


# A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

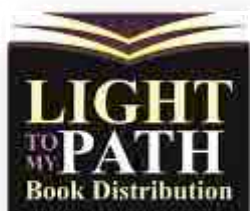


*A Devotional Look at the  
Life and Message of the Prophet  
Jeremiah*

F. Wayne MacLeod

# A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

A Devotional Look at the Life  
and Message of the Prophet Jeremiah



**F. Wayne MacLeod**

**LIGHT TO MY PATH BOOK DISTRIBUTION**

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## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

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## PREFACE

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"A Fiery Prophet," that is what Jeremiah was. He worked with "a people of wood." His messages often burnt them to a crisp! What a thankless job he had. Nobody likes to get burnt. His listeners tried to kill him. They threw him in prison and put him in stocks. He did not have many friends. He never married and had no children to carry on his name. For forty years, however, he faithfully proclaimed the word of the Lord to a people who turned their backs and blocked their ears. He is an example of faithfulness and perseverance. It is a hard example to follow.

In this study, we will examine the key events and messages of this great man of God. I hope that those who read this book will not only come to a new appreciation of the prophet but see how much we still need people like him and his message in our day. May you be challenged as you read to listen once again to the words of this great servant of God. May the words of this fiery prophet consume the wood hay and stubble of our lives and challenge us to new heights of faithful obedience.

F. Wayne Mac Leod



# CHAPTER 1 -

## THE WIDOW'S MITE

---

*1 The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one 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, 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. (Jeremiah 1)*

Jeremiah 1:1-3 gives us insight into the life of the prophet Jeremiah. Notice that he grew up in the home of a priest. His father Hilkiah was a priest during the reign of Josiah, king of Judah. Josiah was one of the rare kings who served the Lord with a whole heart. 2 Kings 23:25 describes the king's commitment to the Lord in the following terms:



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*25 Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him. (2 Kings 23)*

The years preceding the reign of Josiah were challenging. The people of God had abandoned the temple. Sin and evil were rampant in the land. In the eighteenth year of his reign, however, Josiah ordered that the temple of God be repaired (see 2 Kings 22:3-7). After years of abandonment, the temple was in disrepair. While it was being restored, the high priest found the book of the law. It had apparently not been consulted for years. After examining its contents, he gave it to Shaphan the scribe to read to King Josiah (2 Kings 22:8-10). This book touched the king profoundly. God used it to stir up his heart about the evil in his land. In response to the words of the book, King Josiah asked the High Priest to destroy all vessels found in the temple of the Lord that had been consecrated to Baal (see 2 Kings 23.4). This shows us that the temple was not only in disrepair but also defiled by the worship of pagan gods. Under the leadership of King Josiah, the temple was cleansed, and the pure worship of God restored.

Jeremiah began his ministry in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah (Jeremiah 1:2). This was just five years before the priests found the book of the law. These were exciting days in Judah for those who loved the Lord. Jeremiah's father, Hilkiyah, as a priest, may have had a significant role to play in the religious revival that took place in those days.

Jeremiah's ministry spanned the reign of three kings. He served as a prophet for a total of 40 years, from the

## Chapter 1 - The Widow's Mite

thirteenth year of Josiah to the eleventh year of Zedekiah. A look at the history of Judah during this period shows us that while Jeremiah began his ministry under the revival of Josiah, he ended it watching the people of Judah going into captivity for their disobedience to the God he served.

Jeremiah watched Nebuchadnezzar capture the city of Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:10), taking its king into exile (2 Kings 23:11). He saw the Babylonians strip the temple Josiah had repaired of all its treasures (2 Kings 23:12-13). Jerusalem was left in ruins with all its skilled labourers forced to leave at the point of a sword. Only the poor and unskilled remained in the city to fend for themselves (2 Kings 23:14). He witnessed the enemy break down the defensive wall that surrounded the city (2 Kings 25:10) and burn it to the ground (2 Kings 25:9).

What would you like to see after forty years of service for the Lord? Would you not at least want to know that your life and influence had an impact? Would you not like to feel that you had made some contribution to the lives of those you served? What did Jeremiah think as he watched the people of God going into captivity? How did he feel about his contribution to their spiritual well-being? What was it like to walk the burnt-out streets of a once glorious city? What went through his mind as he approached the ground where the once beautiful temple of God had stood? Was there a crushing sense of failure in his heart? What had he accomplished after all these years? Had he wasted his life?

To look back after years of service and only see brokenness must have been devastating for the prophet. He is not alone, however. Pastors all over the world look back, desperately seeking to find some evidence of a ministry that made a difference. Missionaries serving in challenging

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countries return home wondering if their efforts were in vain. Parents watch their children choose paths of sin and rebellion and wonder if they failed in bringing them up. Like Jeremiah, they walk the charred streets of Jerusalem, looking at empty burnt-out buildings and wonder if their life and ministry have had any impact at all.

We live in an age where the value of a ministry is measured by results. We love statistics. Is this how God sees ministry? Is the goal of Christian service to see results? It is easy to be faithful when everything is going well, and we see the fruit for our labours. It is difficult, however, to persevere when we are facing rejection and seeing no results.

God does not call us all to “successful” ministries. There are those who do experience this kind of blessing. God also wants people who will be faithful in the little things. People who will not make statistics and numbers their god, but who will willingly and joyfully persevere in His purpose, even when it means not seeing worldly success. When we stand before God to give an account for our lives, He will not be concerned about numbers and statistics but faithfulness. Jeremiah was faithful to the call of God. This meant a lot of rejection and abuse, but he persevered in God’s purpose, and for this, he would receive his reward.

On one occasion, Jesus watched as people placed their offering in the temple offering box. He saw the rich coming in with their vast wealth and give of their excess. When Jesus saw the poor widow offer her last two coins, however, His heart was touched. According to Jesus, this widow gave more than anyone else. When you come to the end of your service for the Lord and enter the celestial temple of God, what will you drop into the temple offering box?

## Chapter 1 - The Widow's Mite

Maybe our lives and ministries have been richly blessed. We come proudly before the Lord to offer Him a portion of the blessings we have received. When we look behind us, however, we see Jeremiah coming into the temple. As he enters, he is worn and tired. He looks up into the face of His Lord. With shame, he says: "Lord, I don't know what I can offer. I have not seen many converts. People didn't listen when I preached. I have been faithful though Lord; I have persevered for these last forty years. Could I offer you my life of faithful service, it is all I have?"

As we listen to Jeremiah's words, we see the smile of approval on the face of the Lord. Our gifts and offerings pale into insignificance compared to Jeremiah's. Here is a man who offered his "widow's mite." He endured opposition and saw people turn their backs on him. He was rejected and thrown in prison for preaching. People hated him and his message. He was mocked, insulted and abused for his stand. He was not allowed to marry or celebrate with his fellow citizens. When he died, there were no children to carry on his name. We see his suffering for the cause of his Lord, and somehow statistics and numbers don't seem to matter so much anymore. We offer our "successes," but this man standing before us offered his life. His offering seems so much more significant than ours. In an age of glamorizing results, isn't God only looking for faithfulness and obedience? Jeremiah is an example for us in this.

For Consideration:

Describe the times at which Jeremiah ministered. Under what conditions did he begin his ministry? What were the conditions in the nation in his final years?

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What is the difference between striving for success and striving for obedience? What has been your focus?

Would you be content to be obedient even if it meant you did not see fruit in your ministry?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to assure you that you are walking in obedience to Him.

Ask the Spirit of God to convict you in any area of your life where you have made success and statistics your god.

Take a moment to thank the Lord for the example of Jeremiah, a man who gave his life to serving God even when that meant not seeing any results for years of service.

## CHAPTER 2 - CALLED BEFORE BIRTH

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*4 Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jeremiah 1)*

Jeremiah's call to the prophetic ministry is probably one of the best-known in the Bible. Notice that Jeremiah 1:5 speaks of this calling in three stages. Jeremiah was "known," he was "consecrated," and finally, he was "appointed." Let's take a moment to examine these aspects of the prophet's call.

### *Known by God*

Notice first that God knew Jeremiah before He sent Him out as a prophet:

*5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,*

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Any employer will take the time to get to know his or her workers before sending them out to do a job. Good employers will match their employee's skills with the job they require them to do.

Notice, however, when God knew Jeremiah. Jeremiah 1:5 tells us that God knew Jeremiah before He formed him in his mother's womb. Before Jeremiah was conceived, God knew all about him. God's knowledge of Jeremiah is very different from that of an earthly employer. This knowledge was like that of an artist standing before a blank sheet of paper. The painter forms an idea of what he or she wants to create and with skilful strokes of the brush, brings to life what was conceived in the mind. Like a potter forming a clay vessel, the idea is born in the thoughts and heart of the potter. He knows the size, shape, and purpose of the creation before he shapes it. Like the pottery vessel and the painting, Jeremiah was born in the mind of God before His Maker placed him in the womb.

God had a purpose for Jeremiah. He shaped and moulded him for a task. Jeremiah was not a chance happening of his parent's marriage. Before his mother conceived him, God knew what He wanted to accomplish in this young child's life and personally formed him to fit the call. What an encouragement it is to know that God shapes and forms us individually for His purpose. What God did in the life of Jeremiah, He does for us as well. The God who knew you before you were born formed you for a purpose.

### *Jeremiah is Consecrated*

Secondly, notice that Jeremiah was also consecrated.

*5 ...and before you were born I consecrated you; (Jeremiah 1)*

## Chapter 2 - Called Before Birth

To consecrate is to set apart or to dedicate. This was the second stage of God's call on the life of Jeremiah. God created Jeremiah with a purpose in mind. Then He set him apart in his mother's womb for this task. God placed His protective and guiding hand on the life of this unborn child. Jeremiah had God's stamp of approval. Even as he came out of his mother's womb, Jeremiah was protected by the sovereign hand of God, His Creator. Nothing would hinder that sovereign will of God in his life. God would shield him and protect him until Jeremiah became aware of his purpose.

### *Appointed by God*

Finally, notice that Jeremiah was appointed.

*5 ... I appointed you a prophet to the nations. (Jeremiah 1)*

The word "appointed" in the King James Version of the Bible is translated by the word "ordained." The word is used to speak of a responsibility given to another person, the passing on of instructions or the granting of permission. In a sense, it is like a young driver receiving his or her driver's license. When the driver is of age, that piece of paper gives him or her permission and authority to sit behind the wheel of a car and drive. This is what God is doing for Jeremiah by appointing him. He is giving him permission to go in His name and speak His word. God knew Jeremiah before he was born and created him with a purpose. God consecrated him by setting him apart and sovereignly protecting him for the task He had in mind. Now that Jeremiah was old enough to understand that call, God hands him his license as a prophet. He was to go to the nations and speak the words of God.



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Many times, we feel that our call came when God gave us our appointment. God's call was on Jeremiah's life well before his actual appointment was made known to him. This was also the case for Moses. He was set apart from his birth for the specific task of delivering the people of God from bondage. God protected him and shaped him through various situations in life, preparing him for this responsibility. It was only at 80 years of age that God gave him his appointment.

The apostle Paul's calling took place well before his appointment. Consider what he told the Galatians:

*15 But when he who had set me apart  
before I was born, and who called me  
by his grace, 16 was pleased to reveal  
his Son to me, in order that I might  
preach him among the Gentiles, I did  
not immediately consult with anyone;  
(Galatians 1)*

According to Galatians 1:15, Paul was set apart as an apostle from his mother's womb. His appointment did not take place until he came to know the Lord Jesus. Before coming to an awareness of his calling, Paul sought to destroy the work of God. Despite this, however, God's hand was on him. He was shaped from birth by God for a very particular ministry.

God's servants are born, first, in the mind of God. They are then set apart from their mother's womb and, at the moment, chosen by God, appointed to the ministry to which they have been shaped all their lives. Jeremiah's calling had nothing to do with his natural ability or inclinations. It had everything to do with the purpose of God before he was born. What is the purpose of God for your life?

## Chapter 2 - Called Before Birth

### For Consideration:

God knew Jeremiah before birth as an artist knows in his or her mind what he is going to paint, or a potter knows the purpose for which they fashion the clay. What does this tell you about your life?

What do we learn here in the calling of Jeremiah about the way God protected and kept him for the purpose He had for his life? Have you seen evidence in your life of how God worked out circumstances to prepare you for the task He had for your life?

Jeremiah was called not because of his natural ability, but because God had a plan for him before he was born. In other words, God's call is more about His purpose than our ability. What does this teach us about the source of our strength and wisdom?

What is the call of God on your life? Can you step into that calling, knowing that God can use you not because of your ability but because of His purpose?

### For Prayer:

Thank the Lord that you were born not so much because of the relationship of your parents but as one who was first known in the mind of God.

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Ask that Lord to reveal His purpose to you. Thank Him that He has been protecting and shaping you for that purpose.

Ask God to help you to rely not on your ability but His empowering. Thank Him that He not only calls but equips all He calls to do what He has given them to do.

## CHAPTER 3 -

### I AM ONLY A CHILD

---

*6 Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." 7 But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord." 9 Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. 10 See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."*

In chapter 2, we examined the call of Jeremiah to the prophetic ministry. Notice the response of the prophet to this calling:

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*6 Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." (Jeremiah 1)*

Jeremiah felt inadequate. His response is not uncommon. Moses did not want to go to Egypt for the same reason.

*11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3)*

When God called Isaiah, he replied:

*5 And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" (Isaiah 6)*

Listen to Paul's sense of unworthiness for the call of God on his life:

*8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (1 Corinthians 15)*

All these men experienced what Jeremiah experienced the day God called him to be a prophet. None of them felt worthy or even capable of fulfilling the purpose of God. I would dare to say that anyone who does feel worthy, may not understand human nature.

### Chapter 3 - I Am Only a Child

God delights in taking the weak of this world and sending them out in His strength. He equips those He calls. Notice God's response to Jeremiah's sense of unworthiness:

*7 But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. (Jeremiah 1)*

"Jeremiah," the Lord God said, "there are no excuses. You *will* go to those to whom I send you. You *will* tell them what I tell you to say. You were born for this. This is your purpose in life." I have met people who have not stepped out into the call of God because they felt unworthy or incapable. Unworthiness is not an excuse for disobedience, nor is our inability. We must never be afraid of what looks impossible to us. All too many people only do what they are humanly capable of doing and stop there. God is not interested in our human ability. He places us in situations that are bigger than us to show us His ability. How will we ever understand the power of God if we only do what we know we can do in our strength. God was calling Jeremiah to a task that was far bigger than himself. To calm Jeremiah's insecurities, however, God reassures him of two vital facts.

