

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Against the Flow

(studies in Jeremiah)

Commission: IMPLAUSIBLE

(Introduction and background; Jeremiah 1)

Study #1

Introduction: Domesticated bears...

As is typical, my annual week-long backpacking trip with sons Ben and Zach was refreshing. There were lots of highlights and only a few minor mishaps.¹

The trip we just completed was different in that it was the first time we have gone in a national park. In the past we have always spent our week traipsing around in designated wilderness areas, where there are virtually no rules.

In Rocky Mountain National Park, thought, there are rules.

- Use the designated “privy.”
- Pitch your tent on a tent pad.
- No campfires in most campsites.
- And - get this - carry a bear-proof canister for your food.

A bear-proof canister weighs about three pounds. It is a two to three gallon hard-sided plastic container with a screw top lid and locking tabs.² Park regulations said that all our food had to be stuffed into the canister each night.

¹ I’ll mention many of these in the weeks ahead; after all, the reason I go backpacking is to collect sermon illustrations...

² On previous models, the bears just unscrewed the lid, but they can’t seem to figure out the tabs. Opposable thumbs would help...

If you are thinking that carrying the canisters was a bit of a pain, you’re absolutely right. If you are thinking that we were required to carry the canisters to protect our food and our safety, you’re dead wrong.

Park Rangers will assure you that the canister is **NOT** for the protection and welfare of the visitors to Rocky Mountain National Park. The canister is to protect the bear.³

See, once a bear gets into people food, he gets used to it. He becomes a pest. And once he becomes a pest, he has to be put down.

If he is not put down, he’ll starve because he’s become domesticated. There are stories - especially of bears in Yellowstone National Park - of grizzly bears dying by the side of the road in the winter because they have gotten so used to foraging in station wagons that they have lost the skills needed to survive the wilderness.

There is nothing more pitiful than a domesticated bear. It is tragic to even think that one of the most majestic creatures on the planet could be reduced to begging on the side of the road, stripped of his wildness, his prowess, because he took the easy path of grabbing tourists’ bologna sandwiches.

If there is anything more pitiful than a domesticated bear, it is a domesticated man or woman.

God intends that there should be a certain wildness about us. Unpredictability, spontaneity, passion and fire are part and parcel of what it means to be fully human.

We were not made to be tame. We are each designed by God to be unique, not carbon copies of each other. Exploration and adventure is in our gene pool. We are called to live life to the fullest.

Our society would have us define ourselves as consumers in lock step with other consumers. But taking the road less traveled is our birthright.

³ There are only twenty four black bears in all of Rocky Mountain National Park. (don’t ask me how they know)

The Bible would tell us that following God's lead leads to the least domesticated, wildest ride life offers.

As Exhibit A of the most undomesticated people ever, I submit the Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah. Jeremiah is a wild man, one of the most compellingly undomesticated men I've run across in life or literature.

He is a man to admire for his **courage, tenacity, perseverance** and for his **robust trust in God**.

Surrounded by a generation of people who did not stand for God, Jeremiah did. In a society that was supposedly all about God (the nation of Israel) He went "against the flow" of the popular, prevailing compromising, mediocrity-addicted religious culture.

I propose that you and I become acquainted with this remarkable man by exploring the book he has left us.

Why Jeremiah?

A very long book...

Jeremiah's is a long book. Anybody can see that by looking at its fifty two loooong chapters. In fact, except for the massive collection of songs contained in the Psalter, Jeremiah is the longest book in the Bible.⁴

His book is both timely AND timeless.

To fully understand the book's message we need to be familiar with the history of the Jews - especially that part of Israel's story recorded in the last part of 2 Kings (chapters 21-25) and 2 Chronicles (chapters 33-36). That's where we read of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem.⁵

Jeremiah wrote his book to be timely. It arose out of a very specific historical context.

But Jeremiah also brings us the timeless message of God's faithfulness and grace and the victory of faith.⁶

The book is a literary masterpiece. In certain places, Jeremiah writes a narrative of historical events in simple prose. In other sections, he writes complex and highly charged poetry.

