

Know the Lord *Jeremiah 9:23–24* July 8, 2026 — Wednesday Evening Pastor Trent Eastman | New Baptist Church, Huntington, WV

Tonight we are going to Jeremiah 9:23–24. The reason is that Paul quotes this passage in our text for Sunday — 2 Corinthians 10:7–18 — and I want to understand, as well as I can, what Paul is quoting before we get there. We often treat Old Testament quotations in the New Testament like hyperlinks — a quick reference, a nod to something back there — rather than as load-bearing ingredients of meaning. Tonight we are going to slow down and take the original seriously.

We will begin with an overview of the book of Jeremiah, and then we will focus in on chapter 9. But before I can give you that overview, I need to tell you a story that spans 126 years. Once I have told it, we will come back and place Jeremiah inside it.

A Story That Spans 126 Years

In 712 BC, King Hezekiah fell gravely ill. Through the prophet Isaiah, God delivered a stark word: set your house in order. But Hezekiah prayed, and God granted him fifteen more years. Two things happened during those fifteen years that changed the course of everything. First, envoys from Babylon arrived — Hezekiah showed them everything in his treasury, and Isaiah told him plainly that everything he had shown them would one day be carried off to Babylon. Second, Hezekiah's son Manasseh was born in 709 BC.

Manasseh reigned for fifty-five years, from 697 to 642 BC. He closed the temple doors, built altars to foreign gods throughout Jerusalem, and led the nation deeper into the syncretism that Assyrian pressure had made politically convenient. His son Amon followed him and did exactly what his father had done — two years, and then he was assassinated by his own servants.

In 640 BC, Josiah became king at eight years old. By 632 he had begun to seek the Lord in earnest, and by 628 he had launched a systematic purge of the high places and idols throughout Judah and even into the former northern territories. He was the most thoroughgoing reforming king since David — and then, in 609 BC, he died at the battle of Megiddo, trying to intercept the Egyptian army marching north.

With Josiah gone, the kingdom unraveled quickly. His son Jehoahaz reigned three months before Pharaoh Neco deposed him and took him to Egypt. Jehoiakim, another son of Josiah, then reigned from 608 to 597 BC — but he was nothing like his father. He saw religion as a tool of the state, dismantled the reforms, and ultimately rebelled against Babylon. In 606 BC, the Babylonians defeated the Assyrians decisively at the Battle of Carchemish, and in that same year took their first group of political prisoners to Babylon — Daniel and his companions among them.

Jehoiakim likely died during a Babylonian siege in 597 BC. His son Jehoiachin succeeded him, reigned three months, and was taken to Babylon. Then Zedekiah — another son of Josiah — became king and reigned until 587 BC, when he too rebelled against Babylon, and that rebellion ended with the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple in 586 BC. Zedekiah himself was forced to watch his sons executed before his eyes were put out, and he died in a Babylonian prison. The story ends — or nearly ends — in 560 BC, when Jehoiachin was released from prison, a quiet footnote recorded at the very end of Jeremiah.

The Book of Jeremiah in That Story

Now let's put the book of Jeremiah inside that timeline. Jeremiah was called in 627 BC — the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign, one year before the great temple reforms began. He records it himself:

“The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, 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. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month. Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying...” — Jeremiah 1:1–4

His ministry spans the entire period — from just before the reforms under Josiah, through the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, to the fall of Jerusalem and beyond. Chapters 1 through 6 belong to the pre-reform years. Chapters 7 through 21 come during and after the reforms under Josiah. Chapters 22 through 26 belong to the reign of Jehoiakim, who burned Jeremiah's scroll. Chapters 27 through 39 move through the reign of Zedekiah, and chapters 40 through 51 address the period after Jerusalem's fall.

But here is the critical point: the book of Jeremiah is not a chronological record of events and messages. That is not how it is structured. It is structured as a legal case — a covenant lawsuit — brought by God against Judah for breaking the covenant He made with them at Sinai.

Once you see that, the whole book snaps into focus.

