

A RIGHT WORSHIP EXPERIENCE MAY NOT BE ENOUGH

by Doug Goins

The next three Sunday mornings we are going to sit under the prophetic preaching and writing of Jeremiah, the last major Old Testament prophet to speak for God to the southern kingdom of Judah. During the last forty years of the existence of that nation, Jeremiah faithfully represented the living God to its people. We're going to look at chapter 7 of Jeremiah which is the first formal sermon that he delivered in the gate of the temple in Jerusalem.

To capture the emotional impact of the event, try to imagine a meeting you were in--a class, a church service, a business meeting--where an uninvited stranger arrived and interrupted the proceedings. I have been in that situation a couple of times. One time when I was teaching a seminar a self-appointed prophet wandered in and tried to wrest control of the evening. I remember how uncomfortable it felt. Imagine in your mind's eye that as you streamed into church this morning with all the good fellowship on the patio, some stranger with a bullhorn began to preach at all of you. The leadership here wouldn't have known who he was. He wouldn't have been invited. That would have been an awkward, embarrassing event to go through. This is what happens when Jeremiah arrives and begins to preach in the gate of the temple. I am grateful for Eugene Peterson's commentary on this section of Jeremiah in his book, *Run With the Horses*, (Intervarsity Press, 1983, pp57-69).

We need to go back about fifty years to the reign of King Manasseh in Judah to understand some of the miraculous history that leads up to the preaching of this sermon. Manasseh was the worst king the nation ever had. He was a thoroughly evil man who presided over a totally corrupt government, and he reigned in Jerusalem for 55 years. That's a half-century of spiritual and moral darkness in the nation of Judah. Manasseh encouraged pagan worship. Entire communities in the country were involved in sexual orgies. There was cult prostitution at shrines erected to Baal and Asherah throughout the whole country. He imported wizards and sorcerers from the Far East. The people became enslaved to magic, to superstition, and to fear.

In 2 Kings 21 we're told that Manasseh even took his own infant son and placed him on an altar to the god Molech. In a terrible ritual, he burned him as an offering. The temple, built by King Solomon, was totally desecrated by Manasseh. That temple had been built to be empty of all forms of gods, so that the one true and invisible God could be worshipped in simplicity. Manasseh took the temple and filled it with idols, shapes of beasts, and monsters. Magicians and prostitutes, both male and female, were all over the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. What he had done was to deify lust and greed. Second Kings 21:9 tells us in summary: "Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations had done whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel." Of all the pagan nations, his sin was greater.

The prophet Jeremiah was born in the last decade of Manasseh's rule. Jeremiah learned how to walk and talk and play as a little boy in this evil environment. It really was a slum society. After 55 years of misrule, true faith had come close to oblivion in the land of Judah. There were some godly families, including the family that Jeremiah was born into, a priestly one. Some of those families remembered the messages from prophets of God. They remembered what it was like to worship God wholeheartedly in the temple in true worship. They were like hidden pockets of refugees, faithful people who were almost exiles in their own nation. Manasseh died and his son Amon succeeded him, but things didn't change. The evil continued, however, the people finally couldn't take it anymore, and Amon was murdered. His eight-year-old son Josiah was placed on the throne in Jerusalem, and a miraculous spiritual turnaround began in this nation of Judah. Second Kings 22, verse 2, says of King Josiah, "He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord." From the very beginning as an eight-year-old boy, he had a deep, intuitive longing for God. His corrupt parents couldn't squash it out of him, nor could the evil environment that he was growing up in. God used the spiritual sensitivity of Josiah to bring new life to the nation.

