

Jeremiah: Lesson 9

Jeremiah's Yoke

Memory Text: "Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." (Luke 9:23)

Setting The Stage: Awareness is largely the product of comparison. Those that have travelled, how do you help the person you're talking to appreciate what you've experienced? You do it by using some form of attachment. You use what is familiar to those you're talking to, to explain to them something unfamiliar.

Jesus resorted to the use of parables. Scripture records 40 parables that Jesus taught. These stories, or parables, He used as a comparison, or a reference to illustrate some pretty huge things the people needed to know about God. Actually the word "parable" (Gr. *parabole*) means "a juxtaposition," "a comparison," "an illustration," from a verb meaning "to put one thing by the side of another."

God directed Jeremiah to use parables, or object lessons, to illustrate the truth God was trying to communicate with His people, but sometimes Jeremiah had to live out those messages – acted parables – to make the point more forceful. We have seen some of those. In this week's lesson we'll review where Jeremiah was again called to live out God's messages to Judah.

Sunday – A Solitary Life

Jeremiah 16:1-13; Luke 14:26

Jeremiah 16:2. Jeremiah was commanded to accept a solitary life – no wife, no children. He was to go it alone. This direction came to him much earlier in his ministry as Hebrew youth married at an early age. How hard would this be for you if you were given this instruction? In the culture of the times, starting a family was important to young men. Not only was there the blessings of love and companionship, but there was the real possibility of a son carrying on the family name.

The reason for this injunction was spelled out in **v. 3, 4**. Both parents and children were to suffer a horrible fate. So Jeremiah's life as a bachelor was to be a living parable, warning Judah of the impending captivity and teaching them the dangers of when God's word is dismissed. Jeremiah was also to be deprived of participating in those activities which bond person to person – mourning and celebration. Serving and working for God often brings personal sacrifices.

1. To illustrate how far the people of God had wandered from the Lord into spiritual adultery, Hosea was asked to marry a prostitute (Hos. 1:1-3).

2. The names of Isaiah and his children were given for “signs and wonders” (Isa. 8:18). Isaiah’s name means “Jehovah will save,” a reminder to Judah that they would be saved from Israel, Syria, and Assyria. The name of Israel’s first son, Shear-jashub, means “a remnant shall return,” signifying to Judah that a remnant would be saved and that God would not make a full end of Judah at that time. Isaiah’s second son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, means, “Speed the spoil, hasten the prey.” This son was a reminder that judgment was coming to those who would reject God’s grace.
3. Ezekiel was to remain dumb until he heard about the fall of the city, at which point he would be able to speak again (Ezek. 24:24, 27).
4. Methuselah’s name means, “When I die, it shall come.” Each time someone called out to Methuselah his name reminded the people that the year of his death marked the year the flood would come to wash away a wicked world.

Luke 14:26, 27: “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” We are each called to bear our cross for Christ. Have you ever considered that your life of commitment and sacrifice might be speaking to someone about their need to make a decision for Christ? In what ways are our lives an illustration of the times in which we live? Do our lifestyles reflect that we believe Jesus is soon to return?

It seems cruel that such devastation would be allowed to happen to God’s people. Didn’t God care? He most certainly did. That he had sent Jeremiah and other contemporary prophets to warn His people tells us a great deal about the love He had for them, and the value He places on the freedom of the human will. When the people were to ask Jeremiah (with hypocritical surprise, mind you) why such stern punishment, the answer was to be given that the people had “forsaken [God].” (Jer. 16:11) What more could God do for them if they didn’t want Him and the protection He could provide?

Keep in mind that coupled with this fearful warning was a message of hope. God would eventually deliver His people from Babylon and restore the once desolate land (see Jer. 16:14-21). Whoever the Lord loves He disciplines (Heb. 12:6).

Monday – Jeremiah’s Yoke

Jeremiah 27:1-18; Matthew 11:28-30

Jeremiah 27:1-7. The Lord told Jeremiah to make bonds and yokes – a shaped piece of wood placed upon the neck of a beast of burden, by means of which loads were pulled, and fastened with bands around the animal’s neck. Jeremiah was to wear the yoke (probably about 1 ½ m long and 8 cm thick) as a sign of impending captivity, humiliation, and servitude. Another acted out parable. The imagery was too obvious to be misunderstood.

This message was given at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah (not Jehoiakim – see v. Jer. 27:3, 12; 28:1). It was given to three different audiences:

- 1) To the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon, all enemies of God's people (vss. 1-11). Jeremiah was a prophet to the nations (Jer. 1:5). Contrary to popular opinion, God had a deep regard for the welfare of other nations. The ambassadors from these nations had been sent to Zedekiah urging an alliance against Nebuchadnezzar. These nations are mentioned in the same order in Jer. 25:21, 22, given 11 years before. The former prediction had been fulfilled by this time, however, for some reason, these kings still entertained hope that they could succeed in a rebellion against Babylon.
- 2) To king Zedekiah (vss. 12-15). According to *Prophets & King*, p. 458, if Zedekiah had accepted Jeremiah's warning and had the courage to persuade the people, he could have led the nation to serve Babylon and prevent incredible disaster from occurring. Zedekiah saw what happened when Jehoiachin's and Jehoiakim resisted Babylon. Yet he would not listen.
- 3) To the priests and the people (vss. 16-18). Jeremiah saw that the false prophecy about the return of the temple vessels was designed to incite rebellion, so he suggests that the prophets pray that the existing vessels not be taken.