The Structure of the Legal Case

The court is convened in chapter 1, where Jeremiah is appointed as the Lord's prosecutor. The charges are then laid out in chapters 2 through 24 — the evidence that Judah has broken the covenant. The charges are extensive: spiritual adultery, idolatry, social injustice, false worship, corrupt priests, corrupt prophets, wicked kings, and a persistent refusal to repent. Throughout these chapters, God presses His case the way a lawyer examines witnesses — “What wrong did your fathers find in me?” “What injustice have I done?” “Why have you done this?”

The verdict comes in chapter 25: seventy years of exile. In chapters 26 through 29, Judah responds — and rejects it. Jeremiah is put on trial. False prophets contradict him. Kings refuse to listen. The people reject the sentence. The guilty party refuses to accept the Judge's ruling.

Then something unexpected happens. In chapters 30 through 33, before the sentence is carried out, the Judge makes a promise. He announces His own plan for restoration — a New Covenant, not the cancellation of justice but justice fulfilled by God Himself. And then, in chapters 34 through 52, the sentence is executed exactly as declared: Jerusalem falls, the temple burns, the Davidic king is removed, the people go into exile. Everything Jeremiah predicted comes true. The Judge's verdict is vindicated.

What is striking about this structure — and it is worth sitting with for a moment — is that the charges are presented precisely at the moment when the law is found. The discovery of the law scroll in the temple in 622 BC is what ignites Josiah's reforms; it is also the legal foundation for the indictment. You cannot have a covenant lawsuit without establishing what the covenant required. And here is what that tells us about the revival under Josiah: it was real, but it was not deep. It was an aesthetic revival — outward change without inward transformation. The law was found and obeyed, but the heart of the nation was never reached. The charges were valid even in the middle of the reformation.

Into the Charges: Chapters 2 Through 10

Now let's move into the body of the indictment and trace how it builds. Chapters 2 through 6 open with the dominant image of a broken marriage. God remembers Israel as His bride, the one who followed Him in the wilderness with something that at least looked like devotion. But Israel has become an adulterous wife — she has abandoned her husband for gods who cannot help her. Chapters 7 and 8 shift to false religion and false security: the people trust in the

temple, in their sacrifices, in their circumcision, in the mere fact that they are the people of God. Chapters 11 through 17 press the covenant more directly — the Sinai covenant is broken, and the covenant promises always included curses. Chapters 18 through 20 show God working like a potter, offering judgment still threaded through with mercy, pleading with Judah to repent — and Judah refusing. Chapters 21 through 24 turn to the leadership: David’s house has failed; the shepherds have scattered the sheep.

And then we arrive at chapter 9. And chapter 9 asks the question underneath all the other questions — not what have they done, but why have they done it. What is the real problem? Because idolatry, injustice, and covenant-breaking are the symptoms. Chapter 9 names the disease.

Look at verse 3:

“They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, declares the LORD.”

And verse 6:

“Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me, declares the LORD.”

Hear it. Twice in this chapter, God gives His diagnosis. Not “they do not obey me.” Not “they do not fear me.” They do not know me.

That is the root. Everything else in Jeremiah — the broken marriage, the false securities, the broken covenant, the rejected mercy, the failed shepherds — all of it grows out of this one soil: a people who do not know their God.

And because they do not know Him, verse 7 tells us He responds like a refiner. “Behold, I will refine them and test them, for what else can I do...” Verses 8 through 22 unpack what that refining will look like. It will not be gentle. It will not be comfortable. But it is not cruelty — it is a refiner working metal that has gone cold, trying to bring it back to something that will hold its shape.

The Heart of the Matter: Jeremiah 9:23–24

And then — after all of that, after the diagnosis and after the description of the refining fire — God says something remarkable. He tells them what would have saved them. He tells them what knowing Him actually looks like.

“Thus says the LORD: ‘Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight,’ declares the LORD.” — Jeremiah 9:23–24

Three boasts are forbidden. Three things Judah had been leaning on instead of God.

