

## The Burning Bush—Online article archive

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### Judgment is coming saith the Lord.

Jeremiah 26:8-24.

**The synopsis of the message preached in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church at the morning and evening services on Lord's Day, August 7th 2011, by retired minister, Rev Ivan Foster.**

These messages may be downloaded at the following links:

- [Morning service, Part 1](#)
  - [Evening service, Part 2](#)
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Forty-five years ago, my attention was providentially directed to the book of Jeremiah in a very special way. I had been taught by Dr S. B. Cooke, lecturer in Homiletics in the old Free Presbyterian Theological Hall, that it was the book for today. Indeed it is, for Jeremiah laboured in the midst of apostasy which ended in the judgment of Judah by the Babylonian captivity. In July 1966, when Dr Paisley, Rev John Wylie and I, a student minister of 18 months standing, were beginning a three-month prison sentence in the old Crumlin Road Prison, Belfast, I began to studiously read the book of Jeremiah.

Some eighteen months later, Dr Paisley preached at my ordination in Lisbellaw Free Presbyterian Church on the first chapter of Jeremiah. It is a book to which I have returned many times during my ministry. Today, I find myself turning to it once more. Jeremiah is indeed a model for the end-time preacher.

In this book is presented the message we need to hear today. In this book is pictured the opposition we may expect to face today. In this book is portrayed the courage needed for this day.

The Bible says that: "the thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun," Ecclesiastes 1:9. This holds good in moral things; the same vices are now as ever they were. Men in every age were born in sin, and were transgressors from the womb; from their infancy corrupt. There were the same unnatural lusts and violence in the days of Noah and Lot as now in this present age. There were but few then, as now, that were men of honesty, truth, and righteousness.

The response of God to these things remains the same also. We need not wonder at what the outcome for the community or nation that abandons God's Law and follows sin will be. Jeremiah made reference to the unchanging response of God to sin in his message. His words are quoted by his enemies in verse 9. "Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant?" What the Lord has done before in response to sin He will do again.

The only difference was that the judgment spoken of by Jeremiah was to be more terrible



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than that before experienced.

So it is today. The nations will again experience God's judgment on sin though this time it will be more terrible than ever before.

"And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day," 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10.

Our own land is guilty of great sin of late. Backsliding has been prevalent amongst God's people for quite some time. "Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit," Jeremiah 2:11.

That has been taking place here in Ulster. We have changed the Word of God. We have changed the Law of God. We have changed the character of God. There has been a setting aside of what the Lord says on all the issues of life and a substituting of man's notions. The definition of modesty, the observance of the Lord's Day, the meaning of holiness -all have been altered and that in a downward direction in order to suit the increasing worldliness of God's people.

What we find prophesied for the last days we see taking place before our eyes."This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

We have slipped back so far that the teaching of God's Word on important issues is virtually unknown amongst many of God's people. The basic elements of holiness and godliness have disappeared over the horizon!

Parallels of this may be found in the days of Jeremiah."For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water," Jeremiah 2:13. "O generation, see ye the word of the LORD. Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee? Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number. Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love? therefore hast thou also taught the wicked ones thy ways. Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents: I have not found it by secret search, but upon all these. Yet thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me. Behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned. Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way? thou also shalt be ashamed



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of Egypt, as thou wast ashamed of Assyria. Yea, thou shalt go forth from him, and thine hands upon thine head: for the LORD hath rejected thy confidences, and thou shalt not prosper in them." Jeremiah 2:31-37.

"Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not: Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it? But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone. Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest. Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you. For among my people are found wicked men: they lay wait, as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich. They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge. Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" Jeremiah 5:21-31.

The acceptance of this departure on the part of the people of God is the most heart-breaking aspect of it all. In former times, sin amongst the professing people of God provoked outrage but that indignation is sadly lacking today. We ought to note the behaviour of our Saviour when He encountered sin. Consider these verses which record incidents at the beginning and at the end of His public ministry.

"And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: and when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up," John 2:13-17.

"And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." Matthew 21:12-13.

The spirit of today is not that of the Saviour but rather is that of the days of Noah and of Lot. "And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also



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as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed," Luke 17:26-30. In the days of Noah and Lot, life continued on as usual and no notice was taken of the violence and bloodshed, the abominable activities going on around. A casual indifference to wickedness is what marked the days before those great judgments and Christ says it will be so in the days prior to His return.