Firstly, God told Jeremiah in verse 8:

*8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord."*

God promised to protect Jeremiah. There would be opposition to his message, but Jeremiah would not be alone. God would be with him and deliver him from the angry people who lashed out against him. God did not promise that things would be easy for the prophet. People would not like

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what Jeremiah told them. They would seek to harm him. God, however, would not abandon him in those times. Jeremiah would be assured of God's protection when he was under attack.

How often did the people of God want to stone Moses? God delivered him every time. David fled from those who rejected his kingship and sought his life, but God protected him from their sword. The apostles Paul and Peter were stoned and put in prison. If the Lord had work for them to do, however, no one could keep them from that work. The Lord, who calls, protects those He calls until they have accomplished His purpose. God told Jeremiah:

*20 And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, declares the Lord. 21 I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless." (Jeremiah 15)*

God promised to strengthen Jeremiah against all attacks of the enemy. Those who heard him would fight against him, but God would surround the prophet with a wall of bronze. The people who opposed him would not prevail. God would deliver Jeremiah from their attacks. While life would not be comfortable, the prophet was assured of God's presence to protect and keep him. He could step out with boldness to speak the word God gave him.

Not only did Jeremiah have the promise of God's protection but notice another commitment God made to the prophet in verse 9:

### Chapter 3 - I Am Only a Child

*9 Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. (Jeremiah 1)*

I can imagine that Jeremiah, as he reflected on the call of God to be a prophet to the nations, would have wondered what he was to say. God told Jeremiah, however, that this was not his concern. God promised to give him the words He wanted him to speak. Jeremiah was simply to share what God put in his mouth.

God did not deny that Jeremiah was only a youth. What the prophet said was correct. Jeremiah was young at the time of his commissioning. He lacked strength, wisdom and discernment. Even a child, however, can accomplish much under God's anointing. What confidence this must have given Jeremiah. He could boldly go with the word the Lord God had given him. He was assured that, as he went, the protective hands of God surrounded him. God would lovingly shield him from the attacks of the enemy. Yes, he was a child, but he was a child protected and equipped by God, and that made all the difference. He would succeed where many wiser and more experienced men failed because his confidence was not in his ability but in God.

For Consideration:

What was the response of Jeremiah to the call of God? From a human point of view, was Jeremiah equipped to fulfil the purpose of God?



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Are any of us worthy of the call God has placed on our lives? Have you ever disobeyed God because you felt unworthy or incapable of doing what He asked you to do?

Should we fear being placed in a situation that is humanly too difficult for us?

What was the two-fold promise of God to Jeremiah? Is that promise also for all who are called by God today?

Can we fulfil our calling in our strength and wisdom? What was the source of Jeremiah's words? What is the source of our power, provision and wisdom? Are you trusting God for what you need?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord that He equips those He calls to do the work He has given them.

Ask the Lord to give you confidence that not only will He give you all you need, but He will also protect and keep you as you walk in obedience to His call on your life.

### Chapter 3 - I Am Only a Child

Ask for the grace to trust God for your need. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have tried to exercise your calling in human strength and wisdom.

Ask the Lord to give you a more profound sense of His call on your life. Ask for the courage to step out even when you feel unworthy and inadequate.



## CHAPTER 4 -

### TWO SIGNS

---

*11 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" And I said, "I see an almond branch." 12 Then the Lord said to me, "You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it."*

*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 disaster shall be let loose upon all the inhabitants of the land. (Jeremiah 1)*

Before sending Jeremiah out with His word, God gave him two signs. These signs were intended to encourage and give him a sense of urgency in the task to which he had been called. These signs came to Jeremiah in the form of a vision.

*The Almond Branch*

The first of the two signs was an almond branch.

*11 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" And I said, "I see an almond branch." 12 Then the Lord said to me, "You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it." (Jeremiah 1)*

What was so unique about the branch of an almond tree? What was the Lord saying to Jeremiah through this picture? There are at least three possible answers.

In Numbers 16, we read the story of Korah's rebellion. Korah and his followers began to criticize Moses and Aaron for their leadership in the nation of Israel. Even though God had chosen Moses and Aaron as leaders, Korah and his supporters felt they also had the right to this position. The Lord killed Korah for his rebellion, but his discontent succeeded in stirring up confusion in the minds of the people against the leadership of Aaron.

Moses and Aaron sought the Lord to know what to do about this uneasiness in the camp of Israel. The Lord told them to command each tribe to bring a branch and place it before Him. The Lord would then reveal His chosen priest through these branches. Aaron brought an almond branch. When Moses returned the following day, he discovered that Aaron's branch had budded and produced almonds:

*8 On the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony, and behold, the*

## Chapter 4 - Two Signs

*staff of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds. (Numbers 17)*

It was by this means that the Lord proved to His people that Aaron was His chosen priest.

Hebrews 9.4 tells us that this almond branch was placed inside the Ark of the Covenant as a permanent reminder to the people that the Lord had chosen Aaron and his descendants to be His representatives. Was God, by showing this almond branch to Jeremiah, reassuring him that he too was His representative?

The second possible meaning of this sign is found in the Hebrew language. God asked Jeremiah to tell Him what he saw in the vision. Jeremiah responded by telling the Lord that he saw an almond branch. The Hebrew word for almond is "*saged*." The Lord responded by saying: "I am watching over my word to perform it (verse 12). The Hebrew word for watching over is "*saqad*."

Many commentators believe there is a play on words in this verse ("*saged*" (almond) and "*saqad*" (watch). When God gave His word, He watched over it. All that He said would come to pass. Is it possible that God was giving a new meaning to the symbol of the almond branch because it sounded so much like the Hebrew word for 'watching over'? Whenever Jeremiah saw the almond, he would remember that God would not hesitate to perform all that He said. He would often need this reminder in his ministry.

We must note, thirdly, that the almond tree was one of the first trees to bud in the land of Israel. In many senses, it was a reminder that God would do what He said without

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delay. Even as the almond was quick to bud, so God would fulfil His word without delay.

Whatever the meaning of the almond branch, it is sure that it was meant to give Jeremiah courage. He could go with the confidence that God called him to speak a word that would not delay in coming to pass.

### *The Boiling Pot*

The second sign the Lord gave Jeremiah was that of a 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 disaster shall be let loose upon all the inhabitants of the land. (Jeremiah 1)*

Notice that this boiling pot was tilting from the north. When the boiling contents rose, they would spill out to the south. What was in the pot? It was the wrath of God against His people. A great enemy would come out of the north to devour God's people. At any moment, this anger could spill out over the side and come pouring down over the people of God. This was a powerful incentive for Jeremiah to go quickly with the word of God. The picture of that boiling pot would have a tremendous influence on Jeremiah and his message.

As God sent Jeremiah, He sent him with a vision burnt into his heart and mind. Jeremiah was a chosen vessel to bring the word of God to His people. God was watching over this word to perform it. This word was a word of warning about

## Chapter 4 - Two Signs

a grave danger that awaited his people. Jeremiah needed to go. The people needed to know. His words were of utmost importance. He could not fail his people. He could not fail his God.

For Consideration:

Why do you suppose God gave Jeremiah two signs? What would these signs have meant for the prophet? How would they encourage and direct Jeremiah in his ministry?

What did the almond branch mean to Jeremiah? Why was it essential that the prophet understand that God would not hesitate to fulfil His promises or keep His word?

How confident are you in the promises of God? Have you ever wondered if God will be faithful to His word?

The boiling pot confirmed to Jeremiah that the judgement of God was coming for the nation of Israel. Is that judgement coming to our country or members of your family? What challenges does this picture bring to you personally?



## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord for the confidence we can have in His Word. Thank Him for the assurance that He will fulfil all that He promises.

Ask the Lord to forgive you for times you have doubted His word and promises.

Do you have loved ones who are under the judgement of God? Ask the Lord to show you how you can be an example to them and point them to the forgiveness offered in Christ.

## CHAPTER 5 -

### WORDS OF FIRE AMONG A PEOPLE OF WOOD

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*14 Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of hosts: "Because you have spoken this word, behold, I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall consume them. (Jeremiah 5)*

Have you ever had a hard message to deliver to a friend? I am talking about one of those messages that risks causing him or her much hurt; one that you wished you could ignore. Jeremiah's calling was difficult. God told the prophet that His words would be like fire among people of wood. The result was obvious. His words would offend and hurt.

Jeremiah would make many enemies because of what he preached. He proclaimed a message of despair and doom. The words were harsh. The prophet would not be well received.

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

What did Jeremiah tell the people that caused such objection? In chapters one to six, we read that Jeremiah proclaimed a two-fold message. First, he showed the people how God saw them. Second, he prophesied about what God was going to do to them because of what He saw in them.

### *How God Saw His People*

In Jeremiah 2:20, God compared His people to whores without moral restraint:

*20 "For long ago I broke your yoke and burst your bonds; but you said, 'I will not serve.' Yes, on every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down like a whore. (Jeremiah 2)*

Israel, however, was not like a common whore. God went on to compare her to a wild donkey in heat. Those looking for her would not have any problem finding her. She made herself available to all who wanted her:

*24 a wild donkey used to the wilderness, in her heat sniffing the wind! Who can restrain her lust? None who seek her need weary themselves; in her month they will find her. (Jeremiah 2)*

God saw His people as those who had broken His law and argued with Him about His purpose:

*29 "Why do you contend with me? You have all transgressed against me, declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 2)*

## Chapter 5 - Words of Fire Among a People of Wood

He compared Israel to an unfaithful wife who left her husband to seek other lovers:

*1 "If a man divorces his wife and she goes from him and becomes another man's wife, will he return to her? Would not that land be greatly polluted? You have played the whore with many lovers; and would you return to me? declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 3)*

They were foolish and stupid children with no understanding:

*22 "For my people are foolish; they know me not; they are stupid children; they have no understanding. They are 'wise'—in doing evil! But how to do good they know not." (Jeremiah 4)*

They had rebelled against God and turned from Him:

*23 But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and gone away. (Jeremiah 5)*

God people grew fat by oppressing their fellow citizens. Their evil knew no bounds. They would stop at nothing to enrich themselves, even at the expense of the fatherless and needy:

*28 they have grown fat and sleek. They know no bounds in deeds of evil; they judge not with justice the cause of the fatherless, to make it prosper, and they*

A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood  
*do not defend the rights of the needy.*  
*(Jeremiah 5)*

Prophets in Judah and Israel spoke falsehood, and the people delighted in this falsehood. They preferred lies to the truth.

*31 the prophets prophesy falsely, and  
the priests rule at their direction; my  
people love to have it so, but what will  
you do when the end comes? (Jere-  
miah 5)*

God's people wanted nothing to do with the truth of His Word. They treated the word of the Lord as an "object of scorn:"

*10 To whom shall I speak and give  
warning, that they may hear? Behold,  
their ears are uncircumcised, they can-  
not listen behold, the word of the Lord  
is to them an object of scorn;  
they take no pleasure in it. (Jeremiah 6)*

They felt no shame for their evil deeds; they did not even know how to blush:

*15 Were they ashamed when they committed abomina-  
tion? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know  
how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who  
fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be  
overthrown," says the Lord. (Jeremiah 6).*

What is your reaction when people criticize you? Even if we know that what they say is correct, we often do not appreciate their criticism. When these criticisms multiply, our

## Chapter 5 - Words of Fire Among a People of Wood

response becomes more intense. Is it not easy to see that those who heard Jeremiah would not be happy with his message? His words did indeed burn.

### *What God was Going to Do*

The second part of God's message through Jeremiah related to what He was going to do to His people. Chapters one to six are filled with descriptions of what was to become of this rebellious nation. Let's look briefly at two passages that summarize the words of God through Jeremiah:

*23 I looked on the earth, and behold, it was without form and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light. 24 I looked on the mountains, and behold, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro. 25 I looked, and behold, there was no man, and all the birds of the air had fled. 26 I looked, and behold, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the Lord, before his fierce anger.  
(Jeremiah 4)*

In these verses, Jeremiah told his people what he saw in their future. He saw a future of darkness. He saw the mountains quaking and the hills moving with the force of that quake. He saw no man and a world in which the birds fled. He described a desert with cities in ruins before the great anger of the Lord. His prophecy was a picture of desolation. The land of "milk and honey" had become an empty, dark and barren desert because of the anger of the Lord.

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

Let us consider another example of what Jeremiah preached. Listen to his words in Jeremiah 5:

*15 Behold, I am bringing against you a nation from afar, O house of Israel, declares the Lord. It is an enduring nation; it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say. 16 Their quiver is like an open tomb; they are all mighty warriors. 17 They shall eat up your harvest and your food; they shall eat up your sons and your daughters; they shall eat up your flocks and your herds; they shall eat up your vines and your fig trees; your fortified cities in which you trust they shall beat down with the sword.” (Jeremiah 5)*

Jeremiah prophesied about a nation coming from the north to devour the lands of Israel and Judah. This army would ravage the fields and flocks, killing their sons and daughters, and taking their cities.

God sent Jeremiah with words of fire to people of wood. These words were not well received. He was called to preach a message that would gain him many enemies. It was not an easy ministry. We can only admire a man who was willing to make such a sacrifice for his Lord. Strengthened by the Lord, however, Jeremiah would be faithful in preaching such messages for forty years.

## Chapter 5 - Words of Fire Among a People of Wood

For Consideration:

Does God always call us to deliver comfortable messages to His people? Are you able to speak the truth of God even when it hurts?

How easy is it to avoid the hard messages and speak only those messages that will make us friends?

How do you think God sees your society? What do you think God would say about your church? What are the hidden sins that lurk beneath the surface?

Is there evidence of barrenness and the judgement of God on your society or church? What is this evidence?

What does Jeremiah's message teach us about a society or church that turns from God and His Word? What hope is there for such a community or church?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to give you the grace to live for Him, even when doing so is difficult and challenging.



### A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

Ask the Lord to search your heart to see if there is any offensive way in it. Ask for strength to repent and turn from any sin He might reveal.

