

# Two Unknown Heroes - Uriah of Kiriath-Jearim

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We have been looking at two unknown heroes. One this morning whose name was Jehoshava, she was a woman that you may have never heard of, but in the year 841 BC she intervened to rescue her one-year-old nephew who grew up to be king and in doing so she preserved the royal line of God's king and she maintained the great promise of the Old Testament that God's plan of salvation was going to be fulfilled through the family line of David. So this morning we looked at an unknown hero called Jehoshava. Tonight we're going to look at an even more unknown hero and his name was Uriah of Kiriath-Jerim. Now do not worry if you're sitting here tonight thinking I have never heard of Uriah and I've never heard of Kiriath-Jerim and I have not read Jeremiah 26 ever or for decades. Do not worry because this is not a very well-known character in the Bible but he is a fascinating one and I hope a very helpful person for us to look at. He is unknown but he is definitely a hero. Let me read again the last section of Jeremiah 26 which Neil read for us. There was another man who prophesied in the name of the Lord Uriah the son of Shemaya of Kiriath-Jerim.

He prophesied against this city and against this land in words like those of Jeremiah and when King Jehoiakim with all his warriors and all the officials heard his words the king sought to put him to death but when Uriah heard of it he was afraid and fled and escaped to Egypt. Then King Jehoiakim sent to Egypt certain men El Nathan the son of Ahbor and others with him and they took Uriah from Egypt and brought him to King Jehoiakim who struck him down with a sword and dumped his dead body into the burial place of the common people but the hand of Ahikam the son of Shafan was with Jeremiah so that he was not given over to the people to be put to death. Now one of the reasons why Uriah is so unknown is because we are right in the very depths of Old Testament history and this is this is not one of the most well-known parts of the Bible and so as I said please do not worry if you read this chapter thinking I don't know what is going on here at all most of us will feel like that. So to help us navigate the passage and to help us learn about Uriah we're going to ask the same three questions that we asked this morning what is going on why is this important and what do we learn from it. So question one we're going to start with what is going on in Jeremiah 26 well as we said we are deep deep deep in Old Testament history and to get our bearings we need to think a little bit about Israel's history and we need to think a little bit about world history and so the book of Jeremiah covers the period of around 627 to 585 BC so that's where we are roughly and when you think about the history of Israel in the Old Testament it's helpful to think of it as looking like a backwards tick and the reason we say that is because generally the trajectory is negative the high point is in a thousand BC when David was king

David is very famous and most of us will have heard of David he was the king and he was Israel's greatest king but from David onwards the general pathway for the kingdom is negative in 932 his grandson became king and when his grandson became king the nation of Israel split in two and we refer to this quite often the fact that that Israel as a complete nation was divided in 932 the northern part which was bigger was known as Israel the bottom part which was smaller was known as Judah the Davidic the Davidic dynasty the descendants of David continued through the southern kingdom moving on a couple of hundred years you come to 722 BC the northern kingdom is obliterated by the Assyrians and then you come in fact that's not quite in the wrong place I'm this I've got to keep my drawing to scale I mustn't make it not to scale so 722 should really be about there and then the lowest of the low point comes here in 586 BC when the southern kingdom is destroyed by the Babylonians and the little tick at the end is because at the very end of the

Old Testament there's a glimmer of hope after that being conquered by the Babylonians the exiles return and they're looking to the future but you'll see if you're observing all these numbers that are writing on the table that five if 586 is the low point of the the Old Testament you can see that that's exactly when the book of Jeremiah was written and so it is a low point in the history of Israel by this time God's people are a tiny tiny nation so let's just look at a little bit at this for a moment just to get our bearings as we said under David Israel would have been about that size under his grandson it's split in two you had Israel in the north and you had Judah in the south 722 Israel gets conquered by the Assyrians and so Judah and to be honest my scales are terrible it should be more like that very small tiny we nation and so that's where Judah is in terms of

Israel's history alongside that we need to think a little bit about what is happening in world history at that time between kind of well even before 1000 BC but the time we're looking at 1000 BC to 500 BC you've got three big superpowers in terms of world history you've got Egypt down here you've got the Assyrians kind of around here and then you've got Babylon down here okay Egypt was the historic superpower but by this time not as dominant as it once had been for the 200 300 years between 1000 and 700 BC the heavyweights were Assyria that was the big dominant superpower for that period but now in the days of Jeremiah Babylon is emerging as the strongest of them all and so this kind of balance of power is ongoing throughout world history in that period remember this is before the Greeks the Greeks emerged around 333 BC and before the Romans they they emerged and kind of the first in the first