Do we not have an acceptance of sodomy, a tolerance of a cavalier disregard of God's law in the setting up of a government in Stormont in which advocates of and participants in murder and terror are given a prominent, a leading role? Christians sit in coalition with men who have participated in the recent campaign of terror and murder by the IRA. Hundreds of thousands of pounds are paid over by the Stormont government, in which Christians hold prominent positions and office, to sodomite organisations without a whimper of protest by those Christians.

Where such blatant violations of God's Holy Law are tolerated it is absolutely inevitable that a host of other transgressions will abound.

This attitude and indifference must be combatted in God's way. That way is the PREACHING OF HIS WORD!

That is why Jeremiah found himself in difficulties. He was warning his nation of the consequences of its rebellion.

His way is the way for God's servants today as they face the tragic descent of the nations into antichristian lawlessness and rebellion. It is not a popular way. It is the way of reproach and misrepresentation. It is the way that those who are concerned only with vote-winning and the admiration of men will avoid at all costs. They remind me of those we read about in John 12:42-43. "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." Such a cowardly spirit will do little for the glory of God or the wellbeing of its generation.

This passage reveals to us the opposition that will be encountered when such a protest is mounted.

### ***I. THE ACCUSATION JEREMIAH FACED.***

"Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, " verse 11.

**1. This is the same spirit that the Saviour faced.** "And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days." Matthew 26:61. He was charged with speaking against the temple of God and it was part of the wicked case built against the Saviour. It was the same with Stephen, the first Christian martyr. The spirit that moved his persecutors was that of the opponents of Jeremiah. "And set up false wit-



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nesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us," Acts6:13-14.

**2. The actual crime was preaching God's Word.** Verses 8, 12. "Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die." "Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard."

There have been times when preaching the Word of God has been a capital offence. It will be that again in our land. Indeed, we already see that preachers have been taken to court in England for daring to state what God's Word has to say about sodomy and other wickednesses today.

More alarming perhaps than this is the fact that there are those amongst God's people who do not like it when God's Word, in its fulness, is proclaimed and there is no sparing of the wrong-doing and the wrong-doers within our society and within the professing church of Christ. There are Christians who cannot look God's Word in the eyes, as it were. They do not like what God's Word says and they don't like preachers preaching all that God's Word states. This was Jeremiah's crime.

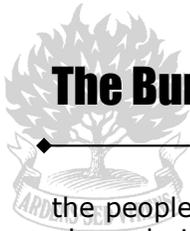
**3. That death was called for shows the depth of hatred there was toward God's servant.** These men desired the death of this faithful and gentle-spirited man. This hatred is of the devil -a murderer from the beginning. "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it," John 8:44.

**4. Note how specific Jeremiah was.** "Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die," verse 8. He spoke "all the words" God gave him to speak.

He did not equivocate or water-down God's message in order to avoid offence. Some men today seek to avoid offending their congregations or any member of the public by being very unspecific in their preaching. That is not being faithful. Note what is said of Moses the great man of God. "And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do," Exodus 24:3.

The same is seen in the preaching of Samuel. "And Samuel told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king," 1 Samuel 8:1.

This too was the standard observed by the apostles. "Go, stand and speak in the temple to



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the people all the words of this life. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught," Acts 5:20-21. May God give His church today such faithful servants as Jeremiah.

**5. The coalition that pressed the charge.** "Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die." verse 8. The priests, the prophets and the people. The servants of the lie led the opposition, for that is who the priests in Jeremiah's day really were. "Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land; and that I should drive you out, and ye should perish," Jeremiah 27:9-10. The people followed liars and sought the death of the man of truth.

### **II. THE ANSWER JEREMIAH GAVE**

Verses 12-14.

**1. I must emphasise the faithfulness of Jeremiah.** "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard," verse 12. When he is challenged he reiterates the message. He does not deny what he said nor seek to retract his words. This was Paul's style too. "And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you," Acts 20:20. How profitable is God's Word! (2 Tim 3:16). Nothing of it is to be concealed or kept back. How cowardly preachers rob their flock when they keep back part of God's message!