His personality permeates every speech, narrative and prayer recorded in the book. We learn from him as we watch him brood, worry, mourn, exult, and lash out.⁷ In each and every section of the book the great heart and the gut-wrenching honesty and the character of the man comes shining through.

An intriguing personality...

It is Jeremiah - the man himself - that has prompted me to want to open this book with you on Sunday mornings.

Of course he prophesied of coming events, as did all the prophets. And where he does so, we'll note that foretelling.

But it is his forthtelling - his courageous truth-telling - that is most compelling.⁸

Jeremiah told the truth, even when the truth was most unpopular. He confronted religious hypocrisy.

⁶ And just a clue: Jeremiah did not arrange his material the way you and I would have, that is, chronologically! He wasn't playing fast and loose with history by placing events out of order. He is just not arranging his material the way we would if we were writing a book today. He arranges thematically, not chronologically. The oracles were written down, per a commandment recorded in chapter 36. Decades passed between the giving of the prophecies and their being committed to a scroll. The structure of the book of Jeremiah is roughly as follows: 1-25 - divine judgment on Judah and Jerusalem; 26-29 - controversy with false prophets; 30-33 - book of consolation; 34-39 - incidents from the days of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah; 40-45 - Experiences after the fall of Jerusalem; 46-51 - oracles against the nations.
⁷ Jeremiah seems to have been particularly influenced by Hosea, a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel.

⁸ The ministry of the prophet was to (at times) foretell what was to happen in the future as well as to (more often) forthtell the Word of God in the current situation. Jeremiah certainly did both.

⁴ Isaiah has more chapters, but Jeremiah has many more words!

⁵ It will also be helpful to be familiar with the prophets who ministered contemporaneous with Jeremiah - Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Ezekiel.

He spoke against the religious leaders at a time when they were living high on the hog and enjoying the acclaim of the movers and shakers.

He saw injustice among God's people - and pointed it out and called for repentance. He saw the poor and the weak abused and stood up for them and against their abusers.

My dream in opening Jeremiah's life and book is that God would create out of you and me a community of men and women who, like the prophet, are marked by integrity, bold love, unshakeable realism, and grace.

I'm praying that we would become, like Jeremiah, people who are all about God and are willing to go **AGAINST THE FLOW** for Jesus in our day as he did in his own time.

Jeremiah starts off with a three verse introduction that serves the same function as a title page to a modern book.

Background: The Life and Times of the Prophet Jeremiah (1:1-3)

[1:1] The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, [2] to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. [3] It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

With these words we are transported from AD 2009 to about 625 BC, from San Antonio to Jerusalem, direct into the life and times of Jeremiah.

And Jeremiah's Israel had seen better days...

What Israel was CREATED to become

From the very beginning God had set Israel apart to be His witness among the nations. He chose Abraham to bring blessing to the world. "Blessed to be a blessing" was the idea from the get go.

And, at various times in the nation's past she had been that blessing. There were highlight periods of faithfulness. But more recently, the trend had been toward shameful faithlessness.

What Israel ACTUALLY became

***Consider the following "prequel" to Jeremiah...⁹

The Reign of Manasseh

When Jeremiah was born, the king on Israel's throne was Manasseh, and old King Manasseh was wrapping up a fifty-five year reign of terror.

The Bible tells us that *[2 Chronicles 33:9]...Manasseh misled Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel.*¹⁰

Manasseh promoted idolatry - even in the temple in Jerusalem. He encouraged ritual prostitution. He introduced child sacrifice, even making his own son "pass through the fire" in a horrible act of worship to a pagan deity.

Injustice, corruption, crime and violence were rampant during Manasseh's half century on the throne.

The reign of Amon

When Manasseh died, his son, Amon, followed as king. The only good thing we can say about Amon is that, mercifully, his reign only lasted two years. But, like father, like son, Amon was every bit as wicked a ruler as Manasseh had been.

King Amon died early, assassinated by government officials (read about it in 2 Kings 21).¹¹

⁹ And talk about a roller coaster! Prior to Manasseh's evil reign was the good king Hezekiah. Prior to Hezekiah was the evil king Ahaz.