[ 7 : 20 ] BC century that's really when they become much more dominant something massive happens if I go back here you said we're in this period something massive happens in the year 605 it's not a massive thing in terms of biblical history it's a massive thing in terms of world history you've got this tension between Egypt Assyria Babylon Assyria and Egypt align together to form a coalition and they meet the Babylonians for the battle of Karchemish now I've kind of spoiled my drawing because I've covered it all in writing but I want you to see Karchemish it's about here the battle of Karchemish takes place about here and it's in 605 BC you've got the Assyrians who are here and the Egyptians who are here aligning together as one force to fight against the Babylonians and they lose the Babylonians win and that's a massive massive event in world history as a result the Assyrians are more or less wiped out Egyptians are hugely weakened Babylon becomes the dominant force over this whole area so you've got the the huge superpower of Babylon you've got Egypt retreating here and the tiny we dot right there is Judah this tiny nation in this massive sandwich of superpowers now what that means is that that everything that we read about in terms of what's going on in

Jeremiah and in the history of Israel in terms of the Old Testament is surrounded by these massive changes in terms of world history and it's important for us to recognize that because it gives us our bearings for where things are at in terms of Jeremiah's ministry and the nation at that time now looking at all of that looking at maps and dates and everything it can also seem a wee bit overwhelming and sometimes it can seem a wee bit boring some people look at historical details like that and they think oh it's not that interesting it seems like it's 2,600 years ago because it was 2,600 years ago but the thing that is so crucial to remember about all these historical details is that it reminds us that all of this actually happened all of this actually happened so when you turn to Jeremiah 26 when you read any of the different things that are going on in Jeremiah that all fits in with world history it's all part of what actually happened and what I what we need to recognize is that at that time while all this was going on in wider world history the nation of Judah was turning further and further away from God and you see that when you look at the history of Israel idolatry was a constant thorn in the flesh of the people of God the northern kingdom that that separated from the southern kingdom was almost consistently idolatrous through its whole history through its whole lifespan the southern nation of Judah was better on the whole to begin with but bit by bit they slipped further and further away from God and by the time you reach kind of 600 BC just after the battle of Kachemish God's people have have pushed him away they're worshiping idols and they're not particularly interested in listening to what God has said to them in response to that backsliding God does the same thing again and again and again you read the history of history in the Old Testament you see this constant pattern of the people turning away from God and you see God responding in the same way every time God does the same thing again and again and again what did he do he sent prophets and the prophets were sent by God to communicate God's message to the nation and almost always that message was a message of warning

God sent his prophets to warn the people that they were on the pathway to disaster that they needed to turn back from the idolatry they that they had to return to the Lord it's interesting when we hear that word prophet we often think you know a prophet is somebody who predicts the future and you think about a prophet like Jeremiah or anybody else you think you know they're there because they kind of predict the future that's maybe what we tend to think of straight away and of course there's a sense in which that's true there's lots in the the Old Testament prophecies that does look ahead to the future and that does ultimately come through so that is true but it's only half the story because in another sense prophets are trying to prevent the future because the the nation is on a pathway to disaster and prophets are trying to prevent that from happening they're saying don't do it don't carry on down the path that you're on come back to the Lord and it will prevent disaster and so they were calling people away from behavior and habits that was going to lead to awful consequences and in this period around 600 BC the most famous prophet of the time was Jeremiah and he came with the same message of warning let me give you an example from Jeremiah chapter 7 if you read through the whole of Jeremiah you're going to just you'll see the same thing being said again and again and again Jeremiah the word of the Lord 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 thus says the Lord of hosts the God of Israel amend your ways and your deeds 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 deeds if you truly execute justice with one another if you do not oppress the souljourner the fatherless or the widow or shed innocent blood in this place if you do not go after other gods to your own harm then I will let you dwell in this place in the land that I gave of old to your father forever he is telling them a message of warning and the reason why it's full of all this do not and to stop doing this and stop doing that and stop doing the next thing is because that's exactly what the nation was doing they were exploiting the widows and the fatherless they were shedding innocent blood they were oppressing asylum seekers and they were going after false gods and so Jeremiah comes with a message of a warning and in 600 BC the threat of the Babylonians was very very real this massive global superpower is breathing down their neck and looking to conquer all the territory that's in front of them and God is repeatedly warning the Israelites in Judah that it's going to happen that God will let that happen if they continue in their injustice their immorality and their idolatry and we see the same thing in Jeremiah 26 I won't read it again because we read it earlier on but it's just exactly the same message God warning them saying turn back turn back before it's too late but the point I want us to notice tonight is that although