When Josiah was 21 years old, in his thirteenth year of ruling, he began a campaign to root out all the pagan worship in Judah, and he personally traveled up and down the length of the country tearing down the Canaanite high places to Baal and Asherah. He destroyed the places of sacrifice to Molech. At the same time that Josiah began his reform in the land, Jeremiah, as a young man perhaps in his late teens or early twenties, began a nationwide prophetic ministry of teaching. Jeremiah preached up and down the land in the streets calling the people to repentance. His early preaching, in the first six chapters of Jeremiah, drew heavily on the writing and preaching of Isaiah, the prophet to the northern kingdom who had ministered some 150 years before. Just as Isaiah warned the people of the north that God's judgment was coming--exile was coming if they did not turn and surrender to the Lord--Jeremiah preached for five years in the streets at the same time that Josiah's reform was going on. Historians tell us that in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, five years later, he began to renovate and repair the temple itself in Jerusalem.

One of the first discoveries made by the high priest under Josiah, a godly man named Hilkiah, who may have very well been Jeremiah's father (we don't know that for sure), was the long-lost Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. Not one single copy of them had

existed for 250 years in the land of Judah. Josiah immediately had the entire Law read to him as the king. He responded immediately to it in obedience. He destroyed all the remnants of false worship in and around the temple. He sent priests up and down the land of Judah to publicly read aloud the Bible to the citizenry. He reestablished biblical worship in the temple. The Scriptures were read as part of the worship; sacrifices were reinstated; Passover was reenacted. Jeremiah had a ringside seat for this whole reformation. People began streaming back into church, giving flourished, and the temple was remodeled. The Torah became a runaway bestseller in all the Jewish bookstores. Reform was accomplished in the nation. Everything a king's commands could do was done. Conspicuous crime, superstitious religion, and immoral worship were arrested.

Jeremiah was struck by something as he watched all of this unfold. He knew that just getting rid of evil did not make people good. He saw that the reformation was really only skin deep. It seemed that everything had changed, but nothing really had. Outward changes were enormous; the inward changes were impossible to see. At this point in his life, God calls him from a ministry of informal street preaching to preach in the temple gate itself as the worshipers are thronging to church. Look at the first two verses of chapter 7, which are an introduction to his message: his call to preach and his invitation to listen. Verses 1-2:

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the Lord, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the Lord.'"

This is an important introduction because Jeremiah is an uninvited preacher, a stranger probably to some or most of the worshipers. The priests that were there probably knew who he was because he had grown up in a priestly family and his reputation was growing throughout the country. But he's facing, as he stands there that morning, a revival atmosphere of joy and celebration and enthusiasm--high emotion and excitement. These people can hardly wait to get to church. And then they're stopped by this unscheduled interruption before the service can even begin.

Verse 2 says that there are three things that absolutely belong to God. First of all the temple itself is God's house, the place designated for the pure worship of Yahweh. The people had renovated it and had provided their resources to clean it up and remodel it, but it was a holy place. Throughout this sermon, Jeremiah reminds the people repeatedly that they're in a place named for Yahweh, and his name determines his ownership of the place and everything that goes on inside of it. The second thing that belongs to God is each word of the message. The sermon that's going to be preached is not just Jeremiah's opinions on worship and lifestyle. It's a direct word from God through Jeremiah to all the people of Judah who are entering the temple. The third thing that Yahweh owns absolutely is every individual who is going inside that temple to worship. This is seen in the phrase at the end of verse 2, *"all you who enter to worship the Lord."*

The Hebrew word for "worship" is a powerful one. It describes the physical act of actually prostrating yourself on the floor before a sovereign, someone who has complete control over you. He's saying, "As you enter this place you are acknowledging God's complete and absolute sovereignty over every area of your life, and as far as you know, there are no areas of rebellion in your heart or of disobedience in your life." Even showing up for worship affirms their dependent status on the sovereign Lord, and they're expressing their desire to obey God's revealed word. Being in church places important, powerful ethical demands on every worshiper who comes into the temple. We hear that call in the language of Deuteronomy. Verse 6 of Deuteronomy chapter 7 says: "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth." They were God's people. He owned them and was sovereign over them, and the requirements of his covenant love were in effect even as they entered his presence to worship. We're reminded here at Peninsula Bible Church of that same truth every Sunday morning through the words of the apostle Paul from 1 Corinthians 6 at the front of the church: "You are not your own, you are bought with a price." We don't belong to ourselves anymore, and coming here affirms that new ownership.