Do you know people who are rebelling against the Lord? Take a moment now to ask God to forgive them and bring them into fellowship with Himself.

Take a moment to pray against sin in your society. Ask God to break these evils and bring His peace and health to your community again.

## CHAPTER 6 -

## THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD

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*8 “Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. 9 Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, 10 and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations? 11 Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord. 12 Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel. (Jeremiah 7)*

We often hear about the problems of other people but never think that next time it could be us. We feel invulnerable. Nothing could happen to us. When it does, however, it takes us by surprise. This was how the people of God

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

felt. They had a false sense of security. Sure, they were sinners, but they were also the chosen people of God. They could not imagine that God would ever abandon them. Surely in their time of need, He would always be there to deliver them. How could He ever let the enemy overcome them? We hear this message today. People have become so secure in the love of God, that they fail to realize that He is also their judge. "A God of love could never send us to hell," they say and continue in their sins with no worry or concern for their future. God called Jeremiah to speak out against this false notion.

Because of their belief, the people of God lived recklessly. Listen to the words of the Lord to His people in Jeremiah 7:

*9 Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, 10 and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!'—only to go on doing all these abominations? (Jeremiah 7)*

The Lord accused His people of many serious crimes in Jeremiah 7. They murdered, committed adultery, made false declarations and worshipped pagan gods. These were crimes punishable by death under the law of Moses. Notice, however, that despite these terrible crimes, the people still came to the temple feeling secure in their relationship with God. "We are delivered!" they proclaimed. "God doesn't hold our sins against us." With that, they would leave the temple to repeat the same crimes. There was no grief over their sin. Their hearts were hard and

## Chapter 6 - The Temple of the Lord

rebellious. They made their offerings to God but had no intention of changing their sinful actions.

Jeremiah warned his people against this attitude. He reminded them of the town of Shiloh and what God did to it because of the evil of His people:

*12 Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel. (Jeremiah 7)*

In Joshua 18:1, Israel set up the tabernacle of God in Shiloh. Samuel's parents worshipped at this tabernacle (1 Samuel 3:1). The Ark of the Covenant was also located in Shiloh in those days (1 Samuel 4:3).

When the Philistines defeated Israel in 1 Samuel 4, the Israelites went to Shiloh to get the Ark of the Covenant. They believed that having it with them would assure victory over the Philistines. They understood that the presence of the Lord was on the Ark.

With the Ark of the Covenant in their midst, the Israelites confidently faced the Philistines in battle. What happened was not what they expected. Thirty thousand Israelite foot soldiers died. The priests who had taken the Ark to the Israelite camp lost their lives, and the Philistines captured the Ark. Never had it entered the mind of the Israelites that God would so abandon them. They felt secure in having the Ark in their midst, but they were disappointed.

Jeremiah had a powerful message for the sinners of his day who regularly worshipped at the temple. You are under the judgement of God, he told them. Yes, you pray and

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

bring your offerings to God, but your heart is not right with Him. You, who stand before the altar, are murders, adulterers, liars and worshippers of false gods. God sees your evil ways. He knows your sinful thoughts. Do you think that you can offer a lamb, and all will be right when your heart is not repentant? Do you believe that God will accept your sacrifice when you have no intention of changing your ways?

Jeremiah rebuked the worshippers who came to the temple. He challenged these “religious people,” reprimanding them for their hypocrisy. They reacted strongly against Jeremiah’s message. He was a threat to their lifestyle. He exposed their sin. They hated him for this.

Jeremiah told the people of his day that just as God allowed the defeat and capture of Israel’s most sacred object—the Ark of the Covenant in Shiloh, so He would not hesitate to send enemies against them and the temple in Jerusalem. Their rebellious and hypocritical heart was an abomination to God.

What an important message this was. God’s people felt secure in their evil ways. They failed to understand the judgement of God. Jeremiah declared that God’s wrath would soon fall on them. He made many enemies with this word, but the truth needed to be told.

For Consideration:

The people of God trusted in the fact that they were the chosen people of God who worshipped at the temple. They believed that if they sinned, all they had to do was offer a

## Chapter 6 - The Temple of the Lord

sacrifice, and all would be well but had no intention of changing their ways. Does this attitude exist in our day?

The people of Israel considered their temple and the Ark of the Covenant sacred but lost them both because of their rebellion against God. What do we consider sacred in your life? Could God close your church? Could he take your business from you? Could He strip you of your health?

How would Jeremiah's message, as recorded in this chapter, be received in our day? Do we need people like Jeremiah, who are unafraid to challenge the "religious" of our day?

For Prayer:

Ask God to give you a genuine faith that touches your thoughts, actions and attitudes.

Ask the Lord to cleanse your church and expose anything in the hearts, minds and actions of its members that does not bring glory to His name. Ask Him to do the same for you.

Ask God for the boldness of Jeremiah to do what He calls you to do, whether it makes you friends or enemies.



## CHAPTER 7 -

## REALITY STRIKES

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*19 But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. I did not know it was against me they devised schemes, saying, "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more." 20 But, O Lord of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause. (Jeremiah*

*11)*

Jeremiah proclaimed a harsh message to the religious people of his day. He faithfully proclaimed the Word of God but made many enemies. Maybe in the early stages of his preaching, the prophet anticipated a better response and naively assumed that people would be more accepting. He soon became aware, however, that this would not be the case. As this idealism changed to reality, Jeremiah expressed his heart to God:



## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

*19 But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. I did not know it was against me they devised schemes, (Jeremiah 11)*

In Jeremiah 11:19, the prophet compared himself to a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. This quiet lamb put up no fight because it was not aware of what was coming. “I did not know it was against me they devised schemes,” he told the Lord. “I entered the ministry thinking all would be well but came to realize that the people I preached to, wanted to kill me.”

Listen to the attitude of the people toward Jeremiah in verse 19:

*“Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more.” (Jeremiah 11)*

The people of his town wanted to cut Jeremiah down like a tree. They wanted to rid the earth of every remembrance of his presence. Jeremiah dared to challenge them and expose their hypocrisy. They hated him for this—enough to kill him.

What do you do when the harsh reality of a difficult ministry strikes? Notice the response of Jeremiah in verse 20:

*20 But, O Lord of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause. (Jeremiah 11)*

## Chapter 7 - Reality Strikes

In Jeremiah 11:20, the prophet confessed God as the Lord, “who judges righteously.” His fellow-citizens wanted to take his life. They had people on their side who could twist the truth in their favour. What chance did the prophet have against a corrupt justice system and a people who hated him? Jeremiah’s comfort in these days was in the fact that his God was Lord of hosts. He was the all-powerful God to whom every nation on earth would one day bow. His Lord was a Judge who would not be influenced by the lies of evil people. He judged with fairness and truth. He knew Jeremiah’s innocence and would defend him before the crowds that called for his death. The prophet found great comfort in his Lord.

Second, Jeremiah understood that while the people of his day acted deceitfully, the Lord God would not be deceived by their words and arguments. Jeremiah’s God “tested the heart and mind.” In other words, the God of Israel, who stood with Jeremiah, would see the evil thoughts and intents of those who sought to destroy him. This same God knew the sincerity of Jeremiah’s heart. He would not be fooled by the lies of those who sought His life. He would judge in truth.

Finally, Jeremiah committed his cause to the Lord. He chose not to take matters into his own hands. He gave his problems to the Lord and waited on Him to see what He would do. When the harsh reality struck, Jeremiah knew he could trust the Lord to care for him and do what was right.

We must note here that while the prophet responded with great faith in God’s righteous judgements in chapter 11, in chapter 12, we see his struggle to understand God’s ways. After committing his cause to the Lord in Jeremiah 11, he cried out in Jeremiah 12:

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

*1 Righteous are you, O Lord, when I complain to you; yet I would plead my case before you. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive? 2 You plant them, and they take root; they grow and produce fruit; you are near in their mouth and far from their heart. (Jeremiah 12:1)*

In these verses, the prophet reminded God that those who rebelled against Him planted their gardens and harvested an abundant crop. God was far from their hearts, yet they thrived. Jeremiah could not make sense out of this. Why did the wicked prosper while men like Jeremiah suffered for doing what was right?

Why does the way of evil prosper in our day? Why do those who follow the Lord suffer persecution and prejudice while unrighteousness is becoming more accepted? Men and women, around the world, have lost their families, possessions, jobs, and even their lives, because they sought to live in the truth of the Word of God. Where is the justice of God in this? Jeremiah was confused. Everything seemed backwards. Men were rewarded for evil and punished for doing good.

Have you ever had times when you did not understand the ways of the Lord? Jeremiah gives us a clear example to follow in these times. He responds in faith by committing his way to the Lord. Jeremiah does not have the answer, but he refuses to allow his confusion to keep him from obeying God and trusting Him.

God did not leave Jeremiah without an answer. Notice that God rebuked Jeremiah for his complaint:

## Chapter 7 - Reality Strikes

*5 "If you have raced with men on foot,  
and they have wearied you, how will  
you compete with horses? And if in a  
safe land you are so trusting, what will  
you do in the thicket of the Jordan?  
(Jeremiah 12)*

God reminded the prophet, in these verses, that He had a more significant ministry for him. The rejection he was experiencing here was mild compared to what was ahead. Jeremiah was racing with men right now, but God wanted him to compete with horses. Jeremiah was living in a comfortable place right now, but God was going to take him into the thickets of the Jordan. All this was preparing Jeremiah for a more significant work the Lord had for him. We cannot compete with horses until we have learned to run with men. We cannot be successful in a thicket until we have been faithful in ease.

God went on to remind Jeremiah that while His justice was not evident at the time, it would surely come:

*7 "I have forsaken my house; I have  
abandoned my heritage; I have given  
the beloved of my soul into the hands  
of her enemies. (Jeremiah 12)*

*12 Upon all the bare heights in the de-  
sert destroyers have come, for the  
sword of the Lord devours from one  
end of the land to the other; no flesh  
has peace. (Jeremiah 12)*

God reminded Jeremiah in these two verses that judgment had come. "I have forsaken my house ... destroyers have come," He told the prophet. God pronounced His

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sentence. Evil-doers were under a sentence of death. Their destiny was determined. It is true that God allowed them a few years of prosperity, but the day was fast approaching when His sentence would be carried out. Already the enemies were gathering to attack those who sought Jeremiah's life.

God told Jeremiah that he had no cause to question His judgement. Those who prospered in his day were already judged. How easy it is for us to focus on material blessings and prosperity and fail to realize that those living under these temporary blessings are under the curse of God.

As Jeremiah faced the rejection and hatred of the people of his day, while he could not understand what God was doing, he committed his life into the Lord's hand. He trusted the Lord to judge in truth. God was not blind to the threats of Jeremiah's enemies. He would not only judge them but use what they did to Jeremiah to strengthen and equip him for greater ministry.

For Consideration:

Jeremiah faced struggle and rejection in his ministry. Have you ever had unrealistic expectations broken by reality?

Consider Jeremiah's prayer in Jeremiah 11:20. What does it teach us about how he faced persecution and rejection in his prophetic ministry?

## Chapter 7 - Reality Strikes

How has God used trials to strengthen you in your ministry?

For Prayer:

Ask God to help you to have a clear sense of His purpose in the struggles you face.

Thank the Lord that He uses whatever you go through to strengthen you for what is ahead.

Ask God to give you the grace to commit your struggles to Him without seeking vengeance or becoming angry. Ask for the faith to trust Him with what you cannot understand.



## CHAPTER 8 -

### A RUINED BELT

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*1 Thus says the Lord to me, "Go and buy a linen loincloth and put it around your waist, and do not dip it in water." 2 So I bought a loincloth according to the word of the Lord and put it around my waist. 3 And the word of the Lord came to me a second time, 4 "Take the loincloth that you have bought, which is around your waist, and arise, go to the Euphrates and hide it there in a cleft of the rock." 5 So I went and hid it by the Euphrates, as the Lord commanded me. 6 And after many days the Lord said to me, "Arise, go to the Euphrates, and take from there the loincloth that I commanded you to hide there." 7 Then I went to the Euphrates, and dug, and I took the loincloth from the place where I had hidden it. And behold, the loincloth was spoiled; it was good for nothing. 8 Then the word of the Lord came to me: 9 "Thus says the Lord: Even so*



## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

*will I spoil the pride of Judah and the  
great pride of Jerusalem. (Jeremiah 13)*

As a prophet of God, Jeremiah spoke the word of the Lord, but there were also times when the Lord called him to act out his message. We have an example of this in Jeremiah 13:1. In this verse, the Lord asked the prophet to buy a linen loincloth and wear it around his waist. Notice in verse 1 that this loincloth was not to touch water. In other words, Jeremiah was never to wash it.

Jeremiah purchased this loincloth and put it on. We are not told how long Jeremiah wore this belt. As he wore it, however, the dust and dirt of his daily life began to accumulate on it making it dirty. This dirty loincloth no longer brought him delight. Instead of being an object that enhanced his appearance, because of its dirt, it was only bringing him shame. It was then that the word of the Lord came a second time to Jeremiah (verse 3).

In verse 4, the Lord commanded Jeremiah to go to the Euphrates River and hide his loincloth in a crevice of a rock. The Euphrates was about 800 kilometres (500 miles) from Jerusalem. It is unclear where Jeremiah was at the time of this revelation from the Lord, but it may have required a significant amount of time and effort to travel to this region in obedience to the Lord.

Many days passed before the Lord spoke again to Jeremiah about his loincloth. When God did talk to the prophet about it, He asked Him to return to the Euphrates and dig up the loincloth. Remember that Jeremiah still did not understand why the Lord was asking him to do this. Obeying the Lord, the prophet returned to find his loincloth. When he dug up the garment, Jeremiah found that it was spoiled. He describes it as “good for nothing” (verse 7).

## Chapter 8 - A Ruined Belt

Only after he retrieved the loincloth did the Lord reveal the reason for this strange request. God told Jeremiah in verse 9 that even as this garment was ruined, so He would destroy the pride of the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

God's people were wicked. They refused to listen to His word. They insisted on following the stubbornness of their hearts, instead. They worshipped and served other gods. Like the linen belt, the people of God were filthy and unclean before Him—they refused to come to Him for cleansing.