Jeremiah was the most famous prophet at that time he wasn't the only one and we see that that there was another man who prophesied in the name of the Lord Uriah the son of Shemaiah from Kiriath Jereem he prophesied against this city and against this land in words like that of Jeremiah and so Uriah came with the same message he delivered the same warnings he spoke in the same words that Jeremiah spoke with but if you read through the whole of Jeremiah's the whole book of Jeremiah you will see that there's one big theme running right through that that book and the big theme running through the whole book of Jeremiah is that his message and the message that people like Uriah also communicated was a message that no one wanted to hear and that's what comes up again and again and again in the big book that is Jeremiah they communicated a message that people did not want to know you see it in relation to Jeremiah the chapter that we read he spoke to the people and the priests and the prophets that's that's false prophets there are saying to the people he deserves to die because of what he's saying he's prophesied against us and the same thing happened to Uriah in the passage at the end of the chapter he used words like Jeremiah and when the king with all his warriors and all the officials heard his words the king sought to put him to death and tragically unlike Jeremiah Uriah's life was not spared he was killed because of his message and his body was dumped because he proclaimed a message that the people did not want to hear so that's Uriah that's what's going on that's when he lived and that's the circumstances that he spoke into our next question is why is this important well I want to give you three reasons why it's important one relates to the book of Jeremiah one relates to wider questions of theology and one relates to the world today so first of all in relation to the book of Jeremiah and understanding the book of Jeremiah the crucial lesson that's been pressed before us here is that

[ 17 : 39 ] Jeremiah wasn't alone he wasn't alone and at one level you think well that's that would have been an encouragement for Jeremiah although he was preaching a message that nobody wanted to hear at least he wasn't the only one doing it there was Uriah and no doubt some others as well who were speaking the same message that God wanted to deliver and for Jeremiah that would have helped because if you know anything about Jeremiah you will know that his life was very hard he's often known as the weeping prophet and his calling was a very lonely isolated calling but he wasn't the only one Uriah was also called by God and he prophesied the same message to the same hostile audience but that's not the really important reason about the fact that Jeremiah wasn't alone what's even more important is the fact that Uriah also prophesied is crucial for teaching us about how God deals with people who reject him it's teaching us a crucial lesson about how God deals with people who reject him and the point we need to highlight is that God sends prophets we've actually read about that in verse 5 God sends prophets Jeremiah Uriah and others to communicate a message to the people why is that so important it is important because it's telling us that

God was giving the people chance after chance after chance to repent the nation is drifting towards complete disaster but God doesn't respond to that by saying well you know what they deserve everything that they're going to get so I'll send I'll send Jeremiah well maybe one or two might listen but to be honest I'm not that bothered if they don't that's not how God responds God sends Jeremiah God sends Uriah he sends others and he does so to make sure that his message is heard and that is teaching us such a crucial lesson about the character of God it's telling us that God is not comprecious he's not vindictive and when God does administer his judgment it's not this angry bolt from the blue instead it's just the settled consistent righteous response to the fact that numerous numerous warnings have been given again and again and again and all of them have been ignored often we can think of God's judgment as a bolt of lightning you know you imagine God judging and you think like lightning sudden destructive but it's not really like that at all God's judgment is not a bolt of lightning that just comes completely out of the blue God's judgment if we want to kind of find out an example in nature God's judgment is much more like coastal erosion you know when you sometimes see a house that's built near the edge of the sea and year after year that that shoreline is working its way back closer and closer and closer and closer and everyone's looking on to the person in the house saying you need to move you need to leave your house because the warning is there and some people do some people don't and eventually the day comes when the house tumbles into the sea that's what God's judgment is like there is warning after warning after warning and his judgment is only poured out on those who who have squandered chance after chance after chance to repent so it's teaching us a really important lesson about God's character but it's also teaching us a lesson about people's hearts because Yeraiyya's message confirms that these people really are guilty because they've got no interest in what God is trying to say to them they couldn't care less they're like we are not listening to you and and so much so in the case of Yeraiyya it's like actually we hate what you're saying so much we're going to kill you and that's pointing us to the fact that Yeraiyya's message had only two outcomes it would either clear their guilt or heap up their guilt Yeraiyya's message would either clear their guilt or heap up their guilt that's because if they listened to it it would bring restoration and healing and hope if they didn't listen it just confirmed that they were marching down the wrong path in defiance and it's so so crucial that we recognize that that is what the gospel does for all of us every time we hear the gospel it's another opportunity for our guilt to be cleared for our sins to be forgiven for us to find peace and security in Jesus every time we hear it it's an opportunity for complete healing but every time we reject it every time we push God away it confirms that we're guilty it confirms that our guilt before God is real so we're learning that crucial lesson from this the fact that Jeremiah wasn't alone

