

## **The Exposition of God's Word: Ah, Lord God!**

**Jeremiah 32:17-25**

By [Lynn Downing](#)

*March 18, 2012 – Morning Sermon*

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, we gratefully acknowledge You are the Potter and we are the clay. We need Your shaping in our lives. We need Your molding. We thank You that You have called many of us to know You and belong to You in Jesus Christ. We pray that today You will call the rest. We pray that You will grant to us Your truth. Help us to hear from You and we pray that You will help us to know how to respond to You. We pray that we will respond to You with supple minds and with eagerly worshipful hearts. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, Amen.

We will read from God's Word and this is from Jeremiah 32:17. I will read more later from this passage but we'll start with this verse from Jeremiah 32:17 which says [17] 'Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you. I was reading this passage of Scripture a couple of months ago and was struck by the response that Jeremiah had to God in the context and the situation in which he found himself in Israel, in his own life and in his family. I'll say a little bit more about that in a moment but there is a very pregnant content to this expression when he says "Ah, Lord God!" He says that in some other places in his prophecies as well and the meaning of it in each case depends on the context on which it's found.

In this particular case there is something of a mixture of mystery and wonder. By that I mean the mystery of wonder and not the wonder of awe although he is awed of God. There is something of a mixture here of his knowing that if he wants to know what's going on God is the one he approaches and he approaches him rightly. There is also a sense of perplexity and while the situation as it was could be very overwhelming Jeremiah doesn't seem to be overwhelmed. He is perplexed but not overwhelmed and we want to see how that teaches us in our relationship with the Lord in this study.

I want to ask you a few questions which will sort of relate then to now because there is a close relationship between then and now as far as the context of this passage. Are any of you interested in the economy? Are any of you interested in

real estate these days? Are any of you interested in freedom of speech in ministry and in other matters? Are any of you interested in domestic and international welfare of this country and other countries because all of this has implications in this passage and then finally individually speaking are any of you in a position of difficult personal circumstances in your own life? So what was happening at this particular time when Jeremiah expresses before the Lord "Ah, Lord God!"? Several very traumatic things were going on. Number one, the siege mounts were ramps that would be built up against the wall of the city of Jerusalem. The siege mounts were in construction and some had already been finished. The siege from Babylon against Israel in Jerusalem was already obviously underway. The second thing that was happening was Jeremiah had been told by the Lord multiple times to prophecy that Babylon would succeed in the conquering of Israel and in the destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah had been very faithful to pass this information on in his prophetic responsibility as a spokesman, the mouth piece for God.

The problem is the king didn't like the message and he didn't like it to such a degree that he took Jeremiah and put him in jail. This is the way we sometimes deal with the messenger instead of the realities of the message and that's exactly what happened in Jeremiah's case. Jeremiah now is in the court of the guard. He is in prison because he has had his freedom of speech taken away from him. Then to top it off and this is in God's design but it would have been interesting to know what was going on in Jeremiah's mind when he found out about this, God told Jeremiah his cousin would come to him to try and sell him a piece of property. The cousin was Hanamel, the son of Jeremiah's uncle. Sure enough Hanamel did come and want to sell him a piece of property. What a time for a family member to come and try to foist off a land deal on somebody as far as the overall context is concerned. Those were the things that were going on – the conquering of Israel, Jeremiah being in jail and his cousin in the midst of all that is happening comes to him to sell Jeremiah a piece of property.

It was Jeremiah's right to own it because of the family relationship, his cousin wants him to buy it and the interesting thing is Jeremiah bought it because he came to realize this was a design of God. There was something that God was going to be saying not only to Jeremiah but to Israel itself through this land deal that would take place between Hanamel and Jeremiah. With that in mind I'd like to read the rest of the passage from Jeremiah 32 that I started earlier. I will read a section now and a section a little later. Jeremiah 32:17-25 says

[17] Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you. [18] You show steadfast love to thousands, but you repay the guilt of fathers to their children after them, O great and mighty God, whose name is the LORD of hosts, [19] great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the children of man, rewarding each one according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds. [20] You

have shown signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and to this day in Israel and among all mankind, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day. [21] You brought your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and outstretched arm, and with great terror. [22] And you gave them this land, which you swore to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey. [23] And they entered and took possession of it. But they did not obey your voice or walk in your law. They did nothing of all you commanded them to do. Therefore you have made all this disaster come upon them. [24] Behold, the siege mounds have come up to the city to take it, and because of sword and famine and pestilence the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans who are fighting against it. What you spoke has come to pass, and behold, you see it. (Here is where the perplexity enters into his voice and in his expressions to God, not overwhelmed but wondering what is going on with this land deal.) [25] Yet you, O Lord GOD, have said to me, “Buy the field for money and get witnesses”—though the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans.