Just as Jeremiah had bound this garment around his waist, so God had bound His people to Himself. They enjoyed His blessing and rejoiced in intimacy with Him. Despite this privilege, they rebelled against God and became unclean through their actions.

Listen to God's heart for His people, as recorded in verse 13:

*[11] "I bound the whole house of Israel  
and the whole house of Judah to me,"  
declares the LORD, "to be my people  
for my renown and praise and honor."  
(Jeremiah 13)*

God entered a covenantal relationship with His people, binding them to Himself. God was proud of His people. He delighted in them and wanted them to be a people for His praise and honour. He demonstrated His character and glory through them. They reflected His glory to the world around them. He drew them close, and they experienced the richness of His blessing.

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

God's people, however, did not reflect this glory to the world. They were tarnished with sin and rebellion. They became an object of shame and dishonour. As a result, God stripped the belt off his waist and cast it from His presence. He disciplined His people by exiling them to the region of the Euphrates—where the Babylonians and Assyrians lived. By taking his belt to the Euphrates, Jeremiah prophetically traced the steps the captured people would walk as they were forced into exile.

While Jeremiah did not initially understand what the Lord was asking him to do, he was obedient. Through his actions that day, Jeremiah revealed the judgement of God on His people. He also showed them that their uncleanness and rebellion made them “good for nothing.” Like Jeremiah's loincloth, God's people had become shameful. The day was fast approaching when they would retrace Jeremiah's steps into exile beyond the Euphrates.

It is a tremendous privilege to be bound to the Lord God in a relationship of love and devotion. In that relationship, we experience intimacy with Him and the fullness of His blessing in our lives. We are called to reflect the glory of God in this world through this relationship with God. This glory, however, can be tarnished by sin and rebellion. Not all believers reflect the fullness of God. The name of the Lord is sometimes blasphemed because of our actions.

Writing to the Romans, the apostle Paul said:

*[23] You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. [24] For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” (Romans 2)*

## Chapter 8 - A Ruined Belt

The apostle Peter would say something similar when he wrote:

*[2:1] But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. [2] And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. (1 Peter 2)*

Paul told the Romans that their lifestyle was causing the unbeliever to curse the name of God. Peter challenged believers of his day to abstain from sensuality because the practice of this lifestyle among believers was defaming the way of the truth. As those who have been drawn close to God, we must live pure and holy lives, reflecting the character of God in all that we do. We must resist any influence that would tarnish that relationship.

For Consideration:

What does Jeremiah's example teach us about obedience to the Lord? Do we have to understand what God is asking before being obedient? Have you ever not obeyed because you did not understand why God was asking you to do something?

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

Why do you suppose the Lord chose to illustrate His message to the people through Jeremiah? Would this illustration speak to the people in a way words could not communicate? Compare this to how the Lord used parables about everyday life to teach His message to the people of His day.

What do we learn in this passage about how God leads us step by step? Could it be that you do not have the answer you require from the Lord because you have not yet been obedient to what He has already revealed?

How does the illustration of Jeremiah's belt help us to understand God's relationship with us?

Take a moment to consider the clean and pure loincloth Jeremiah purchased and wore proudly around his waist. Compare this to the loincloth he dug out of the Euphrates. Which of these two pictures best resembles your life and walk with the Lord?

For Prayer:

Ask God to help you to be obedient like Jeremiah, even when you do not see the whole picture.

## Chapter 8 - A Ruined Belt

Thank God for the privilege we have of representing Him, His love, and His power in this world. Ask Him to enable you to be clean before Him and a faithful representative of His character in this world.

Do you know individuals whose testimony has been destroyed? Take a moment to pray that the Lord would restore them.



## CHAPTER 9 - DO NOT PRAY FOR THIS PEOPLE

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*11 The Lord said to me: "Do not pray for the welfare of this people. 12 Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence." (Jeremiah 14)*

We are quite familiar with the passages of Scripture that speak about the long-suffering patience of God. We rejoice in His forgiveness. We understand that if we come to Him, He will never cast us out (John 6.37). God will remove our sins from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103.12). We cherish stories of how God brings unbelievers to Himself. We tell the story of Paul, who wanted to see the destruction of the church of Jesus Christ but met the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus. By the grace of God, he became the greatest missionary of the New Testament.



## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

God's forgiveness and patience seem limitless, but then we read Jeremiah 7:16:

*16 "As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you. (Jeremiah 7)*

How could Jeremiah expect to have any impact on the lives of the people of God if God would not listen to his prayers for them? God told Jeremiah that even if the people were to humble themselves to the point of fasting, He would not listen to their prayers. Listen to the prayer of the people in Jeremiah 14:20-15.1.:

*20 We acknowledge our wickedness, O Lord, and the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against you. 21 Do not spurn us, for your name's sake; do not dishonor your glorious throne; remember and do not break your covenant with us. 22 Are there any among the false gods of the nations that can bring rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Are you not he, O Lord our God? We set our hope on you, for you do all these things. (Jeremiah 14)*

While there seems to be repentance in the heart of the people in this prayer, notice the response of the Lord God in the very next verse:

*1 Then the Lord said to me, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people. Send them out of my sight and*

## Chapter 9 - Do Not Pray for this People

*let them go! 2 And when they ask you, 'Where shall we go?' you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord: "Those who are for pestilence, to pestilence, and those who are for the sword, to the sword; those who are for famine, to famine, and those who are for captivity, to captivity." (Jeremiah 15)*

God made it clear to the people that even if Moses or Samuel pleaded for them, He would not incline His heart or change His mind about them. Moses often interceded with God for the lives of the people of Israel. The Lord heard his petitions and forgave His people. It would be different this time. God had made up His mind. He warned His people, but they refused to listen. There was no amount of pleading now that would make a difference for them. They were going to be punished. Justice was going to be served. Their destiny was sealed.

There is a limit to the patience of God. There is a point where God will cease calling and set His mind to judging. We cannot go on living as if God will always give us another chance. Hebrews 3.15 tells us:

*15 As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." (Hebrews 3)*

Why does the writer to the Hebrews tell his readers to listen to the voice of God today? He says this because there may not be a tomorrow. Tomorrow may see the end of God's pleading with you. Tomorrow you may hear the voice of the Lord saying to you what He said to the rich man in Luke 12.20:

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*20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' (Luke 12)*

If you can hear the voice of the Lord today, don't ignore it. There will come a time when your prayers of repentance will fall on deaf ears.

Consider the words of the Lord through the prophet Jeremiah to the people of his day. Put yourself in the place of Jeremiah for a moment. It is the heart of every sincere pastor that the people God has placed under his care experience the fullness of God's blessing. Where there is sin, that they would repent. Where there is hurt, that they would be healed. What would be your response to the Lord if He told you what He told Jeremiah that day? How would you feel as a pastor if the Lord said to you that the sheep He had given you to care for would perish and be judged by God and nothing you could do or pray would change that?

There would be no great victories to report. There would only be defeat and judgement. This was determined before Jeremiah began preaching. Jeremiah would not see people repenting of their sin and turning to God. Instead, the wrath of God was poured out. Jeremiah kept preaching the word of God to show his people why this judgement had come. They would go into exile with the truth of God ringing in their ears. Jeremiah's words would be the last they heard before leaving their nation at the point of the sword. These words would continue to ring in their ears as they reflected on their punishment in exile. God wanted a man to pastor His people as they faced His judgement. It would not be an easy ministry, but it would be a necessary one.

## Chapter 9 - Do Not Pray for this People

### For Consideration:

What do we learn in this chapter about the limits to the patience of God? Can we take His patience for granted?

There came the point in the history of Israel, where God refused to listen to their prayers? What causes God to stop listening to your prayers today?

Consider the nature of Jeremiah's ministry. Would you be willing to be a pastor to a church that was being judged by God? Would you be willing to accept the call of God to shepherd a people who would not change?

How vital was the ministry of Jeremiah at this point in the history of God's people? While he would not see repentance or spiritual blessing, what did his service accomplish in the life of the people of Israel at that time? What was God calling him to do in those days? Why was this necessary?

### For Prayer:

Take a moment to thank the Lord for His patience. Ask Him, however, to help you to not take that patience for granted. Ask Him to help you not to put off walking in obedience today.

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

Do you know people who have refused to listen to the voice of God in their life? Ask God to break their resistance.

Ask God to help you to see more clearly why He has placed you in the ministry He had given you today? Ask Him to provide you with the grace to be obedient even when you do not see results.

## CHAPTER 10 -

### THE LONE PROPHET

---

*17 I did not sit in the company of revelers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because your hand was upon me, for you had filled me with indignation. 18 Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail? (Jeremiah 15)*

Jeremiah had a high price to pay as a servant of God. His message of impending doom did not make him any friends. People did not respond positively toward him or his message. Some of his fellow citizens wanted to kill him. In Jeremiah 15 and 16, we catch a glimpse of the emotional toll Jeremiah paid to be obedient to God's call.

Listen to his words in Jeremiah 15:15,17:

*15 O Lord, you know; remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors.  
In your forbearance take me not away;*

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*know that for your sake I bear reproach.*

*17 I did not sit in the company of revelers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because your hand was upon me, for you had filled me with indignation. (Jeremiah 15:17)*

Notice what Jeremiah expresses here. He speaks in verse 15 of those who persecuted him. He reminds God that he bore reproach for His sake. He was shamed and belittled in his community because of the message he preached.

In verse 17, the prophet told the Lord that he sat alone. He did not join those who mocked the name of the Lord. He had no one to sit with him in his need. All this was because God gave him a message that the community despised.

The prophet went on to express his grief to the Lord in Jeremiah 15:18:

*18 Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail? (Jeremiah 15)*

Jeremiah felt that his pain was unceasing, and the wounds of rejection and persecution were incurable. You can almost hear Jeremiah say: "Lord, this is hard. I have no friends. I have no-one with whom I can share my pain. You never told me how lonely it would be. I feel deceived. Where are you in all this pain? You are like a brook that a thirsty man comes to, only to find out that there is no water. As Jeremiah contemplates his lot, he cries out:

## Chapter 10 - The Lone Prophet

*10 Woe is me, my mother, that you bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land! I have not lent, nor have I borrowed, yet all of them curse me. (Jeremiah 15)*

Jeremiah is saying something like this: "Why did my mother have to give birth to a child like me. My life is filled with bitterness and trouble. Everyone rejects me. I have done nothing wrong to any of them, but they curse me because of the message I bring from the Lord." This was not an easy burden to bear.

What a blessing it is to be loved and respected by the people we serve. This was not the case for Jeremiah. The people of his day hated and cursed him. He had no one to comfort and encouragement him when he felt the sting of rejection. The pain seemed too much for him to bear.

God forbade Jeremiah to marry or have children.

*1 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 "You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place. 3 For thus says the Lord concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place and concerning the mothers who bore them and the fathers who fathered them in this land: 4 They shall die of deadly diseases. They shall not be lamented, nor shall they be buried. They shall be as dung on the surface of the ground. They shall perish by the sword and by famine, and their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the*



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*air and for the beasts of the earth. (Jeremiah 16)*

God told the prophet that if he were to marry, his wife and children would die of deadly disease, famine and sword. Their bodies would lay on the ground and be eaten by birds and beasts of the earth. To spare him this pain, God forbade him to marry. Instead, he was to give himself to the prophetic ministry. The fact that Jeremiah did not marry, in a culture that expected him to marry, was a prophetic warning to the people of God. Jeremiah's singleness was a reminder of what God was going to do to His people.

God also told Jeremiah that he was never to go to a funeral service, nor was he to show any compassion for those who died.

*5 "For thus says the Lord: Do not enter the house of mourning, or go to lament or grieve for them, for I have taken away my peace from this people, my steadfast love, and mercy, declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 16)*

God's people had rejected Him, so He would act toward them without mercy and kindness. God would no longer show compassion to His people. Jeremiah's lack of empathy for those who mourned was a prophetic statement to the people of God that God's mercy had come to an end.

In Jeremiah 16:8-9, the Lord commanded the prophet to refrain from attending the joyous celebrations of the nation.

*8 You shall not go into the house of feasting to sit with them, to eat and*

## Chapter 10 - The Lone Prophet

*drink. 9 For thus says the Lord of hosts,  
the God of Israel: Behold, I will silence  
in this place, before your eyes and in  
your days, the voice of mirth and the  
voice of gladness, the voice of the  
bridegroom and the voice of the bride.  
(Jeremiah 16)*

As a prophet, Jeremiah was not to rejoice with his people. The day was coming when God would strip away all gladness and joy from them. Jeremiah's refusal to celebrate was a prophetic sign of future events.

The call of Jeremiah was a lonely one. He could not sit down with a wife over the dinner table and share the hurts of his heart. He could not rejoice with the people of God in a joyous feast. God took away his right to attend the funeral services of the people he grew up with. He could not even show compassion for them in their time of grief. Is there any wonder that he cried out to God: "my pain is perpetual?"

As a servant of God, I how often seen the need for fellowship with other believers. I have often appreciated being able to sit down over a coffee with my wife and share my hurts. I have enjoyed the fellowship of other believers and felt their encouragement and support. Jeremiah did not have this privilege. Would you be willing to follow the Lord under these conditions? Would you be ready to leave your friends and family and abstain from marriage to obey God in a call that was destined to bring only rejection and cursing from those who listened to you? What an example we have in the life and ministry of the prophet Jeremiah. May God give us more people with this commitment.

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### For Consideration:

How would Jeremiah's ministry and lifestyle be viewed today?

What painful issues do you deal with in your ministry or walk with the Lord? How is Jeremiah an example for you?

What role do other Christians or co-workers play in your ministry? How have they been an encouragement and support for you?

Do you know servants of God who feel alone and lonely? Is there anything you can do to minister to them or encourage them in their struggle?

### For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to give you a desire for obedience more than worldly success.

Thank the Lord for the people He has placed on your path to be a blessing and encouragement to you.

## Chapter 10 - The Lone Prophet

Take a moment to pray for a brother or sister in ministry who is struggling with the burden God has placed on their shoulders. Ask God to sustain them and give them the courage to persevere.



