside the Ishtar gate in Babylon, buried under the rubble of a destroyed city. When it was translated, surprisingly it describes for us the food rations that were distributed to a man called (in Akkadian) *Ya'u-kinu*, king of Yahudu. *Ya'u-kinu* is the Akkadian equivalent of Jehoiachin, and this documents the food rations that were given to him and to his sons. The Jehoiachin ration tablet establishes for us historically and archaeologically that Jehoiachin was a captive in Babylon, that he was still recognized as the king of Judah, and that he was given food for him and his sons to survive.



God's Word to all the world closes with this vivid picture of a ray of hope, showing us that the line of David extends past the fall of Babylon. If you are new to Christian faith, you may get the wise recommendation to start with the New Testament. That's good advice, but in truth, the New Testament comes to us as the climax of the story. When we open the first page of the New Testament, halfway through the first chapter we meet Jehoiachin again. Josiah was the father of Jehoiakim and his brothers at the time of exile to Babylon. Jehoiakim was the father of Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin became the father of Shealtiel, who became the father of Zerubbabel, and 14 generations down is Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, from whom Jesus, called the Messiah, was born. God knows what He is doing. Jeremiah ends with Babylon's fall and God's Word remaining.

How much weight do you put on the Word of God? I would risk my eternity on it. Nations will rise and fall. Kings, leaders, will be forgotten. God's Word endures, and there is one name that

will never be forgotten. When we come back to the theological conclusion of Jeremiah, we come back to this strong conviction. Remember, from the beginning, the almond tree that was blooming, and God said, "*I am watching over My Word.*" We discover in the whole narrative arc of Jeremiah that God's discipline, His correction, is for our good. It's for our good for God's Word to come against us to blow up the idolatry in our hearts and minds. The more I experience that in my soul from the Word of God, I have learned to welcome it. Initially, I thought, "This looks dangerous—God is coming after me." And now, after following Christ for many years, when I see the Word of God coming after me, I welcome it. Cut down the tree of idolatry in my life. Set things on fire with a refining flame. Throw into the Euphrates anything that rises up against God in my life. That's the kind of vision that Jeremiah plants in us.

God watches over His Word. All that He has spoken comes to pass. He uproots, He tears down, and what He says comes true. God disciplines us for our good—a refining fire to produce in us a mature faith. In the end Jeremiah leaves us with the overwhelming impression that God is in fact sovereign over all the earth.

I want to come back to my friend Eric Peels to share with you what he wrote on page 65 of his *Introduction to the Oracles Against the Nations*. Listening long to this portion of God's Word, he comes to the beautiful and compelling ending to ask, "What do we really see of God in these chapters?" He said this:

"In the end, we see that the oracles against the nations are driven by the firm conviction that Yahweh has sovereign dominion not only over Israel but over all nations. The God of Israel is King of the nations, Creator of all that exists, not bound by time or place. He has appointed His prophet over peoples and kingdoms. He can uproot, break down, destroy, and overthrow, but he can also build and plant.

"The image of God portrayed in the oracles against the nations is that of a sovereign God, who relentlessly asserts His rule throughout the world. Yahweh is a king who wages war against his enemies and restores justice. He is not a cold, unmoved avenger, but He is passionately involved, even emotionally, in great indignation over all evil, yet also deeply moved.

"He is the King who rules over all the nations and whose name is Yahweh of hosts. With the same power He used to create the universe, He also operates in history. He is incomparable, unmatched by any power, human or divine. He thwarts the seizure of world power and judges injustice and oppression. He exposes the lie of self-assurance and false confidence and punishes all arrogant pride. Nothing is hidden from him. He destroys idolatry.

"This King marches into battle to punish any power that rises up against Him or against humanity. He is also the Judge who stands up for the oppressed, avenges all evil and makes

justice prevail. With royal authority, He judges all the kings and princes of the earth.

"He is the Redeemer who defends the rights of His people and pleads their cause.

"This God, King-Warrior-Judge, does not carry out His work indifferently. His judgment is the result of His burning wrath over evil and injustice. He abhors all pride, self-assurance, oppression, and abuse of power, and He sweeps it all away in His fury.

"At the same time, He shows profound compassion. The King who punishes evil is the same one who laments the judgment. He weeps over the judgment of Moab. He has regard for the widows and orphans of the victims. God will not abandon the work of His hand. He consoles, restores and radically forgives.

"The combination of great anger and deep compassion, devastating vengeance and hopeful promises, outbursts of violence and tears of sorrow give the image of God a tremendous dynamism.

"There is a high tension here that will be fully manifested in the New Testament proclamation of the cross of Christ. Where the Son is forsaken by the Father in His judgment on all evil, God's love for the world triumphs through the depths of His death."

Eric Peels, *Jeremiah 46-51*

Beloved brothers and sisters, when we say that God is sovereign, we mean that He is a king, a real one. We mean that He is good and powerful, and the fact that God opposes idolatry and hates evil should bring us great joy. At the same time, the God who is revealed in these chapters is a God who offers repentance to all, all who listen, all who turn.

There is a question that we asked at the very beginning of the series: Is Jeremiah's ministry successful? Pastor Scott is going to answer that question next week in great depth and conviction. I want you to know that from my perspective it was. God's Word to us, brothers and sisters, is so precious, so valuable, so enduring, to be treasured, disseminated and shared, to be received as the corrective Word of our Heavenly Father, to be embodied and shared with others as a lifeline of hope.

The theological vision of Jeremiah that leaves us with God's breathtaking sovereignty over all the world allows space for you and for me inside that vision to express to God in worship: "I trust You." You have to have this as one of the bedrock stones in the life of faith. We will face seasons, ups and downs, moments when we are confused, where we lose track of the direction the lives of our children or grandchildren are going, we are not sure what's happening in geopolitics, what's happening in our own jobs or business, what's happening in the school districts around us. We have these moments in the life of faith where we just look around and

say, "I don't know what's going on." We have to have this sewn: that God can be trusted, that God is sovereign, that He is good, that He is powerful, that He is actively working in the world to bring about His will. It's Jeremiah and his faithful ministry over decades that allows us to see it and allows that to be planted deep, deep in our own souls.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, You are good and powerful, and You are sovereign. Lord, thank You for this triple ending of Your Word to all the world, for this dramatic sign act of Your enduring Word, and for this ray of hope at the very end. Lord Jesus, I pray for these my brothers and sisters that You would plant in us the deep conviction and understanding that You, God, do watch over Your Word, that You discipline us in Your love for our good and that You are sovereign over all nations, all peoples, over us. And so, Lord, in the presence of the Great King we stand together and we worship You.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.