Not wisdom. The wise had rejected God’s wisdom. Judah had counselors, scribes, scholars of the law — and none of it produced knowledge of God. Wisdom without the Lord is just cleverness in the dark.

Not might. Judah believed political alliances would save her. Run to Assyria. Run to Egypt. Run to Babylon. Human strength, human treaties, human armies — that was her confidence. And every one of those alliances would fail her.

Not riches. Josiah’s reforms had produced a season of relative prosperity, and the nation made the oldest mistake in the book — they assumed blessing meant approval, that a full barn meant a clean conscience. But wealth was never meant to be security. Something else was.

Only one boast is permitted: “that he understands and knows me.”

And why? Because knowing the Lord was the entire purpose of the covenant. Not sacrifices. Not the temple. Not circumcision. Not the label of being God’s people. Chapters 7 through 10 already tore those false securities down. Knowing God — that was always the point.

What It Means to Know Him

God does not leave the question open. He tells us exactly what He is like, in three words.

Hesed — steadfast love. Covenant faithfulness. The loyal love that does not quit on its promises. This is the heart of the relationship.

Mishpat — justice. This is doing what is right before God — personal covenant faithfulness. Am I living rightly before Him?

Tsedaqah — righteousness. This is treating others according to God’s covenant — social covenant faithfulness. Am I treating my neighbor the way His covenant requires?

If Israel truly knew God, they would know His steadfast love, His justice, His righteousness — and they would reflect those very qualities back into the world. Knowing Him was never meant to stay in the head. It was meant to reshape a life and reshape a community.

Instead, they boasted in wisdom, strength, and wealth. And they never became what they claimed to worship.

This is the thread that runs through the entire book. Chapters 2 through 25: you do not know the Lord, though you think you do. Chapters 26 through 29: your refusal to know Him results in exile. Chapters 30 through 33: God promises a New Covenant in which they shall all know Him.

Listen to Jeremiah 31:31–34:

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

The old covenant demanded knowledge of God. The new covenant gives it. God Himself writes it on the heart. God Himself forgives the iniquity that made knowing Him impossible in the first place.

And that promise is not abstract. It has a face and a name.

In John 17:1–3, Jesus prays:

“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

Eternal life is not merely a destination. Eternal life is knowing God. That is what Jeremiah’s entire legal case was building toward all along — and that is what Jesus fulfills.

The Invitation

Do not boast in your wisdom. Do not boast in your might. Do not boast in your riches. Boast in this — that you understand and know Him. That is the one boast God will not refine out of you. That is the one boast that will still be standing on the last day.

So let me ask you what Jeremiah asked Judah.

Not: do you believe the right things about God? Not: do you attend the right services, sing the right songs, sit under the right teaching? Judah had all of that. Judah had the temple. Judah had the sacrifices. Judah had the name. And God said — you do not know me.

So ask it plainly. Do you know Him? Not know about Him. Know Him — the way Jeremiah 9:24 means it. Know His steadfast love, and love steadfastly in return. Know His justice, and walk uprightly before Him. Know His righteousness, and treat your neighbor the way His covenant requires.

Here is the mercy in all of this. Judah could not manufacture that knowledge on her own. She proved that for four hundred years. She had the law and broke it. She had the prophets and silenced them. She had the temple and trusted it instead of the God who lived there.

But God did not leave her with a command she could not keep. He made a promise He would keep Himself.

I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

That is not Judah's achievement. That is God's gift. And Jesus stands at the center of that gift — the one through whom the law gets written on a heart, the one through whom sin gets remembered no more, the one who prayed on the night before He died that we would have this exact thing: eternal life, which is to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He sent.

So hear the invitation tonight. Stop boasting in what cannot save you. Wisdom will not save you. Strength will not save you. Wealth will not save you. Religion without relationship will not save you.

Know Him. That is the covenant. That is the promise. That is eternal life.

And if you know Him tonight — even a little, even imperfectly — then let that be enough to send you home rejoicing. Because the God who delights in steadfast love, justice, and righteousness — that same God delights in you.