¹⁰ Thompson regards some of Manasseh's evil as compelled by the fact that Judah was a vassal state of Assyria. Yet Manasseh went further than his grandfather Ahaz in adopting the worship of other gods.

¹¹ Thompson suggests that this assassination was likely orchestrated by high ranking officials who may have been trying to organize an anti-Assyrian revolt.

For killing the king, the assassins were themselves put to death. But Amon's death paved the way for a whole new day in Israel with the inauguration of a new king, the eight year old child-king, Josiah.

A New Day Dawns!

Josiah, the king (2 Kings 22) (640-609 BC)

THE BOY-KING

For reasons that are never made clear, Josiah was not cut out of the same cloth as his father. His heart was soft toward the Lord as his predecessors' hearts had not been.¹²

Of course, Josiah would not have been trusted with actual authority at the beginning - after all, he was eight! But as soon as he reached maturity, his every action, decree and command promoted the worship of the one true God and was aimed at getting rid of the false.

THE **EXTENT** OF THE REFORMS...

After Josiah had been on the throne for several years, a scroll was discovered in a closet in the temple. Not seen for years and years, it was the scroll of Deuteronomy!

Deuteronomy lays out how the nation was to live, what kind of living would bring God's blessing, and what would bring His discipline.

When this scroll was read aloud to Josiah, he realized the terrible danger Israel had put itself into through its sinful ways and started to lead in a wholesale national reform, all based on what Moses had written in Deuteronomy.

¹² It may be that Josiah's grandfather, Manasseh, could be the source for Josiah's soft heart toward God. Late in life, Manasseh was afflicted by the Lord and repented, spending the last several years of his life in God-honoring ways. Is it not likely that the repentant grandfather, Manasseh, poured a reverence for God into Josiah's life from birth to age 6 (at which point Manasseh died and Amon became king)? If so, what a message of the importance of training young children to follow the Lord! What a message about the powerful influence of godly grandparents!

He removed all forms of worship except for the worship of God; he put to death the priests of the pagan cults; he banned all sorcery and magic; he ordered the cleansing of the Temple.¹³

Every reform that a king could bring, Josiah brought.

THE **LIMIT** OF THE REFORMS...

Unfortunately, though, while the reforms were as comprehensive as Josiah could make them, they were, in actuality, a mile wide and an inch deep. As much as Josiah may have wished for genuine revival, for much of the population, his reforms were just so much flag-waving.

What could have represented a wholesale return to biblical spirituality ended up being not much more than renewed Jewish nationalism.¹⁴

There were great changes in morality. Social justice issues improved. And surely, the elimination of pagan cults was of great benefit.

But, his reforms were legislated, external and imposed.¹⁵ In the minds of the people, it was not all about God. Still needed was the internal change that could only happen as one by one, people dealt with the Lord.

Enter Jeremiah.

Jeremiah saw through the sham of external conformity without inward change. He saw the complacency and he took it on, head on.

¹³ Josiah led in the expansion of the Jewish state, as well, moving into geographic areas that had been unoccupied by Jews for more than a century - Samaria and Gilead and the Mediterranean Sea coast. That he was not met with any Assyrian resistance speaks to the weakness of the Assyrian Empire at the time of Josiah's reforms.

¹⁴ "...we may well wonder whether the great bulk of the people underwent any change in heart at all." (Thompson) To judge from Jeremiah's preaching many of them did not, and once Josiah passed from the scene they quickly returned to their old ways under the new king, Jehoiakim.

¹⁵ As J.A. Thompson remarks in his commentary, "*One cannot change people by government regulation.*"

The launch of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry came at roughly the same time as Josiah's reforms. For the first several years of Jeremiah's ministry he and Josiah ruled and preached in tandem.¹⁶

Now, we know more about Jeremiah than we do any other Old Testament prophet. As we are introduced to him in these first three verses, we learn a lot about him.

Jeremiah, the prophet

NAME

Jeremiah was a common name in Old Testament times. Some seven "Jeremiahs" pop up in the Bible. His name probably means something like, "*The Lord exalts!*" That this was his name speaks of his parents' vision that their son would be used by God.