That was a lot of introduction to ask a question but the interesting thing is if you read this in the context you discover that the long introduction is far more important than the asking of the question and Jeremiah knew that. Jeremiah 32 has two particular points that I want to share with you. There are more in this chapter but I just want to look at these two. One of them seems to be in passing but it isn't and then the second one comes up a little bit later.

First of all, what seems to be in passing is how you approach God in hard times. How do you approach God in what we would call humanly speaking hard times? What I have just read to you is a prayer Jeremiah is praying and we're listening in on it. This is very important to understand as a beginning reality in knowing how to approach God in hard times by the example and teaching of this particular passage. Jeremiah approached God in all the perplexity, confusion and turmoil of this atmosphere and these conditions, with focus upon God Himself, with understanding of the nature of God and that's the reason Jeremiah was not overwhelmed. He was perplexed as to what this land transaction was for but he found out what this was a little later on. Because he knew who God was through communion and communication with God, he dwelt on God in the situation instead of dwelling on the circumstances.

Don't get me wrong. We are emotional people, more in some cases than in other cases and when things happen that we wished had not happened there will be a sense of anxiety to some degree. The degree to which we'll have that anxiety will depend on how we follow the example of Jeremiah rather than just being overwhelmed at the complications that seemingly have overtaken us. That was his response. He focused on God with an understanding of God instead of dwelling on the problem in and of itself or by itself.

There are four parts to this prayer. I will go through them fairly quickly in order to orient you as to what they are. There is first of all what some commentators call the groan. I don't think it's particularly a groan because looking at the other expressions where Jeremiah comes to God and says "Ah Lord God" you have to understand what's behind this in the context. The first thing he says here is "Ah, Lord God" and the "Ah" is an expression that comes across as "Hey these are different circumstances." Then the two following words are worshipful acknowledgment that there is a sovereign, "Ah, Lord God." That is the reason I said earlier that this is a very pregnant expression. It is filled with the wonder of worship and also the trust of confidence in the Lord God in light of the situation that was before him. It's something that you would find in Philippians 4, where we are told to be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. This is a supplicatory "Ah, Lord God." That is the first thing he does.

The second thing he does in this prayer is he praises God for His mighty acts. What's going on here? He is looking to the powerful One. He is reminding himself in the presence of God of the might, power and the nature of the Lord God. He focuses on two of the major mighty acts of God. They are creation and redemption. In him reminding himself in prayer before the Lord of not only the power but the creating wisdom of God, he is being built up in his ability to understand and respond to the situation that is before him. There are places in Scripture that the creating work of God is referred to and couched in context of the fact that God created the world not only by His power but by His wisdom. That is one of the things that Jeremiah is focusing on here.

Secondly, he focuses on in Jeremiah 32:17 that God has made the heavens and the earth by His great power. The other noteworthy act that he reminds himself of is the redeeming work of the Lord. Then he gives a short history lesson about how God did redeem His people by bringing them out of Egypt. Let me put up a parenthesis here. If I were to walk up to you today and say "Have you been redeemed?" you might think that I was asking you if you had been converted but redemption is more particular than that. It is more specific than that. It is a part of an overall saving work of Christ that He accomplished for us on the cross but redemption is very particular, very specific. It refers to the ransom payment that Jesus made in order to deliver us out from under the bondage, power and domination of sin so that we could live in such liberty that we could with confidence say "I can now do all things through Christ who strengthens me." That's the Biblical idea of redemption. So is it any wonder that that is the focus here where he talks about the redeeming of Israel out of the bondage of Egypt and all of the power and miraculous content that was apart of that great deliverance out of bondage at that time. Jeremiah 32:20-22 says

[20] You have shown signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and to this day in Israel and among all mankind, and have made a name for yourself,

as at this day. [21] You brought your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and outstretched arm, and with great terror. [22] And you gave them this land, which you swore to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey.