As we come to the body of the sermon, we might expect some note of congratulations and some rejoicing in the impressive temple reform. You would think that Jeremiah would praise the people for cleaning up the place, getting rid of prostitutes and wizards, and making it safe to walk the streets without getting mugged or murdered. We don't hear anything like that. If Jeremiah were here this morning, he probably wouldn't mention this lovely remodeled room. The message of the sermon is one of danger and warning. He even goes so far as to say that you worshipers are in danger of your very lives.

The first danger that he spells out is found in verses 3-11. It's the danger of a religious image without content, of style without any spiritual substance. Verses 3-11:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.' For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever. Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!'--only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, says the Lord.

The problem here has to do with how the people perceive themselves versus how they really are. He says that their self-perception is

based on *"deceptive words."* We saw that phrase twice, in verse 4 and then again in verse 8. Literally, they are being deceived by "words of the lie." What was the lie they were believing? In verse 4, apparently it was the refrain of a current praise and worship song. The prophet says: *"Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.'"* I don't know what Jewish music sounded like in 700 B.C., but we can imagine these words to the tune of a praise song of today. They loved to sing it. It was beautiful and melodic. Today, you could string any number of phrases together: "born again, born again," "praise the Lord, praise the Lord, praise the Lord." The lie had to do with their being in the right place at the right time but misunderstanding God's desire for them.

In verse 8, again he says, *"You trust in deceptive words to no avail."* The specific thing that they were affirming is in the middle of verse 10: *"We are delivered."* This was the content of the current temple theology that was being taught regularly by the priests to the people. The deception was the belief that this worship experience and place would provide safety, deliverance, and protection from God's judgment on individual sin and national sin. They believed that if they would just show up in the right place and go through the right motions, then they would be safe and protected. Jeremiah is irate. The people are in the right place. They are following the biblical patterns of worship, but they themselves are not right with God. He defines very specifically and piercingly the seriousness of their spiritual condition. He calls the people to account for their hypocrisy. He says that there's a contradiction between their corporate life of worship in the temple and their daily lifestyles at home, in the community, and in the marketplace.

There are two distinct lists in this opening paragraph of the indictments against these people as they stand together in church. In verses 5 and 6, he first raises some concerns about justice in their society. These people are either oblivious to these injustices, or they are actively participating in them. These are legal, relational, economical, and even racial injustices. He talks about the oppression of aliens, those in society of less legal advantage than those who have full citizenship. He speaks of the oppression of orphans and widows. In both of these conditions, they are people who are innocent victims, through no fault of their own, of the premature death of a father or a husband who would be a protector and a provider. These people are not to be exploited because of their disadvantage. He says that they are allowing the shedding of innocent blood in this place. That's speaking of the legal system--judicial murders being carried out against innocent people who don't have the resources to defend themselves. The judicial system was corrupt.

We don't have to look around very far within our own community to see people suffering in all the same ways. Increasingly we have a population of illegal aliens and undocumented workers. By and large those workers are being "ripped off" by employers. It's a great temptation all around us. I remember a couple of years ago, as a pastor dealing with a single mother and her two small children, trying to represent this woman to a landlord who was cheating her and taking full advantage of the fact that she had no resources. Our court system favors those with money and influence, and it penalizes those who don't have resources to defend themselves.

Second, in verse 9 he speaks very personally and directly to individuals. Even if they are not part of the problem socially, he says that there are people in the congregation, in terms of their own personal morality, who are guilty of stealing, murder, adultery, and lying. There are many ways to steal, not just armed robbery. We can fudge on our income taxes or expense reports. We can declare bankruptcy when it is not absolutely required. Any way that we choose to give ourselves financial advantage at somebody else's expense is stealing. Murder: the tongue is probably the most dangerous murder weapon known to man. We assassinate characters and defame reputations with our tongues. Jesus said that if you even think hatred towards someone you are guilty of murder. I'm guilty of that as I look back over my life. Adultery: you may not be an adulterer in the physical sense, but if you are guilty of fantasizing lustfully towards somebody else that you have no right or relationship with, then you have committed adultery. Lying: again, it can be very subtle. I've been convicted that my most besetting sin is probably the lie of exaggeration--putting myself in the best possible light when I relate a circumstance.