HOMETOWN OF ANATHOTH

He hailed from a city called Anathoth.¹⁷ It was one of the cities set aside for the priests hundreds of years earlier when Joshua was dividing the land among the tribes of Israel. (Joshua 21)

It was located about three miles northeast of Jerusalem in the territory allotted to the tribe of Benjamin. Looking south from Anathoth, Jeremiah would have been able to see the walls of Jerusalem, an hour's walk away.

PRIESTLY LINEAGE

We know that Jeremiah's father, Hilkiah, was a priest and that he served King Josiah. (2 Kings 22:12ff) Jeremiah was of priestly lineage - but there is no indication that he ever served in a priestly capacity.¹⁸

AGE AND TIME SPAN OF MINISTRY

The introduction to the book tells us that Jeremiah began his ministry in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign, which is 626 BC, and that his prophesying concluded at the time of Jerusalem's exile, which occurred in 586 BC. Thus, Jeremiah prophesied for forty solid years.¹⁹

He began speaking at the time of Josiah's reforms and kept at it until Jerusalem lay in ruins.

Jeremiah moves to tell us about his call to be God's spokesman.²⁰ The call starts off with a reassuring word: Jeremiah is completely known by God.

Jeremiah's Call and Commission (1:4-10)

God's Call to Jeremiah (vv. 4-5)

Intimate knowledge

[4] Now the word of the Lord²¹ came to me saying,
[5] "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you"
(see Psalm 139; Romans 8:29)

Genetics did not primarily shape Jeremiah. Environment did not mainly mold him. It was God from the beginning - and before the beginning - who was at work creating this unique person.

God was intimately acquainted with Jeremiah's strengths and weaknesses and gifts and abilities. He had crafted the man that Jeremiah would become before his parents even came together.

During the months he spent in his mother's womb, God had carefully built this man for a mission.

He was no accident or fluke. He was designed for a purpose.

¹⁹ Assuming that his ministry began in 626 BC, this was also the year in which the Assyrian King, Ashurbanipal, died, signaling the soon collapse of Assyrian might.

²⁰ Same for the call of Isaiah and Ezekiel.

²¹ Word = dabar (Hebrew) = word/event. Both the preached word and the symbolic acts Jeremiah performed are in view here as coming from the Lord.

¹⁶ That is, until Josiah died, killed in the Battle of Megiddo by the Egyptians.

¹⁷ The modern Arab village of Anata is the site of the ancient Anathoth.

¹⁸ In fact, Jeremiah was often opposed to the priesthood as it existed in his day.

King David wrote the same truths hundreds of years earlier in a prayer recorded in Psalm 139.

[13] For You formed my inward parts;

You wove me in my mother's womb.

[15] My frame was not hidden from You,

When I was made in secret,

And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;

[16] Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;

And in Your book were all written

The days that were ordained for me,

When as yet there was not one of them.

The same is true for each of us today. We are not mistakes. We are each formed by the hand of God for purposes He has for us.

To understand this is to gain a new center of gravity in life. We are not random collection of atoms. Each one of us here today is a purposeful creation of Almighty God.

But God isn't finished speaking. In addition to the comforting truth that God knows and has molded Jeremiah, God has a mission for him.

Global commission

[5] "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,

And before you were born I consecrated you;

I have appointed²² you a prophet to the nations."

Huh?

A prophet to the nations? What is that all about?

Speaking is a given for most people. Jeremiah has just learned that he is being commissioned by God to speak globally, to address himself to the worldwide community - Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, Philistia, Syria.

The exact wording is remarkable. God says that he has "given" Jeremiah to the nations.

Jeremiah was never consulted about this "giving." Jeremiah had not consented to being given. God decided to give him away. God can do that.

How do you think you would have processed this message from God? Such a charge might be tough to swallow, might seem a bit daunting.

It was hard for Jeremiah to swallow and we listen to him gag on God's word.

Jeremiah's self-doubt (v. 6)

[6] Then I said, "Alas, Lord God!

Behold, I do not know how to speak,

Because I am a youth."