So that is the second thing he does. The first is the expression “Ah, Lord God” and second is a revealing in his own mind these two major mighty acts of God.

Thirdly, he worships God by listing and focusing on some attributes of God. One of the commentators I read said he crammed all of the attributes he could in two and a half verses. Here is what they are. He talked about the omnipotence of God when he said ‘nothing is too hard for You.’ You are the One who created the earth and the heavens and nothing is too hard for You. That is a great thing to say with confidence when the enemy is besieging the city, when you’re in jail and this other added thing of someone trying to sell you property at a really inconvenient time. In addition to omnipotence he talks about the covenant love of God. He said

‘You showed steadfast love to thousands.’ What does he mean when he says ‘steadfast love’? Steadfast love is the nature of covenant love. Nothing would ever permanently stop either the fulfillment or the application of the covenant of grace. That is the focus here at this particular point in his emphasis on the steadfast love of God as manifested through the giving, development, fulfillment and application of the covenant of grace. Then he talks about the justice of God. It’s not a good thing to forget that God is a just God and maintains His righteousness always, even at the expense of giving His Son to satisfy that righteousness and justice on our behalf. He even judged His own people and He is now judging them again with this captivity that is underway where they will be taken into Babylon and will be in that captivity for at least seventy years. This commentator I used says a couple of other things as well. These verses show that the prophet remembered the Lord to be a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generations to those who hate Him. Post modern ideas sometimes feel uneasy about God’s justice as if it is wrong for God to punish sin but if we have any understanding of the Scripture we know that there is never any hesitation on God’s part to defend and set forth His righteousness and His justice. We also know that He did that on our behalf in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

The fourth of these characteristics of the Lord that Jeremiah focuses upon these attributes is God’s omniscience, His knowing of all things. It says You reward each according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds on the basis of perfect knowledge in their lives. In transitioning into the fourth characteristic here is what this commentator said. This prayer is rich in its praise of the attributes of God. Jeremiah worships God for His omnipotence, His omniscience, His love and His justice. The prayer is highly theological, informed by his understanding of the rich doctrine of God and the same thing ought to be true of the prayers of

every Christian. That is how do we approach God in hard times? We approach Him on the basis of a knowledge of who He is that is studied and understood. The commentator goes on to say that you must have a theology before you can have a prayer life. You must have an understanding of God. What is theology? It is the study of God. You must have a studied theological understanding of God before you can have any substantial prayer life.

The final of these four things is Jeremiah's prayer concerning his own situation and this little indication of perplexity in Jeremiah 32:25 which says [25] Yet you, O Lord GOD, have said to me, "Buy the field for money and get witnesses"—though the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans." It's worth noticing the proportions of this prayer. This is a major part of the point I want to make in how we approach God in hard times. The prophet spent more time praising God than he did talking about his problem. Does that mean we try to discount our problem? No. Does that mean we try to minimize it and stick our head in the sand like the proverbial ostrich? No, but it means that it is more important to know the nature of God than to be fixed paralyzingly on the problem at hand. That's exactly how Jeremiah dealt with this situation. An evangelist by the name John Guest said "Jeremiah offered seven parts of praise to one part of puzzlement." There is how we approach God. I want to say a little more about this before I get into the second of these two major points.

What is the instruction that comes to us in our day out of all that I have shared with you in this study that Jeremiah has told us? Obviously, by example and instruction it shows us that we are to do something that once you discover this word you find it comes up over and over again in the Scriptures. We are to wait on the Lord with knowledgeable focus. If we wait on Him our knowledgeable focus will become more informed and more acute but knowledgeable focus will not be apart of our life and our relationship with the Lord unless we are practiced with our intimacy with Him in the way of waiting upon Him. Preoccupation with circumstances left to ourselves will be debilitating and paralyzing to us. We're inclined that way already.