## CHAPTER 11 - AT THE POTTER'S HOUSE

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*1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 2 "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." 3 So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. 4 And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do. (Jeremiah 18)*

The Lord often speaks to us through everyday events. On one occasion, the Lord told Jeremiah to watch a local potter at work. As he observed, the vessel on which the potter was working was spoiled as it turned on the wheel. Jeremiah saw, to his amazement, how the potter reshaped the flawed lump of clay and formed it into another vessel. It was at this moment that the Lord spoke to the prophet:

*6 "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the Lord. Behold, like the clay in the*

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*potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O  
house of Israel. (Jeremiah 18)*

Men and women make decisions from their sinful minds. Those decisions are often contrary to the will of God. People have lost their lives through wars originating in the wickedness of the human heart. Immorality and injustice are destroying our society. From the time of Adam, human beings have turned their backs on God's purpose. Even in Jeremiah's day, people hated the truth of God. They preferred the lies of the false prophets to the truth of God. Like the clay on the potter's wheel, we have not always cooperated with the heavenly Potter.

God wanted to show Jeremiah that while He had a good plan for His people, their sin and defilements spoiled their chance of experiencing that purpose. Instead, the direction of their life would take a different turn. The people who could have experienced the richness of God's blessing in their homeland would now be forced to leave. Instead, they would be driven at the point of a spear to a land that did not belong to them.

As Jeremiah watched the potter form that lump of clay, I am sure he marvelled at the skill of his hands. In the last chapter, Jeremiah complained to God about his lot in life. Here now, he watched the potter shape a vessel as he pleased. He realized that it was the right of the potter to do what he wanted with the clay. God reminded Jeremiah of this in verse 6 when he said: "Can I not do with you as this potter has done?" God had the absolute right to make Jeremiah the type of prophet He had called him to be.

Speaking to the people of his day, the apostle Paul would say:

## Chapter 11 - At the Potter's House

*20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? (Romans 9)*

It is true that Jeremiah's ministry was a difficult one, but the Lord God, as His Creator, had every right to call Him to this task. A potter has the authority to make a container to hold a priceless treasure but also the freedom to create a dish to carry dirt. Both vessels are necessary. We can only wonder if Jeremiah reflected on these things as he considered his complaints in the previous chapters.

Beyond this personal application to Jeremiah was the application to the people of God. God had been preparing His people to live in their land under His blessing, but their sin hindered this from happening. Now they would face a very different future under His judgement. Those who created to live in the peace and blessing of Israel would instead be prepared for exile in Babylon.

God, as a Master Potter, will work out His purposes in our lives and society. How much will that cost, however? Adam and Eve could have lived in the Garden of Eden but fell prey to sin, and paradise was lost. David's sin with Bathsheba meant the loss of a child and a reign that was never again the same. We can complain about our lot in life, or we can respect the right of the Master Potter and submit to His hands.

As Jeremiah watched the potter at work, he could not help but recognize the right of the potter to make whatever



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vessel he chose. He also had to realize that, for the clay on that wheel, the only reasonable thing to do was to submit to the hands of the potter. If he were to be what the Lord wanted him to be, Jeremiah would have to give God the right to determine the purpose of his life.

Our sin and rebellion will change the direction of our lives, but we can only wonder how much more we could have been if we had surrendered and offered no resistance to the Potter. We need to understand that even as broken vessels on the potter's wheel, however, the Lord can mend and heal. He will take the cracked lump of clay and shape it into something useful for His purpose. Will you trust Him with your life? Will you allow Him to form you as He sees fit? Will you commit yourself to walk in the purpose He has ordained for your life?

For Consideration:

How would the time at the potter's shop have spoken to Jeremiah personally?

What does this illustration teach us about the right of God to shape us with His purpose in mind? Have you understood God's purpose for your life?

Can our resistance to God, change the course of our life and ministry? Can God still use us despite our faults and failures?

## Chapter 11 - At the Potter's House

What keeps you from submitting fully to the Master Potter?

For Prayer:

Take a moment to confess that you have not always accepted the right of God to use you as He pleases.

Thank the Lord that He does have a purpose for you and your life. Ask Him to enable you to walk humbly and willingly in that purpose, even when it is difficult.

Thank the Lord that when you fail, He can use our failure and shape it into something beautiful.



## CHAPTER 12 -

### A BROKEN CLAY JAR

---

*1 Thus says the Lord, "Go, buy a potter's earthenware flask, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests, 2 and go out to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom at the entry of the Potsherd Gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you.  
(Jeremiah 19)*

In Jeremiah 19, the Lord asked the prophet to buy a clay jar. We are left to wonder if he purchased this jar from the potter in chapter 18. Jeremiah was then to gather the elders and priests and take them to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. There in that valley, at the Potsherd Gate, he was to tell them the words the Lord give him to speak. Jeremiah needed to take a step of faith here. He did not have the word of the Lord before he went to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. It was when he arrived that the Lord gave him this word.

Why did God ask Jeremiah to go to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom? A quick look at several passages will show us

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that Jeremiah may have been called to this valley for a particular reason.

In 2 Chronicles 28:1-3, we read concerning Ahaz king of Judah:

*1 Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father David had done, 2 but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He even made metal images for the Baals, 3 and he made offerings in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom and burned his sons as an offering, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. (2 Chronicles 28)*

Two generations later, we read about King Manasseh:

*6 And he burned his sons as an offering in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and used fortune-telling and omens and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and with necromancers. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. (2 Chronicles 33)*

When Josiah became king, in the days of Jeremiah, one of his reforms is recorded for us in 2 Kings 23.10:

*10 And he defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no one might burn his son or his*

## Chapter 12 - A Broken Clay Jar

*daughter as an offering to Molech. (2  
Kings 23)*

When God asked Jeremiah to go to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, He asked him to go to the centre of the most detestable of sins in Judah, the practice of child sacrifice. There in that valley, fathers would burn their children to death as offerings to the pagan gods. It was in this valley that the prophet was to proclaim the message of the clay jar. What was that message?

*4 Because the people have forsaken me and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah have known; and because they have filled this place with the blood of innocents, 5 and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it come into my mind— 6 therefore, behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when this place shall no more be called Topheth, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter. 7 And in this place I will make void the plans of Judah and Jerusalem and will cause their people to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hand of those who seek their life. I will give their dead bodies for food to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the earth. 8 And I will make this city a horror, a thing to be hissed at. Everyone who passes by it*

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*will be horrified and will hiss because of all its wounds. 9 And I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and their daughters, and everyone shall eat the flesh of his neighbor in the siege and in the distress, with which their enemies and those who seek their life afflict them.’ (Jeremiah 19)*

That day God spoke directly to the abominations that took place in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. He told the elders and priests that the valley would become known as the Valley of Slaughter because God would bring to it the sword of the enemy. The dead bodies that were slaughtered in that valley would be food for wild animals. To emphasize this devastating judgement, God told Jeremiah to break the clay jar in front of the leaders. This would show them what God intended to do with the nation.

*10 “Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you, 11 and shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter’s vessel, so that it can never be mended. Men shall bury in Topheth because there will be no place else to bury. (Jeremiah 19)*

What a powerful object lesson! God would break His people like a clay jar. Notice the extent of this breaking—“so that it can never be mended” (Jeremiah 19:11). This is not the type of message we like to hear. The day was coming when the hammer of God’s righteous wrath would come crashing down on ungodly Judah, and it would be broken to pieces.

## Chapter 12 - A Broken Clay Jar

Among the priests assembled in the Valley of Hinnom was a man by the name of Pashhur. Pashhur was angry when he heard Jeremiah's message. He had the prophet arrested, beaten, and put in stocks to publicly humiliate him (Jeremiah 20:2).

Jeremiah's message stirred the anger of the people. They hated him for what he preached. This message took an emotional toll on Jeremiah. After this incident, he cried to God:

*7 O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me. 8 For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. (Jeremiah 20)*

You can feel Jeremiah's pain in these words. He knew what the people were saying about him:

*10 For I hear many whispering. Terror is on every side! "Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" say all my close friends, watching for my fall. "Perhaps he will be deceived; then we can overcome him and take our revenge on him." (Jeremiah 20:10)*

Even those who used to be his close friends wanted to denounce him and longed for his fall. His ministry was a lonely one. God's hand was on him, however, and try as



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he might, he could not hold back the word the Lord gave him to speak:

*9 If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. (Jeremiah 20:9)*

Jeremiah was compelled by the Spirit of God to preach the word God gave him. He moved out in obedience to teach the message of the broken clay pot to a people who did not want to hear it. The prophet suffered the inevitable consequences of their rejection of that message. He paid an emotional and physical cost to preach that message, but he was faithful. Men such as this are rare.

For Consideration:

What took place in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom? Could we compare the practice of abortion in our day to the sins that took place in this valley?

There were the pagan practices among the people of God in Jeremiah's day. What sins do we see in the church of our day?

Jeremiah paid an emotional and physical cost to preach the message of the pottery jar in the Valley of the Son of

## Chapter 12 - A Broken Clay Jar

Hinnom. Is there a cost to pay for speaking what God puts on our hearts today? Are you willing to pay that price?

Is it possible that our desire to be respected and loved by people is a hindrance to the proclamation of the gospel?

For Prayer:

Ask God to give you more sensitivity to what He wants you to do and say. Ask for boldness and courage to do what He calls you to do even if it means rejection.

Take a moment to pray for those in leadership over you. Ask the Lord to give them courage and faithfulness to Him, no matter the cost.



## CHAPTER 13 -

## ZEDEKIAH AND JEREMIAH

---

*1 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur the son of Malchiah and Zephaniah the priest, the son of Maaseiah, saying, 2 "Inquire of the Lord for us, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is making war against us. Perhaps the Lord will deal with us according to all his wonderful deeds and will make him withdraw from us."  
(Jeremiah 21)*

It is hard to describe the relationship between King Zedekiah and Jeremiah. God used Jeremiah to convict Zedekiah of his sins. Zedekiah wanted to hear from the prophet but did not obey the word spoken through him.

The first encounter between these two men is in Jeremiah 21. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, was attacking Jerusalem. Zedekiah sent Pashhur the priest and Zephaniah to speak to Jeremiah. He wanted the prophet to seek the Lord about this situation, and hoped that the Lord would deliver them from the hands of their enemy:

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*2 "Inquire of the Lord for us, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is making war against us. Perhaps the Lord will deal with us according to all his wonderful deeds and will make him withdraw from us." (Jeremiah 21)*

Jeremiah sought the Lord on behalf of the king, and the Lord answered him:

*3 Then Jeremiah said to them: "Thus you shall say to Zedekiah, 4 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands and with which you are fighting against the king of Babylon and against the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the walls. And I will bring them together into the midst of this city. 5 I myself will fight against you with outstretched hand and strong arm, in anger and in fury and in great wrath. 6 And I will strike down the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast. They shall die of a great pestilence. (Jeremiah 21)*

God told the king that He was angry with Jerusalem and would give the city over to Nebuchadnezzar. This was not the word Zedekiah hoped to receive.

Later in Jeremiah 37, King Zedekiah sent Jehucal and Zephaniah to ask Jeremiah to pray again about the invading Babylonians. This time Egypt came to the aid of God's people, and Babylon lifted their siege and fled (Jeremiah 37:5).

## Chapter 13 - Zedekiah and Jeremiah

After Babylonian lifted their siege of the city, Irijah, the captain of the guard, accused Jeremiah of desertion to the enemy and arrested him (Jeremiah 37:14). For this supposed crime, Jeremiah was beaten and put in prison, where he remained for some time (Jeremiah 37:16). While in prison, King Zedekiah sent for him.

*16 When Jeremiah had come to the  
dungeon cells and remained there  
many days, 17 King Zedekiah sent for  
him and received him. The king ques-  
tioned him secretly in his house and  
said, "Is there any word from the Lord?"  
Jeremiah said, "There is." Then he  
said, "You shall be delivered into the  
hand of the king of Babylon." (Jeremiah  
37)*

Notice how King Zedekiah sent "secretly" for Jeremiah. Jeremiah was accused of desertion to the enemy. King Zedekiah did not want to be seen conversing with an "enemy of the nation," but he also wanted to hear from the Lord and Jeremiah was the man he felt confident would give him that word.

As the conversation unfolded, Jeremiah told Zedekiah that the conditions in his dungeon were so appalling that he was afraid he would die (Jeremiah 37:20). He pleaded with the king to not send him back. Zedekiah was sympathetic to Jeremiah's request and sent him instead to the prison in the palace courtyard. He also commanded that the prophet be given bread from the bakery every day until the supplies were gone (Jeremiah 37:21). This shows us that the king had respect for Jeremiah.

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Later, when Jeremiah was thrown into a cistern and left to die, a man by the name of Ebed-Melech came to King Zedekiah to plead for the prophet's life. The king commanded that 30 men to go with Ebed-Melech to lift him out of the cistern before he died. (Jeremiah 38:10). Why would the king send 30 men with Ebed-Melech? It would not take 30 men to lift Jeremiah out of the cistern. It is likely that these men were sent to protect Ebed-Melech and Jeremiah against a possible mob that might resist them. He was protecting Jeremiah from those who wanted to kill him.

After Jeremiah's rescue from the cistern, the king sent for him again to hear the word of the Lord (Jeremiah 38.14). Jeremiah told the king that if he surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar, his life would be spared (Jeremiah 38.17). Zedekiah, admitted to the prophet, that he was afraid that if he submitted, he would be handed over to the Judeans and treated cruelly (Jeremiah 38.19). It took a certain amount of courage for King Zedekiah to confess this fear to Jeremiah. It is also an indication of the kind of relationship they had –the King was able to confide in the prophet and confess his greatest fear.

Before Jeremiah left the palace, the king asked him to keep their conversation secret (Jeremiah 38.24). He was afraid of what the princes might think should they discover he had been with Jeremiah. This was also another fear the King experienced. He was scared of what people would think of him or say about him.

When Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, in Jeremiah 39, King Zedekiah fled. What is significant about this flight of Zedekiah is what Jeremiah told him just shortly before it happened:

## Chapter 13 - Zedekiah and Jeremiah

*19 King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "I am afraid of the Judeans who have deserted to the Chaldeans, lest I be handed over to them and they deal cruelly with me." 20 Jeremiah said, "You shall not be given to them. Obey now the voice of the Lord in what I say to you, and it shall be well with you, and your life shall be spared. 21 But if you refuse to surrender, this is the vision which the Lord has shown to me: 22 Behold, all the women left in the house of the king of Judah were being led out to the officials of the king of Babylon and were saying, "'Your trusted friends have deceived you and prevailed against you; now that your feet are sunk in the mud, they turn away from you.' 23 All your wives and your sons shall be led out to the Chaldeans, and you yourself shall not escape from their hand, but shall be seized by the king of Babylon, and this city shall be burned with fire." (Jeremiah 38)*

Jeremiah told the king that if he surrendered willingly then all would go well, but if he refused, he would be captured and led into captivity. This is precisely what took place. Zedekiah wanted to hear from Jeremiah but did not listen to what he said.