he's teaching us about how God deals with people and it teaches us about how people often deal with God second thing is a broader point that I think is important and thinking in terms of of theology more widely um when we talk about a hero like Yeraiyya or really anybody else we're being reminded that heroism highlights the reality of evil and I think that's just an important and a helpful thing to think about Yeraiyya was sent because the nation was a mess full of injustice exploitation cruelty and immorality Yeraiyya spoke because the people needed to turn back from an evil path that they were marching down and Yeraiyya was killed because the king's heart was so hard that he sent to Egypt to drag this prophet back just so that he could kill him and dump his body outside the city and all of us all of it's teaching us a really important point it's teaching us the fact that the reason we need heroes is because evil is real so you think of the heroic acts of a soldier that we admire so much that's because the evil of war is real you think of the heroic acts of medical staff that arises because the evil of disease is destroying humanity you think of the heroic acts of charities all of them are needed because the evils of poverty and addiction are destroying people we all love heroes we read about heroes we admire heroes we want to honor heroes but we mustn't forget that the whole reason we need heroes is because evil is a reality and if you think about that a wee bit more it's pressing into all of us a big question about our worldview it's challenging all of us in terms of how we understand reality how we understand the big questions of life and truth because if you think of heroism in the light of the big these big questions about ultimate reality about origins and destiny about life and death if you think about that for any length of time it is not long before you are confronted by a massive question is being a hero ultimately pointless is it ultimately pointless and if you push them to their logical conclusion there are many worldviews that will have to say yes because ultimately life has no meaning no worth no answers the bible though says no the bible says it is not pointless and I am pretty certain that your heart says no as well we need heroes because evil is a reality so that's a broader point but one that I think is important to think about the third thing very briefly why this is important is because what we read about Uriah in terms of what happened to him the fact that he was killed for his faith 2,600 years ago that has been relevant ever since because all across the world what happened to Uriah has happened to millions of other people as well and it still happens today we live in a nation where it it barely ever happens but there are many places today that aren't like that and a bit like Uriah there are many many unknown heroes who've laid down their lives in order to share God's message of salvation so time is marching on oh my goodness time's going by far too quickly we're nearly there what do we learn from it this is our last question well I want to close and by just suggesting three what I hope are helpful lessons under three key words and you can remember them if you remember the letters WFM now those letters are familiar to many people because that's that's how we

summarize women for mission which is a wonderful organization connected to the free church that raises money each year to support mission work but this time it's not women for mission I want you to remember under WFM I want you to remember three key words warning faithfulness martyrdom warning faithfulness and martyrdom first question I want to ask is how should you view a warning from God if you look at Jeremiah you look at Uriah you look at all the prophets they are delivering warnings from God how should we view that so easy to instinctively react negatively you think well warning that's not particularly pleasant and that's not particularly helpful and whenever you do get a warning as a child or as an adult you think oh I wish I hadn't been told that and it can be very off-putting and unappealing but does that mean that warnings are bad of course it doesn't and you know it doesn't because a warning actually tells us something that we need to hear and in terms of ourselves a warning teaches us that we're in danger and spiritually a warning from God is telling us that evil is real that sin is real that accountability before God is real that eternity is real and that we cannot ignore any of it so it's teaching us incredibly important lessons but what is it telling us about God when we say that you know when I bring you here tonight to say God has brought you here tonight to give you a warning what does that tell you does it tell you that God is stern and angry and depressing and negative no a warning from