It's important to know that this way of approaching God, this process of approaching God has to be understood, practiced and rehearsed almost even before the time of pressure and complication. Isaiah 40:31 says [31] but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. I think this is talking about physical stamina but I think it's primarily talking about spiritual stamina. It's talking about knowledge and understanding that equips us to not be toppled, overwhelmed or defeated when those things happen that we certainly wouldn't choose, whether it's the economy, real estate woes or other personal complications. One of the great rich privileges that God has given to us in our relationship to Him is to know Him with practiced intimacy. That's apart of this waiting on Him.

I think there are at least three elements of levels of prayer that we need to be familiar with. There is first of all the ultimate purpose of prayer which is not necessarily obtaining things although that's Biblical, legitimate, right and a wonderful provision of the Lord, but the highest purpose of prayer is unhurried, worshipful, meditative, communion with Him before His face. Why do I say before His face? It is because the tendency of myself and maybe of you is to come to His hand. While there is nothing wrong in coming to His hand, if that's all we do, we leave off the ultimate purpose of prayer which is to come to Him before His face. I'll say a little bit more about that with a passage from the book of Numbers in a few moments.

Humanly speaking Jeremiah had reason to be overwhelmed and while it's obvious he was perplexed he does not seem overwhelmed. Why was that? It was because he had developed two abilities in this waiting before the Lord in this practiced intimacy with the Lord that's also available to you and me and required of you and me. The two things are he was able to think rightly about God on the basis of this practiced intimacy and secondly he was able to trust God as we're told in that very familiar passage "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding (inabilities)." You ain't got none. This is bad grammar for emphasis. If we try to strengthen our way through this with our own resources we will be more than perplexed. There are many occasions when we will be overwhelmed but if we follow the instruction of this passage and trust Him, once again to be in this practiced intimacy with Him in unashamedly, unhurried, worshipful, meditative communion with Him before His face. That's the point in passing and it's a pretty big point to be in passing, isn't it?

What then would we say is the larger of the two points from this passage? The one that I have just given to you is a part of this larger one but I wanted to deal with it by itself. The second is God's sovereign orchestrations toward the fulfillment and application of the covenant of grace which is found in the second passage I want to read to you in Jeremiah 32. Let me give you some context since we stopped from the passage before. There is a preoccupation and description of the captivity in Babylon for seventy years and now he is going to talk about the fact that the Lord is going to bring them back. He is going to restore them to the land and this property sale is an illustration so that when Jeremiah buys this property from his cousin God is orchestrating through Jeremiah as a demonstration to His people that while things are the way they are now this is not the way they will always be. They will come back from captivity and have life again in the way He will describe it in this passage. I will tell you after I read this what the big point is for then and for now where this is concerned. Jeremiah 32:37-41, 43-44 says

[37] Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. [38] And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. [39] I will give them one heart and one

way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. [40] I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts that they may not turn from me. [41] I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul. [43] Fields shall be bought in this land of which you are saying, 'It is a desolation, without man or beast; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.' [44] Fields shall be bought for money, and deeds shall be signed and sealed and witnessed, in the land of Benjamin, in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, in the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the Shephelah, and in the cities of the Negeb; for I will restore their fortunes, declares the LORD."

What is the point of that? Way back in the Garden of Eden God gave the first declaration of the Gospel. It certainly wasn't as clear and as readable as we see it in our day with the coming of Christ and with the New Testament description about the content of the Gospel, but it was the Gospel nevertheless. It is referred to as the first evangelism - proto-evangelium, the first Gospel. What was it? It was that Jesus would win. What is the Bible? One way, not the way, we can describe the Bible is like this in order to show the consistency and the continuity of it. In Genesis 1 through 3 there is the creation, the fall of man into sin and then God responding to the need of the fall of man into sin with that promise, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed" and then the declaration that the seed of the woman would crush the head of a serpent, the seed of the serpent.

What is the Bible? The Bible is the written record of the history of the giving, the development, the fulfillment and the application of the covenant of grace. Wherever you are you read where you are in the Scripture in light of that continuity that puts it all together. What we have just read in Jeremiah 32:37-41, 43 and 44 is the reassurance that nothing will ever stop the development, the fulfillment and the application of the covenant of grace. There have been many times in the history of Israel that it looked like there might be an end to this little nation. When we look at it we understand what's really going on.