Understandable hesitation (given the scope of the commission)

In Jeremiah's day, Jerusalem was on everybody's radar. The most powerful empires all wanted to control the land of Palestine because of its strategic location. Egypt, Assyria, Syria, and Babylon all wanted it as a staging area for launching attacks on the other world class powers.

Small wonder that Jeremiah's response was hesitation!

Understandable hesitation (given the weakness of the vessel)

But the explicit reason he gives for hesitation is that he is too young.

Remember, the call of God came to him in the 13th year of Josiah's reign (627 BC), at which time Josiah was 21 years old and Jeremiah was, in his own words, a "na'ar" (a general Hebrew word for a young person).

Our best guess is that Jeremiah was sixteen - at the most eighteen - years of age when God spoke to him. He was insecure and unsure about taking on this commission.

I can't say as I blame him. And besides, Jeremiah is not alone in his insecurities.

²² Hebrew "natan" = usually translated "to give."

Most famously, Moses, the great lawgiver, pleaded with God to find someone else to go to Pharaoh - and Moses was eighty years old when God called him at the burning bush!²³

Moses and Jeremiah have plenty of company among God's people.

I don't know to what extent you have struggled with insecurities about the assignments God has given you, but I know that I have sure struggled.

He has commissioned me and every other husband here to cherish our wives; every wife here to love and respect her husband. Every parent has been commissioned to train the children they have in God's ways.

And every Christian has been commissioned to love God fully, to love other Christians sacrificially, to lovingly share the Gospel with those who don't yet know Jesus, and to make disciples as we walk through life.

These and dozens of other commissions are ours from God, today. If you feel a bit of insecurity about fulfilling those commissions, you're part of a very big club.

Insecurities can range from speech-making abilities, to "I'm too young" to "I've got too many weaknesses" to "I'm too busy" to "I don't have the background" to "I'm too small" to "I'm too poor" to "I'm not a person of influence" to "I don't have a winning personality" to - you name it!

Well, the reality is that Jeremiah **was** young and he probably **did** have very little experience in speech-making when God called him. But God responds to his self-doubt with a withering rebuke.

God's Answer! (vv. 7-10)

Correction to wrong thinking

Stop focusing on your lack!

*[7a] But the Lord said to me,
"Do not say, 'I am a youth,'*

Was he unqualified? Of course he was unqualified! God says that his inadequacy was irrelevant.

Did God give Jeremiah a charge that was impossible for him to fulfill? Yep. That's what God does! He gives us tasks to accomplish that are beyond us.

And God keeps speaking to the irrelevantly unqualified, young Jeremiah.

Start focusing on obedience!!

*[7b] Because everywhere I send you, you shall go,
And all that I command you, you shall speak.*

Jeremiah didn't get to choose his locale - he would go wherever God chose to send him.

Jeremiah didn't get to choose his audience - he would go to whomever God chose to send him.

He discovers here that the proper question after receiving a commission from God is not, "How could I do that?" but "When do I start?"

But there is reasonableness to God's giving Jeremiah an implausibly lofty commission. Because of what the Lord says next it makes perfect sense that He would tell Jeremiah to do something that he clearly could not do.

Listen as God speaks directly to the heart of Jeremiah's self-doubts - and to your doubts and mine.

²³ In the New Testament, we have Timothy, who was evidently not a strong, confident person.

Rely on God's power to deliver

**[8] “Do not be afraid of them,
For I am with you to deliver you,” declares the Lord.**

It is perfectly safe to lead a life of respectable churchianity. There's no risk involved with showing up and looking good.

Obedience to God - well that is something else altogether. Actual obedience to His commands takes us into the deep water of risk and danger. I'd even say that if there is not some level of fear and trepidation about doing what God has called you to do, you probably haven't wrestled honestly with what He has called you to do!

Obedying God is risky. We can get ourselves into serious trouble obeying God. Through the centuries, God's people have often put themselves in a position where they needed to be rescued. It's a good thing God is a rescuing God!

He delivered Israel from Egypt. He delivered David from the lion and the bear

No fear, Jeremiah. God is with you. No fear, Dave. God is with you. No fear to **YOU**, too. God is with **YOU** to deliver you.