After his capture, as Jeremiah prophesied, the king was forced to watch his sons die one by one at the hands of the enemy, then his eyes were plucked out. King Zedekiah's life, however, was spared. According to Jeremiah



## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

52:11, he was put in a Babylonian prison and kept there until his death.

Jeremiah influenced the life of King Zedekiah. The king, however, lacked the courage to stand up for the truth. He did not want his people to know that he was meeting with Jeremiah. He had a reputation to uphold. He was easily swayed. There are many people like Zedekiah in our churches today. They want to hear from the Lord. They want to know the Lord's plan for their lives but do stand for Him or walk in obedience.

What was it like for Jeremiah to have these opportunities to speak to the king? Here was a man who wanted to hear from Jeremiah but did not put what he heard into practice. How frustrating it would have been for Jeremiah to watch this man go into exile because he would not listen to what he said.

For Consideration:

How would you describe King Zedekiah's spiritual life? Do you know people like him today?

What do we learn in this chapter about the suffering Jeremiah endured at the time that Nebuchadnezzar was invading the land of Israel and Judah?

Have you ever been guilty, like Zedekiah, of listening to the word of God but not putting it into practice?

## Chapter 13 - Zedekiah and Jeremiah

How do you think Jeremiah felt as he watched King Zedekiah, with whom he had had many personal and deep conversations, completely ignore his words of warning?

For Prayer:

Do you know people like Zedekiah, who regularly listen to the word of God but do not have the courage to obey? Take a moment to pray for them, asking God to give them the ability to walk in obedience.

Thank the Lord for how, even in his imprisonment, Jeremiah had opportunities to share the word of the Lord. Ask God to help you to make use of the situation you are in to be a testimony for Him.

Thank the Lord for His protection in the life of Jeremiah. Thank Him that you can also be assured of that protection as you walk in obedience to Him.



## CHAPTER 14 - CARELESS SHEPHERDS AND LYING PROPHETS

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*1 “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” declares the Lord. 2 Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: “You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 23)*

*14 But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his evil; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah.” 15 Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets: “Behold, I will*

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

*feed them with bitter food and give them poisoned water to drink, for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone out into all the land.” (Jeremiah 23)*

In the last chapter, we saw how God called Jeremiah to speak His word to the king. He also called Jeremiah to talk to the priests and prophets of the nation. God took Jeremiah to the top leaders of the land. While these leaders did not accept or appreciate Jeremiah’s message, the prophet still spoke to them. In chapter 23, we see what God had to say through Jeremiah to the spiritual leadership of the nation. Remember that these individuals saw themselves as the representatives of God. They would not take kindly to any criticism of their role as spiritual leaders.

Jeremiah spoke first to the priests as pastors of the nation. Listen to his words to them in Jeremiah 23:1-2:

*1 “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” declares the Lord. 2 Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: “You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 23)*

Jeremiah told the priests that they were destroying and scattering the sheep (verse 1). They had not attended to their needs (verse 2). Instead of caring for the sheep, the priests were destroying them. Because they were not

## Chapter 14 - Careless Shepherds and Lying Prophets

being cared for, these sheep were wandering from God, looking for help and comfort in other places.

God placed the blame for the spiritual condition of the nation at the feet of the shepherds. How easy it is to blame people for their wandering. Remember, however, that God had chosen these priests to care for these wandering sheep. If a sheep in the flock wandered from the fold, it was the responsibility of the shepherd to go after it and restore it to the fold. The sheep had a natural tendency to wander, so the shepherd had to be on guard. There were many enemies for the sheep, so the priests had to be their protector. God expected that the spiritual leadership of Israel care for the flock.

God accused the shepherds of scattering the sheep. This scattering was not intentional, but through a lack of care. They did not attend to the needs of the flock. They did nothing when the sheep began to wander. They were careless shepherds. God warned the priests that because they had not taken their responsibility seriously, he would “attend to them because of their evil deeds” (Jeremiah 23:2). They would have to answer to God for their lack of spiritual care.

Jeremiah also spoke to the prophets of Judah. God had some harsh words to say to these individuals. Jeremiah 23.11 describes both the prophet and the priest as being ungodly. They even brought this ungodliness into the house of God:

*11“Both prophet and priest are ungodly;  
even in my house I have found their  
evil, declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 23)*

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

The prophets, like the priests, were leading God's people astray. They were doing this by prophesying in the name of other gods. Notice what was happening in Samaria, the capital of Israel:

*13 In the prophets of Samaria I saw an unsavory thing: they prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray. (Jeremiah 23)*

The prophets of Israel were not declaring the word of the Lord. They were consulting false gods instead.

The situation in the southern kingdom of Judah was not any better.

*14 But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his evil; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah." (Jeremiah 23)*

The prophets of Jerusalem were guilty of adultery, lies, and strengthening the hands of evildoers (Jeremiah 23.14). God considered Jerusalem to be no better than Sodom and Gomorrah, which he destroyed in the days of Abraham (Jeremiah 23.14).

God placed the blame for the sickness of the nation on the prophets:

## Chapter 14 - Careless Shepherds and Lying Prophets

*15 Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets: "Behold, I will feed them with bitter food and give them poisoned water to drink, for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone out into all the land." (Jeremiah 23)*

Notice the phrase "for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone out into all the land." The evil of the nation was traced back to its corrupt leadership. The prophets filled the people with false hopes and spoke visions from their own hearts and not from the Lord (Jeremiah 23.16).

*16 Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. (Jeremiah 23)*

The prophets of Jerusalem encouraged people to rebel against the word of the Lord by offering false comfort:

*17 They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, 'It shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No disaster shall come upon you.' (Jeremiah 23)*

God did not call these prophets, yet they went out in His name (Jeremiah 23.21). The result was a people who wandered far from God. God held these prophets accountable for this sin.



## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

Jeremiah paints an ugly picture of the priests and prophets of his day. He reminded them that they were responsible for the spiritual decline of the nation because of their carelessness and lies. Can you imagine the response of the religious leaders of that day to these words? They were not easy words to speak. These leaders, however, needed to be rebuked. By wandering from God themselves, they were destroying the sheep and causing the spiritual decline in the nation. When the judgement of God fell, these leaders would have much to answer for.

### For Consideration:

God accused the priests of destroying and scattering the sheep. This was primarily the result of not doing anything to care for them. How important is it for pastors to be actively reaching out to those who are wandering from the truth?

God accused the leadership of being responsible for the spiritual condition of the nations of Israel and Judah. How important is the role of the leader in the church today?

Are we offering false comfort to those who are living in sin instead of calling them to repentance?

How difficult do you think it would have been for Jeremiah to speak this message to the priests and prophets in his

## Chapter 14 - Careless Shepherds and Lying Prophets

day? How would his failure to share this message make him guilty of the sin of the prophets in his day?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to guide those who are in leadership in your church. Ask God to give them the courage to speak His word and the compassion to care for those who are hurting.

Ask God to give the leadership of your church a passion for the Word of God. Ask God to give your pastors strength to preach what God gives them even when it is difficult.

Ask God to renew the leadership of your church and give them the courage and passion for the flock of God.



## CHAPTER 15 -

### A PLOT TO KILL JEREMIAH

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*7 The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the Lord. 8 And when Jeremiah had finished speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people, then the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him, saying, "You shall die! (Jeremiah 26)*

Jeremiah exposed the sins of his nation. He faithfully shared what God gave him. His words warned of great judgment to come. While the people ignored his message, God continued to send him back. In chapter 26, the Lord sent Jeremiah to the temple to declare His word to those who came to worship:

*1 In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the Lord: 2 "Thus says the Lord: Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak to all*

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

*the cities of Judah that come to worship  
in the house of the Lord all the words  
that I command you to speak to them;  
do not hold back a word. 3 It may be  
they will listen, and every one turn from  
his evil way, that I may relent of the dis-  
aster that I intend to do to them be-  
cause of their evil deeds. (Jeremiah 26)*

Notice the words, “it may be that they will listen” (verse 3). Notice also that God told the prophet that if the people did listen, He would “relent” of the disaster He intended to do to them. While Jeremiah’s message declared doom and judgement, there is also a cry for repentance and restoration. This doom did not need to come. If they listened to the word of God, God would pull back His wrath and forgive their sin. By sending Jeremiah to declare His punishment, the Lord was also offering His forgiveness. We see this clearly in Jeremiah 25:4-6 when God says:

*4 You have neither listened nor inclined  
your ears to hear, although the Lord  
persistently sent to you all his servants  
the prophets, 5 saying, ‘Turn now,  
every one of you, from his evil way and  
evil deeds, and dwell upon the land that  
the Lord has given to you and your fa-  
thers from of old and forever. 6 Do not  
go after other gods to serve and wor-  
ship them, or provoke me to anger with  
the work of your hands. Then I will do  
you no harm.’ (Jeremiah 25)*

God made it clear that if the people listened to His words of warning and repented, then He would do them no harm

## Chapter 15 - A Plot to Kill Jeremiah

(Jeremiah 25:6). Instead, He would extend His forgiveness to them as a nation.

The people who heard the message of Jeremiah could choose to turn from their evil ways and dwell in the land the Lord had given them, or they could continue in their evil ways and provoke the Lord to further anger. The choice was up to them.

The priests and prophets of Jeremiah's day did not appreciate Jeremiah's call for repentance. To repent, you first need to accept that you have sinned. This was not something these men were willing to do. After hearing Jeremiah's message, the officials of the city called a meeting to determine his fate:

*10 When the officials of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the Lord and took their seat in the entry of the New Gate of the house of the Lord. 11 Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and to all the people, "This man deserves the sentence of death, because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears." (Jeremiah 26)*

In the minds of these officials, Jeremiah's words were so offensive that he deserved to die.

Their threats did not silence Jeremiah. Standing before those who sought to kill him, he said:

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*12 Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and all the people, saying, "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard. 13 Now therefore mend your ways and your deeds, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will relent of the disaster that he has pronounced against you. 14 But as for me, behold, I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you. 15 Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the Lord sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears." (Jeremiah 26)*

Jeremiah made it clear to those who sought his life that the Lord had sent him (verse 12). He would not risk his life to declare such a message had the Lord not sent him. Jeremiah does not back down. He told the people that if they changed their ways and repented, the Lord would relent of the disaster he pronounced against them (verse 13). They could do what they wanted to him, but they would have to answer to God for killing an innocent man (verses 14-15). Jeremiah spoke boldly. He risked his life but chose to be faithful to what God has given him to say.

The words of Jeremiah and his boldness cause the officials to think. Some begin to believe that Jeremiah could be right. They reminded the people of two similar cases in their history. On one occasion, the prophet Micah warned King Hezekiah to repent, and when he did, the Lord had compassion on him and did not bring disaster on the land during his reign:

## Chapter 15 - A Plot to Kill Jeremiah

*26 But Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah. (2 Chronicles 32:26)*

The other case was during the reign of King Jehoiakim. The prophet Uriah warned the king of coming destruction. Not only did Jehoiakim refuse to repent but went as far as to send an assassin to Egypt to kill the prophet Uriah. The people in Jeremiah's day did not need any explanation as to what happened to King Jehoiakim. The Bible tells us in 2 Chronicles 36.5-7:

*5 Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord his God. 6 Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and bound him in chains to take him to Babylon. 7 Nebuchadnezzar also carried part of the vessels of the house of the Lord to Babylon and put them in his palace in Babylon. (2 Chronicles 36)*

As the officials examined their history, they began to see examples of what Jeremiah was speaking about. They saw how the actions of past leaders changed the course of their nation. They saw how God was calling them to repent, and their response to that call could very well be their salvation or downfall as a nation.

Jeremiah's life was spared that day. God caused the officials to reflect on their history. This was one of those rare



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moments when Jeremiah would go home and wonder if maybe his preaching was having an impact after all. He would go home, rejoicing that God has spared his life.

For Consideration:

Was Jeremiah's preaching only a declaration of doom and judgement? To what extent was God giving His people an opportunity to repent through the preaching of Jeremiah?

How do the decisions we make affect the course of our life?

We see in this chapter how Jeremiah was willing to lay down his life to preach the message God gave him for the people. For what are you ready to lay down your life?

God protected Jeremiah from the wrath of those who wanted to kill him. Can we be assured of the protection of God as we walk in His calling?

## Chapter 15 - A Plot to Kill Jeremiah

For Prayer:

Thank God that He gives us the opportunity to repent and return to Him.

Ask the Lord to give you the grace to accept your guilt and make the changes necessary to walk in His favour.

Take a moment to thank the Lord for times when He has protected you physically, emotionally and spiritually from the attack of your enemies. Ask Him to give you more courage to walk in obedience to His call on your life.



## CHAPTER 16 - CONFLICTING MESSAGES

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*4 Give them this charge for their masters: 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: This is what you shall say to your masters: 5 "It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever it seems right to me. 6 Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him also the beasts of the field to serve him. (Jeremiah 27)*

*2 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. 3 Within two years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the Lord's house, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon. 4 I will also bring back to this*

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*place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the exiles from Judah who went to Babylon, declares the Lord, for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.” (Jeremiah 28)*

Have you ever wondered why there are so many conflicting messages in Christianity? In the church around the world, there are many different denominations with different ideas and practices. There are even those who call themselves Christians but deny the essential doctrines of the faith. How are we to know the truth with so many different ideas and interpretations? This problem existed in the days of Jeremiah.

In Jeremiah 27, God told the prophet to make a yoke of wood and put it around his neck.

*1 In the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord. 2 Thus the Lord said to me: “Make yourself straps and yoke-bars, and put them on your neck. (Jeremiah 27)*

From the context of chapter 28, it seems that Jeremiah wore this yoke on his neck for some time. It may be that he went about his daily routine with this yoke around his neck as a prophetic reminder to the people.