Jeremiah summarizes this whole list of attitudes and behavior at the end of verse 10. He calls them abominable. That had to be jarring to those people listening. Abominations! They had gotten comfortable with their sins. They'd rationalized their sins, but God, through Jeremiah, called them exactly what they were--abominable. They were gross and ugly and hideous. In Deuteronomy 7:10 Moses even said that this lifestyle is literally hatred towards God. The root cause of all this behavior is mentioned in two places. At the end of verse 6, it says, *"If you do not go after other gods to your own hurt."* Verse 9 continues, *"You...burn incense to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known."* The problem was that the people had gotten Baal and Asherah out of the temple but not out of their hearts. They had rejected God's authority over their lives and obedience to his word. Again, the language of Deuteronomy 7:16 is striking: "Neither shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you." He says that they are a community of people who are trapped in sins that they are not even aware of. Idolatry is loving anything in life more than we love God--money, a relationship, a career, power, influence, significance. Idolatry is very subtle and often times hard to identify.

I think there are serious implications for us today at Peninsula Bible Church concerning this danger of image without content, of style without substance. It is true that physical settings for worship are important. This room is important. Buildings are places where we gather to offer ourselves to the Lord and to hear his word preached. However, my standing in a church singing praise and worship music doesn't make me holy and righteous anymore than my standing in a barn and neighing makes me a horse. Words and activity in worship are important. How we worship is a personal and dear thing. I spent seven years in this congregation as pastor of worship and arts. I love corporate worship. Now as an elder, I have the responsibility to work with our minister of music to shepherd the worship life of this community. But repetition of biblical words no more sustains a relationship with God than my telling my wife fifty times a day that I love her would sustain our marriage. These are only words. These warnings are important to us at Peninsula Bible Church, especially in times of

success--when everything is going well, when the church has a good reputation, and when attendance is growing. It's easy to believe that everything is fine.

Throughout the history of the people of faith--Old Testament, New Testament, church history--the church has always been in danger when it is popular and when there is a surge of social support for the life of the church. When we all repeat together, "the new covenant, the new covenant, the new covenant," or "spiritual gifts," or whatever other theme we latch onto to find security, we may be in danger. Being in the right place for worship, using the right words for worship, is not the life of faith; it's the opportunity for the life of faith. Those words can just as easily be used as a respectable front for a corrupt self. That's Jeremiah's accusation in verse 11:

"Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it," says the Lord.

A robber's den is a secure place where the gang of outlaws returns after it has pulled a job. They've held up a bank, robbed the stagecoach, or pillaged the unprotected travelers, and after the holdup, they go back to the cave where they are safe. That's a shocking accusation to make against a group of people who are gathered together to worship God. What Jeremiah is saying in this paragraph is: "You have found a safe place, a nice clean temple, haven't you? You spend all week out in the world doing what you want, living as you please, taking advantage of others, exploiting someone weaker than you, cursing the person who doesn't cooperate with your plan, practicing character assassination, trampling over others to gain power or wealth, calling dishonesty in the workplace "business acumen," winning by intimidation, devouring *Cosmopolitan* and *Gentlemen's Quarterly*. And then you come to this temple once a week where everything is ordered and comfortable and secure, and you say it's the right place to be."

Six hundred fifty years later, Jesus himself used this text for his own "spring cleaning" temple sermon in Mark 11:15-17: "And they came to Jerusalem. And he [Jesus] entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold pigeons; and he would not allow any one to carry anything through the temple. And he taught, and said to them, 'Is it not written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations"? But you have made it a den of robbers.'" Jesus does not call the temple a house of teaching or a house of sacrifice or even a house of worship; he calls it a *house of prayer*. It's a place to have communication with the living God of the universe--to look him in the eye, to hear from him, and to respond to him. Paul similarly warned Timothy about people in the church who were "holding the form of religion"--externality, religious performance--"but denying the supernatural power of it." Their religious performance may have been wonderful, but their everyday life was rotten. That's the danger of image devoid of content, of style without substance. We live in a culture like this, and it can subtly influence us to keep up appearances, to come to church week after week, while allowing known sin to remain in our lives. We can fool ourselves, as these people had, into thinking that worship and Bible study will somehow save us from God's judgment on sin.