Jeremiah's age and my weakness and your weakness don't matter as long as God is involved.

And with that, the Lord symbolically anointed Jeremiah's lips, the final sign that he was equipped and ready to take on this commission.

Re-commissioned

**[9] Then the Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me,
“Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.”²⁴
[10] “See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms,
To pluck up and to break down,**

**To destroy and to overthrow,
To build and to plant.”**

God has just given a ridiculously difficult commission to a young person. There will be much more de-struction about his ministry than there is con-struction. Much more negative than positive.

But Jeremiah has got all the resource he will ever need to fulfill this commission. He has God's presence and he has God's promise of deliverance.²⁵

²⁵ Verses 11-16 contain two visions aimed at encouraging Jeremiah in his task.

First Vision: Almond Tree

The first vision is of an almond tree, something with which Jeremiah would have been very familiar, since Anathoth, his hometown was famous for its almond crop. (As the Arab village is to this day.) **[11] The word of the Lord came to me saying, “What do you see, Jeremiah?” And I said, “I see a rod of an almond tree.” [12] Then the Lord said to me, “You have seen well, for I am watching over My word to perform it.”**

The most striking thing about Middle Eastern almond trees is that they are the first tree to bud in the spring in Palestine. When the almond tree sprouts new leaves and flowers, you know that spring is just around the corner. The vision of the almond tree was God's promise that He would see to the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecies. Just as the early bursting into bloom of the almond tree heralded springtime, so the spoken word of Jeremiah would point to its rapid fulfillment.

Second Vision Boiling Pot

[13] The word of the Lord came to me a second time saying, “What do you see?” And I said, “I see a boiling pot, facing away from the north.” [14] Then the Lord said to me, “Out of the north the evil will break forth on all the inhabitants of the land. [15] “For, behold, I am calling all the families of the kingdoms of the north,” declares the Lord; “and they will come and they will set each one his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls round about and against all the cities of Judah. [16] “I will pronounce My judgments on them concerning all their wickedness, whereby they have forsaken Me and have offered sacrifices to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands.

The image is clear. A pot sits on the coals of a fire. The pot tilts slightly, boils over, and drains southward. This vision assured Jeremiah that judgment was coming on Judah and Jerusalem, and the destroyer will come from the north. We know that this northern destroyer was Babylon. Whether or not Jeremiah would have understood that the destroyer would be Babylon at this time is unclear. Babylon was, after all, not quite the world dominant power it would become twenty years hence. But Israel's enemies had historically come against them from the north, including Assyria.

²⁴ There is a picture of God touching the mouths of Isaiah and Ezekiel, too.

The conclusion to this commission finds God speaking to Jeremiah as a military commander ordering troops to battle.

Re-Commissioned! (1:17-19)

[17] “Now, gird up your loins and arise, and speak to them all which I command you. Do not be dismayed before them, or I will dismay you before them. [18] “Now behold, I have made you today as a fortified city and as a pillar of iron and as walls of bronze against the whole land, to the kings of Judah, to its princes, to its priests and to the people of the land. [19] “They will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you,” declares the Lord.

God told Jeremiah to take a very challenging message to people who didn't even want to hear it. That was a tough assignment!

A domesticated Jeremiah would have thrown up his hands at the first sight of blood. He would have quit at the first hint of opposition. But Jeremiah was not domesticated.

Over the years, he grew into his commission and became what God designed him to become - a fully-alive man who embraced the adventure of obedience.

The life God chose for him and the life he embraced wasn't easy and it certainly wasn't always fun. But it was a **LIFE**. He wasn't a cookie-cutter copy of what others thought he should be. He was God's original - just as each of us are to be.

Jeremiah led an abundant life. And he points the way for us, today, who would choose the abundant life Jesus offers us.

We will never enjoy that abundant life by watching from the sidelines. We will discover abundance as we slug out a gutsy life of obedience in the trenches.

Equipped with these two visions Jeremiah knows that destruction is coming - he need never doubt it, and that the Lord will honor him by fulfilling the prophetic words that he speaks in God's Name.