The common thread in these messages centered on the need for each entity to serve Babylon and live (vss. 11, 12, 17). God continued to provide hope, however, when He stated that Babylon's time would come (v. 7).

Question: God punished Judah as the result of their ongoing rebellion against His will, but then they even rebelled against the punishment. Why is it so difficult to accept discipline instead of continuously fighting it? Pride doesn't want to be told off or told contrary to its own ideas and opinions. Pride thinks it knows better. May God help us to always embrace a meek and teachable attitude. How you ask?

Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle [meek] and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Tuesday – War of the Prophets

Jeremiah 28:1-9; Deuteronomy 13:1-3

The common thread in the messages of Jeremiah 27 is not only centered on the need for each entity to serve Babylon and live (vss. 11, 12, 17), but also to be careful to not listen to false prophets (see vss. 9, 14, 16).

Jeremiah 28:1-9. Hananiah, a man who seemed to be one of Jeremiah's opponents and one of the leaders of the resistance party, countered Jeremiah's message with one of his own, claiming it was a word from the Lord.

Instead of submitting to Babylon as Jeremiah had encouraged Judah to do, Hananiah suggested that the Babylonian yoke was to be broken and all the temple vessels, captives, including the previous king, Jehoiachin, would return (obviously a subtle attempt to incite rebellion against Babylon). Instead of a seventy-year captivity as Jeremiah had predicted (Jer. 29:10), Hananiah had predicted it would all be over within two years. Two prophets. Which one was right?

Question from viewer: "I appreciate your Sabbath School Lesson from this quarter's Bible Study about Jeremiah. Please help me understand how the leaders and people in Jeremiah's time would have been able to distinguish between the false prophets and Jeremiah who was a true prophet. What evidence did the leaders and the people have that Jeremiah was telling the truth and the false prophets weren't. Today, we have the Bible and know that if someone is telling us things that are not in harmony with the Bible, they are false prophets. But, what did the people of Jeremiah's day have?"

Jeremiah was comfortable to rest his case on the issue of the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of his and previous prophecies (v. 8, 9). Deut. 18:20-22 reminds us that a fulfilled or failed prediction will indicate who is a true prophet and who is a false prophet. Sometimes we have to wait and see. But there are other indicators that help us know whether a person truly has a message from the Lord or not.

Deuteronomy 13:1-3: "If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'—which you have not known—'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. "

These verses remind us that even if a certain prediction comes to pass, wait to hear what message that person will deliver, whether it will lead a person to love and obey God, or cause a person to turn to other gods. Did Hananiah have a message of faithfulness and obedience to God? Didn't his message seem just a little too convenient?

We need to also consider that Jeremiah's previous warnings of impending doom because of disobedience came to pass (two previous captivities under Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin). His message also squared with what previous trusted prophets had said (see Lev. 26:14-39; Deut. 28:15-68). The evidence was there to trust that Jeremiah's messages came from God. But, his message wasn't convenient. They didn't want to accept it.

Wednesday – The Yoke of Iron

Jeremiah 28:10-17

Jeremiah 28:10, 11. Jeremiah wore the yoke as God had commanded him, symbolizing the need for Judah to submit to and not resist Babylon. To add force to his own false prophecy that said God was going to break the Babylonian yoke within two years, Hananiah took the yoke off Jeremiah's neck and broke it. He didn't want the people to be "fooled" into believe Jeremiah's prediction. This experience parallels the confrontation that occurred between the false prophet Zedekiah and the true prophet Micaiah, over whether Ahab and Jehoshaphat should go to battle the Syrians or not (1 Kings 22:8-25).

How did Jeremiah respond? He walked away. Perhaps a good idea for each of us when things begin to get physical? And why would he need to stay to fight? Was he not delivering God's message? Would not God take care of the defiance of Hananiah? But after things had cooled down, what happened?

Jeremiah 28:12-14. Jeremiah returned with a message from the Lord. If he didn't return it would have seemed as though he was defeated. God persisted in using the figure of a yoke, but this time made of a stronger, more enduring material – iron. This was a clear warning that any resistance would only result in a more bitter, more painful bondage. This wasn't a response of revenge, but another clear message from the Lord.

Thursday – Trusting in Lies

Jeremiah 28:15

Jeremiah 28:15-17. What happened to Hananiah? Within about two months of Jeremiah's prediction, he died. And it will always be the sad fate of those who persist in defying the Lord and who lead God's people away from what is true and right (see Acts 5:4, 5; 13:6-11 – Ananias and Elymus).

The damage had been done. Hananiah had led many to trust a lie (v. 15) through deception. Essentially, his was a message of grace, redemption, and deliverance. It was an easy message to share, because it was an easy message for the people to hear. What Hananiah had preached was a false gospel. What the people needed to hear was Jeremiah's message of warning. Is it the same today?

2 Timothy 4:3, 4: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."

2 Thessalonians 2:10-12: "And with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be

saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

2 Corinthians 11:12-14: “But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.”

Appeal: We live in dangerous times; a time when Satan will pull out all the stops and hold nothing back. Jesus warned us that in the days leading up to His return false Christ's and false prophets will appear. Now, like never before, do we need more than an acquaintance with the word of God and a casual relationship with the Lord. We need to know the scriptures and be filled with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Isn't that we really need? Isn't that what you want?