There's a second warning given in this sermon. It's a warning about the danger of a beginning in faith without a continuation. Verses 12-15 of chapter 7:

Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now, because you have done all these things, says the Lord, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house which is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim [that's a reminder of the ten northern tribes that 100 years before had been taken into captivity by the Assyrians].

Jeremiah continues to shock, confront, and provoke. He wants them to recognize this obvious but avoided truth, and he sends them on a field trip up to Shiloh. Shiloh is one of the most famous holy places in Hebrew history. It was only eighteen miles north of Jerusalem. It was the earliest focus of worship and tribal meeting in Israel. When Joshua brought the people into the land after their deliverance from Egypt, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, Shiloh was where they first assembled to set up the tabernacle and to divide the land among the twelve tribes. The ark of the covenant was kept in Shiloh. The prophet Samuel, the first prophetic voice in the history of the nation, preached and counseled there. Shiloh was a magnificent place. It had a great beginning and a wonderful image. But if you read 1 Samuel 4-6, it tells the story of the fall of Shiloh. The people had begun to look on the ark as a protective charm. They forgot what it meant in terms of God's presence and power and requirements on their lives. They took it into battle against the Philistines. The ark was captured, and the army was totally wiped out. The Philistines came to Shiloh and destroyed the tabernacle. Then they razed the city to the ground making it a pile of rubble. As Jeremiah is preaching this sermon, Shiloh is just a few piles of rocks in a field of weeds. Every traveler in that land who went up and down the main road to Jerusalem to the Galilee in the north could see it as a reminder.

Shiloh had been the right place. The right words had been spoken there, but when the right experience no longer launched a consistent walk of loving obedience to God, it ended up promoting a lifestyle of "wickedness," as the text describes in verse 12. The message was that if it happened to Shiloh, then it can happen to Jerusalem. And if it happened to Jerusalem, then it can happen to Peninsula Bible Church. Shiloh had Samuel and the ark of the covenant. We were blessed with Ray Stedman and the message racks. But if we stop being a place that calls people to righteousness, God could care less about this building and this institution.

For each one of us, probably the most important word in this message is that a beginning in faith without a continuation is a dangerous lie to live. To go through the motions of religious activity without growing in grace, to settle for a low maintenance Christian life, with a weekly boost of good worship and good Bible teaching on which we don't act, is dangerous because it will eventually dull our spiritual

sensitivity. It will be like a drug that will eventually blur truth. That was the concern of James in chapter 1, verse 22: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves [that's self-deception again]. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like." That's confusion about spiritual identity. The end result of that is destruction, and it was graphically described at the end of our paragraph from Jeremiah. It's a frightening picture of invasion by the Babylonians. It's going to be deportation and death in captivity. God had been speaking and calling, but the nation wasn't listening or answering. Again, continual worship experience itself without obedient response can become a powerful evil influence in our lives. Failure to obey truth is infinitely worse than no knowledge of truth. Continued disobedience affects our heart, our soul, and our conscience. We become desensitized to spiritual reality, and the final result is pictured here at the end of the paragraph--God's judgment on sin.

This is a lot of bad news which is unsettling. You probably feel as uncomfortable about this whole thing as I do. But there is good news that shoots through this powerful sermon, the brilliant shining light of hope for redemption. The first ray of light that you can see is in verse 13. God says that when he spoke to them persistently, they didn't listen. That speaks of God's character. God never stopped "calling," telling Judah how he loved her, and for forty years, Jeremiah kept calling the nation back to a God of love who had entered into a covenant marriage with them. It says that God was persistent. That word is used eleven times in the book of Jeremiah to describe the faithfulness of God. He keeps speaking and calling even when people ignore him. He's even calling to some of us this morning in merciful love, convicting us of sin in our own lives. That's not bad news; that's good news if we've been made aware of something that we need to deal with before the Lord.