One of them was when Abraham was called from God to sacrifice his son Isaac. Isaac was the beginning of the covenant line after the promise given to Abraham, Isaac and then on down the line. I'm sure that Abraham's response way back then was the same as Jeremiah's would be later on, knowing that with the knowledge and understanding of God therefore I will obey. Only with the knife in the air God stopped him after testing his faith and provided a substitute for the sacrifice and worship process that was about to happen.

What are a couple of other places that are more specific than that? There were a couple of places that it looked like the covenant of grace or the security of the people of God might be jeopardized and come to an end. One of those times was

when Joseph was second in Egypt and the covenant line depended on him recognizing his brothers and providing food for them so they didn't starve to death and the whole promise of God coming to an end as a result of that cessation of that seed line. Another occasion was when that kid (David) killed that giant. What would have happened if Goliath had won? That would have released the Philistines to annihilate Israel. That would have been humanly speaking. Now this wasn't going to happen, we understand that but humanly speaking that would have been the end of the covenant line. God used a child to kill a giant to show to you and me even in our day that the covenant of grace is absolutely unbreakable. The Babylonian captivity or the prophets of God in jail or the complications of an ill timed in the mind of Jeremiah requirement to buy a piece of property, could bring to an end or stop the complete fulfillment of the covenant of grace. Nothing could stop it.

What does that say to us about Christ and the Gospel? First of all it says that the covenant would not be stopped just as it would definitely be fulfilled, so we can also listen to Jesus when He says "I will build My church and not even the gates of hell will be able to prevail against it." What is the purpose of evangelism? If you say it is to win people to Christ so that they can have salvation and belong to God that is true but it's only partially true. The ultimate purpose of evangelism is the building of the church, the completion of the Kingdom which is apart of the application of the covenant of grace. It's going to happen.

Another thing we can listen to the Lord Jesus say is "I am with You always, even to the end of the age" in the application of the covenant of grace. Here are the last words added. "I will never leave you nor forsake you" and then hear these very descriptive passages from Ephesians and II Peter. Ephesians 1:3-4, 7-8a says

[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, [4] even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. [7] In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, [8] which he lavished upon us...

Then in II Peter 1:3-4 it says

[3] His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, [4] by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Those are the things we can know about Christ in light of His unbreakable covenant of grace.

What does it tell us about the Gospel? It tells us that not even the Babylonian captivity will hinder the full development of the Gospel as we're able to know it and live in it in this day and time. It also says that the Gospel is very narrow, very exclusive and very requiring. Look at all the "trouble" that God went to, to purify and teach His people even taking them into captivity for a long period of time and then re-establishing them in order to show that He is rigid in His requirements of how to be acceptable to Him and that rigidity has never ever been changed and will not be. The wonderful thing is that Jesus met the requirements. Matthew 7:13-14 says [13] "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. [14] For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

The covenant of grace has been fulfilled in Christ and it has been available but now I would ask you this question in closing. We know the covenant of grace has been fulfilled and applied in many cases but has the covenant of grace been applied in your life? Do you know the full application in that the question is, do you know Jesus Christ? If not that can be changed before you finish reading this today. You can ask Christ to come into your life and all that has been talked about by Jeremiah and all these New Testament passages will come to its full fruition in the fact that you will be put into a position of having practiced intimacy with the Lord Himself. On the basis of that you can with the knowledge of God and the understanding of who He is that grows and grows, you won't have to be toppled or overwhelmed, perplexed at times sure, but you'll have all sorts of proper equipment with which to approach God in the difficulties and complications of this life. Would you like to have that?

If you do have Christ already I would ask you, have you developed practiced intimacy with Christ, unhurried, worshipful, meditative communion with Him before His face? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Our Father in heaven we want to thank You for Your loving kindness and tender mercy. We pray that You will grant to each person reading this a response to You according to the needs of our minds, our hearts, our souls and our circumstances. Those who need to repent of sin and place their faith in Jesus Christ we ask that You will cause them now to do so as they pray this prayer "Lord Jesus, I acknowledge that I am unworthy but I acknowledge that You have given Yourself for me and I now place my trust in You with confession of my sins. I ask You to forgive me and be the Lord and Master of my life." Amen.

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