What was the message God wanted to communicate through this yoke? The answer is in Jeremiah 27:6-7:

*6 Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king*

## Chapter 16 - Conflicting Messages

*of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him also the beasts of the field to serve him. 7 All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes. Then many nations and great kings shall make him their slave. (Jeremiah 27)*

Many countries would be subject to the yoke of Babylonian domination. Jeremiah wore the yoke as a symbol of his submission to Babylon and the will of the Lord. According to Jeremiah, the Lord wanted His people to submit to this yoke.

There were other prophets in Judah who prophesied that while Babylon would dominate for a time, God's people would soon be free from that control. One of these prophets was a man by the name of Hananiah.

Hananiah told the people that God would break the Babylonian yoke within two years. The temple treasures, stolen by Babylon, would be restored, and King Jeconiah, and all the captives who were exiled to Babylon, would return to Jerusalem within that time frame:

*2 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. 3 Within two years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the Lord's house, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon. 4 I will also bring back to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the exiles from Judah who went to Babylon, declares*

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*the Lord, for I will break the yoke of the  
king of Babylon.” (Jeremiah 28)*

To show his disagreement with the words of Jeremiah, Hananiah removed Jeremiah's yoke and broke it before the people. He told them that this is what would happen to the yoke of Babylon. Within two years, everything would be restored, and the Babylonian domination would cease.

*10 Then the prophet Hananiah took the  
yoke-bars from the neck of Jeremiah  
the prophet and broke them. 11 And  
Hananiah spoke in the presence of all  
the people, saying, “Thus says the  
Lord: Even so will I break the yoke of  
Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from  
the neck of all the nations within two  
years.” But Jeremiah the prophet went  
his way. (Jeremiah 28)*

Jeremiah would have loved to believe Hananiah's prophecy, but he knew he was not speaking the word of the Lord. Listen to his initial response to Hananiah:

*6 and the prophet Jeremiah said,  
“Amen! May the Lord do so; may the  
Lord make the words that you have  
prophesied come true, and bring back  
to this place from Babylon the vessels  
of the house of the Lord, and all the ex-  
iles. 7 Yet hear now this word that I  
speak in your hearing and in the hear-  
ing of all the people. 8 The prophets  
who preceded you and me from ancient  
times prophesied war, famine, and*

## Chapter 16 - Conflicting Messages

*pestilence against many countries and  
great kingdoms. (Jeremiah 28)*

Jeremiah is saying something like this: "What you say, Hananiah would be nice to believe, but it is not what the prophets tell us."

People often believe what they want. Nobody wants to hear of disaster, trials, and suffering. The people of Jeremiah's day listened to the false prophets because they told them what they wanted to hear. They preferred to listen to the prophets who comforted them with soothing lies rather than those who confronted them with the harsh truth.

People have not changed. Even in our day, people choose to believe only the doctrines they like. Modern-day prophets have fallen prey to giving people the word they want to hear and not the word of the Lord. Jeremiah refused to fall into this trap. He chose to preach the word of the Lord no matter how painful it was.

Notice also that Jeremiah told Hananiah that the true prophet would be acknowledged when his prediction came true:

*9 As for the prophet who prophesies  
peace, when the word of that prophet  
comes to pass, then it will be known  
that the Lord has truly sent the  
prophet." (Jeremiah 28)*

In the end, the Lord would reveal whether Hananiah was a true prophet or not. Within two years, the truth or error of his words would be exposed. Jeremiah committed Hananiah to the Lord and trusted Him to reveal this falsehood to the people.



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Sometime later, God told Jeremiah to go to Hananiah and speak to him:

*12 Sometime after the prophet Hananiah had broken the yoke-bars from off the neck of Jeremiah the prophet, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: 13 "Go, tell Hananiah, 'Thus says the Lord: You have broken wooden bars, but you have made in their place bars of iron. (Jeremiah 28)*

The Lord told Hananiah that while he had disrespectfully broken Jeremiah's wooden yoke, it would be replaced with "bars of iron," which would not be broken. God would send the people into exile and place them behind iron bars from which they would not escape within two years. He would be exposed as a false prophet.

Jeremiah had another message from the Lord for Hananiah that day:

*15 And Jeremiah the prophet said to the prophet Hananiah, "Listen, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie. 16 Therefore thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will remove you from the face of the earth. This year you shall die, because you have uttered rebellion against the Lord.'" (Jeremiah 28)*

God was angry with Hananiah because of his lies. He had misled the people. Within two months, Hananiah died (Jeremiah 28:17). God not only showed the nation of Judah

## Chapter 16 - Conflicting Messages

that Hananiah was a false prophet but also that Jeremiah was preaching the truth.

The truth Jeremiah communicated was painful. The people he spoke with did not want to listen. His message also conflicted with those who tried to please the people with false hope. These false prophets were popular because they spoke what people wanted to hear. Sometimes the truth is not what we want to hear. Jeremiah, however, sets an example for us. He was a man God could use to preach the truth. He spoke the word of the Lord even when it hurt and brought him into conflict with fellow prophets. We need more prophets like Jeremiah.

For Consideration:

What conflicting messages do we hear in the church today?

Are there preachers of our day offering false hope and preaching what people want to hear?

How can our desire to be accepted and popular hinder us in preaching the truth of God's Word?

Does God still discipline His church? What does this discipline look like?

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For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to guide His people into the truth? Thank Him that this truth is found in the Bible.

Ask God to set you free from the trap of popularity and wanting to be accepted so that you can be a testimony for Him.

## CHAPTER 17 -

### THE HOUSE OF SHAPHAN

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*1 These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. 2 This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metal workers had departed from Jerusalem. 3 The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiyah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. (Jeremiah 29)*

While the prophet Jeremiah was often alone in the work to which the Lord had called him, he did have a small group of friends who supported him. We saw the relationship between Jeremiah and King Zedekiah. While it is not possible

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to say that Zedekiah was Jeremiah's friend, we can at least say that the king had respect for the prophet and his calling. We have also briefly mentioned Ebed-Melech, the man who saved Jeremiah's life by drawing him out of the cistern (see Jeremiah 38). Jeremiah also had a special relationship with a scribe by the name of Baruch. We will mention him briefly at a later point.

Beyond these individuals, however, we cannot fail to mention the family of Shaphan. Throughout Jeremiah's ministry, one or more members of this household stood behind him. This family seems to be a prominent family in Judah. In the book of Jeremiah, we meet five sons of Shaphan: Ahikam, Elasah, Gemariah, Micaiah, and Gedaliah. All these men supported Jeremiah in his ministry.

Shaphan, the father, was a scribe during the reign of Josiah. When Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law, while cleaning the temple, he gave it to Shaphan to bring to the king. Shaphan read the words of the scroll to King Josiah (2 Chronicles 34:18). After hearing the words contained in the manuscript, Josiah sent Shaphan, Ahikam (the son of Shaphan), and some others to seek the Lord about what would become of the nation because of their sin. Shaphan played an essential part in the revival that would break out under the reign of King Josiah.

Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, as we have already mentioned, was asked by King Josiah to go with his father to seek the Lord about the nation's response to the discovery of the Book of the Law (2 Kings 22:11-13). In Jeremiah 26:24, we read how Ahikam came to the rescue of Jeremiah when the people sought to kill him because of the word he preached:

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*24 But the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah so that he was not given over to the people to be put to death. (Jeremiah 26)*

In Jeremiah 29:1-3, we read that Jeremiah sent a letter to the people who had gone into exile in Babylon. Notice that one of the men who delivered the message was Elasah, the son of Shaphan.

*1 These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. 2 This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metal workers had departed from Jerusalem. 3 The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. (Jeremiah 29)*

Elasah was quite willing to take this letter to the people in exile. He believed in Jeremiah and his message.

In Jeremiah 36, God commanded Jeremiah to write the words He would give him in a scroll. Jeremiah's scribe Baruch recorded the words. Jeremiah then asked him to take the manuscript and read it to the people in the house of the Lord:

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

*5 And Jeremiah ordered Baruch, saying, "I am banned from going to the house of the Lord, 6 so you are to go, and on a day of fasting in the hearing of all the people in the Lord's house you shall read the words of the Lord from the scroll that you have written at my dictation. You shall read them also in the hearing of all the men of Judah who come out of their cities. 7 It may be that their plea for mercy will come before the Lord, and that every one will turn from his evil way, for great is the anger and wrath that the Lord has pronounced against this people." (Jeremiah 36).*

Notice where Baruch went to read the scroll:

*10 Then, in the hearing of all the people, Baruch read the words of Jeremiah from the scroll, in the house of the Lord, in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the secretary, which was in the upper court, at the entry of the New Gate of the Lord's house. (Jeremiah 36)*

Baruch read the words of the scroll from the chamber of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, who was the secretary.

When Gemariah's son Michaiah heard the word of the Lord as recorded in Jeremiah's scroll, he went to the king's house to speak to the princes who were assembled there (Jeremiah 36:12). They summoned Baruch to read the words of Jeremiah to them (Jeremiah 36.14,15).

## Chapter 17 - The House of Shaphan

After listening to the words, the princes decided to take the scroll to the king and read it to him. When three or four pages were read, the king took the scroll, cut it up with his knife and threw it into the fire (Jeremiah 36:23). It is important to note, however, that Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, along with his friends, pleaded with the king not to burn the scroll, but the king refused:

*25 Even when Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah urged the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them. (Jeremiah 36)*

Both Gemariah and Micaiah, sons of Shaphan, played a vital role in sharing the words of this scroll containing the words of the Lord given to Jeremiah.

The next son of Shaphan we read about was the son of Ahikam. His name was Gedaliah. When Nebuchadnezzar took the city of Jerusalem, he chose Gedaliah to be governor over the land (2 Kings 25:22). According to Jeremiah 39:14, Nebuchadnezzar's commander brought Jeremiah out of prison and committed him into the care of Gedaliah:

*13 So Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, Nebushazban the Rab-saris, Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag, and all the chief officers of the king of Babylon  
14 sent and took Jeremiah from the court of the guard. They entrusted him to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, that he should take him home. So he lived among the people.  
(Jeremiah 39)*



## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

Jeremiah would live with Gedaliah in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 40:6).

Babylon destroyed the city of Jerusalem and took its citizens captive, leaving behind only the poor and unskilled governed by Gedaliah. Listen to the first recorded words of Governor Gedaliah to the people who remained in the city of Jerusalem:

*24 And Gedaliah swore to them and their men, saying, "Do not be afraid because of the Chaldean officials. Live in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you." (2 Kings 25)*

Was this not the message of Jeremiah? Compare the words of Gedaliah here to the words of Jeremiah as recorded in Jeremiah 27:

*16 Then I spoke to the priests and to all this people, saying, "Thus says the Lord: Do not listen to the words of your prophets who are prophesying to you, saying, 'Behold, the vessels of the Lord's house will now shortly be brought back from Babylon,' for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you. 17 Do not listen to them; serve the king of Babylon and live. Why should this city become a desolation? (Jeremiah 27)*

It seems evident that Gedaliah was influenced by the preaching of Jeremiah. He believed the prophecy of Jeremiah and chose to govern accordingly.

## Chapter 17 - The House of Shaphan

Jeremiah was not entirely alone in his ministry. How much it must have meant to the prophet to have the household of Shaphan stand behind him. His task was a lonely one. How deeply he must have appreciated this family. They were an encouragement to him. The Lord's workers need people like the household of Shaphan. Maybe the Lord would call you to offer your support and assistance to one of His servants.

For Consideration:

What are some of the discouragement faced by those in ministry?

The Lord supplied Jeremiah with the support he needed in the family of Shaphan. Who has the Lord given you to encourage and strengthen you in your struggles?

How can you be an encouragement and support to those around you who struggle personally or in their service for the Lord?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord that He brings people into your life when you are in need. Thank Him that he supplies your needs through His servants.

### A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

Ask the Lord to show you how you can be a blessing and encouragement to His servants in need.

Do you know of someone who is struggling? Take a moment to ask that Lord to bless them. Ask Him to send the right person to them at this hour of need to encourage and meet their needs.

## CHAPTER 18 -

### SEEK THE PEACE

### OF THE CITY

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*4 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29)*

When the Babylonians took the citizens of Jerusalem captive, they brought them to Babylon, leaving only the poor and unskilled to care for the land. Jeremiah remained in Jerusalem with Gedaliah, the son of Shaphan, the governor. His ministry to those who had gone into captivity did

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

not end when they left their homeland. In the last chapter, we mentioned that Elasah, the son of Shaphan, brought a letter from Jeremiah to the captives in Babylon.

Let's take a moment to consider the content of that letter. Notice in Jeremiah 29:4 that the prophet reminded the captives that it was God who sent them into exile:

*4 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: (Jeremiah 29)*

Notice the phrase: to "to the exiles whom I have sent into exile." It was the Lord who sent His people into captivity. This was in direct fulfilment of the prophecy of Jeremiah. God took their land from them. They had not expected this to happen, but it did. As they sat in exile, they had cause to consider what had happened and why. It was their rebellion against God that put them in this situation. Jeremiah wanted the people to understand that it was God who was disciplining them for their sin and disobedience.

It is not always easy to see God in our struggles. It is even more challenging to understand that He has a purpose in our suffering. One of the significant responsibilities of a Christian leader is to help people to see the hand of God in whatever circumstance they find themselves. This is not an easy lesson for us to learn. We can accept a God who gives us what we want and makes us comfortable. It is not so easy, however, to surrender to a God who strips us of all we treasure. There could be no victory for the people of God, however, until they recognized God's hand in their circumstances and surrendered to His purpose.

## Chapter 18 - Seek the Peace of the City

Notice that Jeremiah encouraged the people to build houses, settle down, plant gardens, marry and have sons and daughters:

*5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. (Jeremiah 29)*

Remember that Hananiah, the prophet told the people that their exile would only last two years:

*1 In that same year, at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fifth month of the fourth year, Hananiah the son of Azzur, the prophet from Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of the Lord, in the presence of the priests and all the people, saying, 2 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. 3 Within two years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the Lord's house, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon. 4 I will also bring back to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the exiles from Judah who went to Babylon, declares the Lord, for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon." (Jeremiah 28)*

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

Jeremiah was telling them something different. He was telling them to build houses and marry their daughters. The implication was that they were going to be in exile for a long time. It was the purpose of God that they remain there. Nothing was going to shorten the time God had determined for them there. No prayers or pleading with God would make Him change His mind. Jeremiah was telling the exiles that this is where they would die. They would never again see the land God promised their fathers. They were to accept this and learn to live in their new circumstances, for this was the will of God for them.