The second image of hope is in verse 3: *"Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will let you dwell in this place."* And again we see it in verses 5-7: *"For if you truly amend your ways and your doings...then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever."* Twice the Lord says that it really is possible at any time to amend our ways, to allow a spiritual transformation to change our habitual ways of thinking. That word "ways" means attitudes--the ways we think, the ways we view things. God can change our stubborn, sinful attitudes from the inside out. It's also secondarily possible at any time to amend our doings. That's our lifestyle and behavior. There can be spiritual reformation to change our stubborn sinful behavior. Again, the good news is that right now anyone of us can repent of sin. If there's something in your consciousness right now that you know you're guilty of, God wants to forgive it and heal it and start you over again.

The third message of hope is a wonderful promise that if we repent, if we amend our ways and our doings, he will let us dwell in this place. We saw this in verses 3 and 7. He will let us dwell in the land of old that he gave to our fathers. The word "dwell" means to be at home, to be comfortable. If you want a picture of dwelling, think of a place in your own house that's most comfortable for you--maybe your favorite chair that you love to sit in or your bedroom. It's a place where you feel secure, where you can be yourself, and where you're fully accepted. That's the promise of God. If we amend our ways and our doings, we can experience peace and security. We can be at home in the household of faith with other brothers and sisters. We can enjoy all the benefits of fellowship, worship, and ministry. It's grace. God is generous. He desires the best for us. What he offers is the chance to be a full participant in congregational life and not just a frustrated observer hoping that the experience will somehow make us feel better. A lot of folk come to church for that reason. The offer is not to feel better but to be at home in the security of God's love. That's a lot better than playing church. The bottom line for all of this comes from another prophetic voice, which says that God loves obedience much more than sacrifice.

I was trying to think of a picture that could capture this relationship between the corporate worship that we enjoy at a time like this and our daily lives lived out before the Lord. I thought about the relationship between wedding services and marriage. Yesterday afternoon one of our pastors had the great joy of marrying two wonderful individuals in this auditorium. It was a great festival. I've told people that the most fun part of my job as a pastor is marrying men and women who love the Lord. I do lots of weddings as all the pastors here do. But I tell couples in premarital counseling, and it's rather hard for them to understand at first, that weddings are easy; staying married is extremely difficult. Couples understandably want to plan a wedding service; I want to help them plan a marriage. They want to know where the bridesmaids are going to stand; I want to help them develop a plan for forgiveness in their relationship. They want to talk about the music of the wedding; I want to talk about the emotions of married life. I can do a wedding in about twenty minutes with my eyes almost closed. A marriage takes year after year of wide-eyed attention.

Now weddings are important. They are beautiful, impressive, emotional, and sometimes expensive. We are careful to be at the right place at the right time and to say the right words. Every detail of the service is important, but all the same, weddings are easy. Marriage is complex and difficult. It's in marriage that we work out, in every detail of life, the words, the promises, and the commitments that we speak at the wedding. In marriage we develop the long, rich life of faithful love that the wedding promises and announces. The event of the wedding without the life of marriage doesn't amount to very much. Even if my wife and I re-enacted our wedding ceremony each year on our anniversary, if we dressed up in our wedding clothes everyday and sang, "We are married, we are married, we are married," if there is no daily love shared--no continuing tenderness, no forgiveness asked and received, no attentive listening, no creative giving, no lifestyle of blessing each other as husband and wife--then the wedding service is a sham and the marriage is an empty charade. Josiah's reform and the temple services were like a wedding. Jeremiah's concerns were with the marriage, a love relationship with the Lord lived out day after day.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I pray that each one of us knows clearly the difference.

Catalog No. 4310
Jeremiah 7:1-15
First message
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November 10, 1991
Updated September 19, 2000

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