**2. The courage and trust in God he manifested.** "As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you," Jeremiah 26:14. The enemy can do nothing with such a man. He was yielded to His Father's will just like the Saviour. ". . . nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done," Luke 22:42. He was going to go to his death, if that be his Father's will, like a lamb. I repeat, how like the Saviour he was. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth," Isaiah 53:7.

**3. The loving kindness and compassion of the man.** He gently warns them of the sin they were about to commit. "But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the LORD hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears," verse 15. Again, this was the Spirit of Christ. "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," Luke 23:34. Jeremiah had no desire to see the wrath of God fall upon this people. It is the same compassion manifested by Stephen. "And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep," Acts 7:60. There is no more loving message than the message which warns sinners of the wrath of God that is to come upon them because of



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their sins. May the Lord give His servants such bold yet gentle compassion today.

### **III. THE ACQUITTAL BY THE LEADERS**

"Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and to the prophets; This man is not worthy to die: for he hath spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God," verse 16.

**1. Even in such an evil time, good men may be found in high places.** Ahikam the son of Shaphan was brought up in better days and was of a godly background. His experience in Josiah's reign and the spiritual stirrings of that day must have lived on with him. "And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying, Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us," 2 Kings 22:11-13.

I believe that there are yet men, even in Stormont, who have memories of better times and of the ways of God. Their actions of late may have been a deep disappointment to us but we ought to pray for them that they might yet stand against the evil that is being done and act in fear of the Lord.

**2. Their regard for God's Word is what made them good men.** ". . . he hath spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God," verse 16. They had a fear of the Lord and His Word. This is what caused them to speak out and resist the desire of the priests and prophets and the people to kill Jeremiah. May the fear of God fall again upon His flock in this land.

**3. A stand for God's Word will find support.** The fear of standing in loneliness against the crowd has cowed many a good man and woman. But it has pleased God ever to give those who stand for Him the comfort of companionship, even if for a time they stand alone. So it is here with Jeremiah.

### **IV. THE APPENDIX TO THE STORY**

Verses 20-24. What a contrast to the story of Jeremiah's stand is the record of Urijah! His story is a warning to God's people.

**1. Here is a man who started well.** "And there was also a man that prophesied in the name of the LORD, Urijah the son of Shemaiah of Kirjathjearim, who prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah," verse 20. He had spoken God's Word with the same faithfulness and plainness as Jeremiah. He had, at the first, shared in Jeremiah's witness for God in a day of apostasy.

**2. However he relied on his own wisdom for his safety in a time of danger.** "And when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men, and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death: but when Urijah heard it, he was afraid, and fled, and



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went into Egypt," verse 21. What a contrast to verse 14. Jeremiah had shown such calm courage when he said, "As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you," verse 14.

Poor Urijah, when faced with the king's rage and threat, resorted to the ways of the flesh and sought safety in Egypt. Well, such a refuge utterly failed him.

That spirit of fear which Urijah showed underlies the formation of the present power-sharing coalition in Stormont. It has been well documented, that faced with the threats of London and Dublin, the Unionist leadership said that they felt that they had no option other than to give in to the demands that they form a coalition with Sinn Fein/IRA. They feared what might be the consequences if they did what they had done before and resisted such corrupt and anti-democratic and immoral demands. That fear has been acknowledged, indeed it has been advanced as an explanation for the course of action that was taken by the Democratic Unionist Party in 2006 - 2007. How far removed from the spirit shown in earlier years to previous blackmailing attempts by the British and Irish governments this retreat by the DUP was.

**3. Urijah's reliance on Egypt ended in death and dishonour.** "And Jehoiakim the king sent men into Egypt, namely, Elnathan the son of Achbor, and certain men with him into Egypt. And they fetched forth Urijah out of Egypt, and brought him unto Jehoiakim the king; who slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people," verses 22 and 23.

Dishonour will ever follow such cowardly actions. There is no escape from persecution and the evil threats of wicked men other than standing firm and trusting in the Lord.

As this world grows darker and the powers of wickedness increase in their opposition to the people of God let each believer remember what the Saviour said. "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels," Mark 8:38.

May we never be ashamed of Christ or His Word.