God tells you that he still cares a warning to God tells you warning from God tells you that he still cares in fact he cares so so much the whole message of the Bible is crying out to you that God still cares and that was what laid the heart of your IEA's message this relentless truth that God still cares and that was true of Old Testament Israel it's true of you now that God cares too much to let you go that God cares too much to keep quiet he cares too much about what eternity is going to mean for all of us he cares too much not to warn you and so a warning is a precious thing it's a message from a God who cares the F was for faithfulness Uriah is an amazing example of faithfulness nobody wanted to hear his message but he still proclaimed it and he did that because he had something that was too important to compromise on Uriah had something that was too important to compromise on I need to ask you do you have that do you have that today faithfulness is unfashionable compromise is something that gains far more respect but all of that's really an illusion because really in terms of the most important things in life and people will have things that are too important to compromise on if you think of education if you're a teacher and you're standing before your child and you say to them you know what's two plus two and they say five you wouldn't say oh well yeah I respect your opinion you can have that truth and I'll have mine no you say no it's four and you need to know that it's four same if you're a car mechanic and a car comes in for its MOT and it's like you know oh this guy's brakes don't work but I don't want to offend them I don't want to upset them I'm not gonna say you don't do that why because it's too important to compromise you fix the brakes and you fix anything else that needs to be done same if you work in the health service or anything if you're dealing with someone's money if you're in the public sector whatever it is and really all our jobs will have aspects that are too important to compromise on what about eternity what about ultimate reality what about the questions of life and death is that stuff that we just compromise on or do we recognize that the Bible is giving us a message that is so important and so good that we cannot compromise on it that is what your eye believed that is what we need to believe as well and couple to that is a very important message in regard to faithfulness that I want to make very briefly mention very briefly because it's faithfulness in terms of how we function as a church and it's not I mean at the moment you know in in British history this is not a high point in terms of the in terms of the work of the church you say that when I talk about Old Testament history and I say that it's a backwards tick and Jeremiah is kind of at the low point in terms of Scottish history in the church we're kind of on a backwards tick at the moment and we're hoping that there'll be an upward but at the end but we're we're not far off there at the moment in terms of of people coming to church in terms of people hearing the gospel and in the midst of that we can often think to ourselves well you know the key thing is just that we're faithful and week on week if we're just here if we preach the word keep doing what we're doing

[ 32 : 50 ] we just need to be faithful I think it's a huge danger that we can miss a crucial point that we learn from Uriah from Jeremiah and from all the prophets they teach us something massive they teach us that faithfulness means sticking your neck out faithfulness to God's message means sticking your neck out it means taking risks it means going out to the people who desperately need to hear this message Uriah is an amazing example of faithfulness Uriah is an amazing example of faithfulness last of all last of all our M stands for martyrdom and that's that's what happened to Uriah ultimately his commitment to God's message cost him his life he knew he was in danger he fled to Egypt but he was pursued caught but he did not compromise because he knew he had something worth dying for do you have that do you have that so often in life we want to avoid death at all costs anything is worth it if it prevents death Uriah knew that trusting God is worth it even if it means death and ultimately that's because his message of warning was coupled to a message of hope everything that he said that

Uriah said that Jeremiah said is all part of the unfolding of God's incredible plan of salvation that culminates in Jesus Christ they're looking forward to the hope that comes through the ultimate hero through God's son the Lord Jesus and the ultimate conclusion of Uriah's message is not that Uriah died for God the ultimate conclusion is that God the Son Jesus Christ died for Uriah and he died for you too and that's where we see that in the cross of Jesus Christ you see the ultimate warning because it shows us the reality and horror of sin but you also see the ultimate act of faithfulness Jesus obedient to the very limits of pain and suffering to save us and on the cross you see the ultimate martyrdom Jesus laying down his life to save us Uriah is an unknown hero and I'm sure he's actually very happy to be pretty much unknown and his goal my goal God's goal is that every one of us would see where his message was pointing pointing to Jesus the one who came and died and rose again to save us he is the ultimate hero and he is the one who's calling us all to him tonight