There were two options for the people of God. Either they could become bitter and refuse to accept the inevitable, or they could trust God and make the most of their circumstances. Jeremiah challenged them to get on with life, build their houses, have children and enjoy the good things God would provide in this less than ideal environment.

Jeremiah also encouraged the exiles to seek the prosperity of the city to which they were exiled:

*7 But seek the welfare of the city where  
I have sent you into exile, and pray to  
the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare  
you will find your welfare.*

If God's people were going to prosper, they would have to do so in a foreign land. They would have to forgive those who had taken them into captivity. More than this, however, they needed to seek the prosperity of their enemies. They were to become ideal citizens of Babylon, adding to its economy and blessing its people. God commanded the Jewish exiles to pray for the prosperity of their enemies and tied their blessing to the welfare of Babylon—they would only be blessed as their enemies were blessed.

## Chapter 18 - Seek the Peace of the City

The Jewish exiles could live in poverty, refusing to do anything that might bless those who had taken them from their homeland. They could spend the rest of their lives mourning the loss of their properties. They could live in rebellion and be crushed by their Babylonian rulers. They could hold on to an attitude of bitterness towards their captives and make life miserable for everyone.

On the other hand, these exiles could put aside hatred and bitterness and plant their fields, build their houses and see their children's children. They could become good citizens of Babylon and gain the admiration of their enemies. They could accept the fact that God had sent them into exile and learn to rejoice in His mercy, even in exile.

The blessing and prosperity of God's people were tied to the land of their captivity. They would have to put aside bitterness and pride and submit to God. This was the great lesson God wanted to teach them. They were in captivity because they had failed to surrender to God. They refused to be broken by God. The pathway to victory in exile would be through brokenness and submission.

Was this the message the exiles wanted to hear in their exile? Many lesser prophets would have offered false hope and comfort. Jeremiah's letter was hard. It was a message that provided hope and support only by surrendering to their trial. It was a message that rebuked the bitterness, pride and stubbornness of their hearts. Jeremiah offered them no hope of returning to their homeland in their lifetime. He told them that they could only be blessed by blessing and forgiving their enemies.

There are many people today who need to hear this message. There is bitterness in their hearts that has lingered



## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

there for years. They have refused to forgive. They have failed to see that while the enemy meant to harm them, God can use what happened for good. These individuals have been unable to experience the fullness of God's blessing because their pride and lack of forgiveness has kept those blessings from them. Jeremiah's letter to the exiles, though difficult to accept, is still the pathway to victory.

For Consideration:

Does God allow hard things to happen to His children?

Have you found it difficult to forgive those who have offended you? Why would it have been hard for the exiles to forgive their enemies?

How easy is it to offer false comfort rather than speaking the hard truth? Have you ever found yourself in this situation?

To what extent is our blessing tied to our willingness to be a blessing to others?

God challenged His people to be good citizens in the land where they lived. What impact have believers had for good on your community?

## Chapter 18 - Seek the Peace of the City

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to give you the grace to submit to Him and His purpose even when it is difficult.

Do you have a hard time forgiving people? Ask God to give you the grace to offer that forgiveness.

Ask God to help you to be a blessing to those who have offended you.

Ask God to help the believers in your community be good citizens giving testimony to the goodness of their God.

Take a moment to pray for your city. Ask God to break through the areas of sin and evil. Ask Him to restore His blessing.



## CHAPTER 19 - THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD

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*27 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. 28 And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring harm, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 31)*

Probably the most encouraging section of the book of Jeremiah is chapters 30 to 33. In these chapters, Jeremiah speaks about the coming restoration of God's people to their homeland. He also gives us insight into the discipline of God and its purpose in the life of His people. Let's consider this for a moment.

Because God's people refused to listen to Him, He allowed their enemies to overpower them and take them into exile.

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

At this time, all human support was stripped away. Even their allies forgot them in their time of trouble:

*14 All your lovers have forgotten you;  
they care nothing for you; for I have  
dealt you the blow of an enemy, the  
punishment of a merciless foe, because  
your guilt is great, because your sins  
are flagrant. (Jeremiah 30)*

Jeremiah reminded his people, however, that God was not blind to those who devoured them:

*16 Therefore all who devour you shall  
be devoured, and all your foes, every  
one of them, shall go into captivity;  
those who plunder you shall be  
plundered, and all who prey on you I  
will make a prey. 17 For I will restore  
health to you, and your wounds I will  
heal, declares the Lord, because they  
have called you an outcast: 'It is Zion,  
for whom no one cares!' (Jeremiah 30)*

God allowed the enemies of His people to overpower them but would hold them accountable for doing so. This may seem strange to us but understand that it was only natural that Judah's enemies attack her. Human nature is greedy and envious of what others have. We can be sure that Satan was doing all he could to destroy the people of God. What kept him from doing so? It was the restraining hand of God. God had been holding back Judah's enemy for many years. They were secure because God kept them.

How little we understand of this restraining influence of God. We are living in a sinful world. We are facing a

## Chapter 19 - The Discipline of the Lord

horrible enemy in the person of Satan. He will do anything to destroy, not only the work of God but God's people as well.

In the story of Job, we catch a glimpse of the desire of Satan to destroy God's servant. In Job 1, we read about an encounter between Satan and God:

*6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. 7 The Lord said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." 8 And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" 9 Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? 10 Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." 12 And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord. (Job 1)*

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Notice how Satan was “going to and fro on the earth” (verse 7). The reason for this is quite apparent. He wanted to find someone to tempt and destroy. Notice also the reason Satan could not tempt Job was because God had put a “hedge around him and his house” (verse 10). God needed to lift this hedge if Satan were to penetrate it – something God would ultimately do to accomplish something good in the life of Job.

Jeremiah experienced this protection of God in his life and ministry. Very early in his ministry, God promised that the enemy would not be able to penetrate the wall that he would set up to protect him.

*20 And I will make you to this people a  
fortified wall of bronze; they will fight  
against you, but they shall not prevail  
over you, for I am with you to save you  
and deliver you, declares the Lord.  
(Jeremiah 15)*

How often Jeremiah’s foes wanted to kill him but could not penetrate the bronze wall God has set up around him. In the same way, God surrounded His people with His care and protection from their enemies. When God’s people refused to obey Him, He loosened His restraint, and the enemy penetrated.

God did not need to tell Babylon to attack the nation of Judah. They did what was natural to them. They did what their sinful nature dictated. God loosened His restraint, and the enemy lashed out in cruelty and greed. God did not author their sin. He merely stopped holding them back. They chose to obey the sinful impulses of their hearts and would suffer the consequences of their evil actions.

## Chapter 19 - The Discipline of the Lord

God's restraining hand is an act of mercy and love. He is not obliged to hold back the enemy but does so because He loves His people. If God were not holding back the enemy, where would we be today? We cannot take this for granted.

There are times when God pulls back His protective hand. The result is often confusing and terrifying. In the case of Job, he lost his family and personal health. In the case of God's people in Jeremiah's day, the enemy swept in and took their land. Jeremiah told his people, however, that even when God pulls back His hand, He does not surrender control.

Jeremiah prophesied that the day would come when God would restore His people. Notice when this would happen:

*24 The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intentions of his mind. In the latter days you will understand this. (Jeremiah 30)*

God would restore His people when He had "accomplished the intentions of his mind." In other words, God did not remove His hand or surrender control. He allowed the enemy to be an instrument through which He would accomplish His purpose for His people. Only when the intents of God's heart were achieved, would He restore them.

Listen to what Jeremiah prophesied about Ephraim:

*18 I have heard Ephraim grieving, 'You have disciplined me, and I was disciplined, like an untrained calf; bring me back that I may be restored, for you*



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*are the Lord my God. 19 For after I had turned away, I relented, and after I was instructed, I struck my thigh; I was ashamed, and I was confounded, because I bore the disgrace of my youth.'*  
(Jeremiah 31)

Under the discipline of God, Ephraim would come to recognize his sin. He would understand that God disciplined him to bring him to repentance so that his fellowship and blessing could be restored. It was God's deepest desire to have mercy on His child. It was His purpose to discipline Ephraim until He learned his lesson and was restored to fellowship. Though God punished Ephraim, He did not cease to love him. Listen to the words He spoke through Jeremiah:

*20 Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 31)*

God had to speak harshly to Ephraim. It broke His heart that He had to discipline him so severely. Ephraim was dear to the heart of God, however, and God yearned to fellowship with him. God jealously guarded His relationship with them. He disciplined them to purge anything that would keep them from perfect communion and fellowship. For a moment in time, God lifted his restraining hand, but He did not give up on His people. He would discipline them, but when that discipline had accomplished its purpose, He would restore them:

## Chapter 19 - The Discipline of the Lord

*28 And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring harm, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 31)*

When His people had learned to submit and were transformed by His discipline, God would restore them. He would open His arms to receive them. There in His arms, they would be shielded once again from their enemy. There they would know the abundant blessing of fellowship. There they would enjoy perfect peace.

Jeremiah reminded his people that while the Lord had lifted His protection for a time, He would use this to shape and transform them. When His discipline had accomplished its purpose, He would restore them. God had not abandoned His people. While their exile would not be comfortable, it was God's way of transforming and humbling them so that they could be restored to greater fellowship and blessing.

For Consideration:

What do we learn in this chapter about the restraining hand of God? Where would we be if God were not restraining the evil intended for us?

Does God have the right to lift His protection from us?

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

What is the purpose of the discipline of God? Does God forget those He disciplines?

Does God delight in discipline? What evidence do we have that God prefers to bless than punish?

Have you ever been disciplined by the Lord? What did that discipline accomplish in your life?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord for the many times, unknown to yourself, that He has restrained the hand of evil intended for you.

Thank the Lord that when He disciplines us, He does so for our good.

Ask the Lord to help you to submit to His discipline in your life so that you can learn what He wants to teach you.

## CHAPTER 20 - PRACTISING WHAT YOU PREACH

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*6 Jeremiah said, "The word of the Lord came to me: 7 Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle will come to you and say, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.' 8 Then Hanamel my cousin came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the Lord, and said to me, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself.' Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord. 9 "And I bought the field at Anathoth from Hanamel my cousin, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. 10 I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. (Jeremiah 32)*

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

Over the course of this study, we have seen how God asked the prophet, Jeremiah, to speak challenging words. It was not easy to preach to people who would not listen or accept what he was saying. In the last chapter, we examined the letter Jeremiah wrote to the exiles telling them that their deportation would be a long one, but the day was coming when God would restore them to the land of their fathers.

While it was often difficult for Jeremiah to speak the words of the Lord, it was another matter to stand behind those words personally. Many preach but do not practice what they tell others. In Jeremiah 32, the Lord puts Jeremiah to the test to see if he genuinely believed what He was asking him to preach.

*6 Jeremiah said, "The word of the Lord came to me: 7 Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle will come to you and say, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.' (Jeremiah 32)*

The Lord told Jeremiah that his cousin would be coming to see him. Jeremiah's cousin wanted to sell him a piece of land in Anathoth, his hometown. While this type of transaction was typical, what was strange about this situation was the circumstance under which the property was being sold. Jeremiah 32:2-3 give us the context:

*2 At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah. 3 For Zedekiah king of Judah had imprisoned*

## Chapter 20 - Practicing What You Preach

*him, saying, "Why do you prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord: Behold, I am giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall capture it; (Jeremiah 32)*

Jeremiah was in prison. He had been sent there by the king for prophesying against his nation. There was no telling if he could ever leave his cell to enjoy the property he was being offered. What good was land to Jeremiah if he was going to spend the rest of his days in prison?

Notice also what was happening in the nation at that time. "The king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem." The Babylonians had camped on the doorstep and were ready to take the whole land. This was not the time to purchase a piece of property. Would you buy property if your country was at war and the enemy was threatening to take it from you?

When Jeremiah's cousin arrived at the prison and offered Jeremiah the property, there may have been a few questions in the mind of the prophet. Should he buy the property or not? Was buying the property a wise investment? Human wisdom told him it was foolish, but what had he been preaching in recent months? Had he not prophesied that the exiles would return to the land God had given to their fathers. By buying this land, he would show the world that he believed what he was preaching.

Jeremiah decided to obey the Lord and purchase the property. He paid the money to his cousin and had a deed made up. He called Baruch the scribe and asked him to take the documents and place them in a clay jar for safe-keeping, telling him that the day was coming when houses and vineyards would once again be bought in the land:

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*15 For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.’ (Jeremiah 32:15)*

Through Jeremiah obeyed the Lord in this matter, he did not understand what God was doing. Listen to his prayer in verses 24-25:

*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.  
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.” (Jeremiah 32)*

Jeremiah struggled with what he had just done. He chose to obey the Lord and trust His leading, but he had many questions. God understood the confusion Jeremiah was experiencing and comforted him in his struggle:

*27 “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me? (Jeremiah 32)*

God reminded Jeremiah that nothing was too hard for Him. He would go on to tell the prophet:

*42 “For thus says the Lord: Just as I have brought all this great disaster*

## Chapter 20 - Practicing What You Preach

*upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good that I promise them. 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." (Jeremiah 32)*

The Lord reminded Jeremiah that He would restore His people to their land. The day was coming when fields would be again purchased. Jeremiah was not a wealthy man. It could be that everything he had was invested in the piece of property that was going to be taken by the Babylonians. God was asking Jeremiah not only to preach the Word but demonstrate His confidence in that Word by investing in the land God promised would one day be restored to him.

Jeremiah took a step of faith that day. God asked him if he believed what he was preaching. He put him to the test and called him to invest in what he was teaching others. Jeremiah struggled with the decision but was determined to obey. Would we pass this test today?



## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

### For Consideration:

Did Jeremiah's purchase make sense from a logical and human perspective? Explain.

Should we ever do something when we do not understand what we are doing?

Should human logic and understanding be the basis for our decisions? Can human reasoning and intelligence keep us from obedience?

What do we see in this chapter about the importance of consistency in word and lifestyle? Do you practice what you preach?

### For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to help you to trust His Word and His leading more than your human wisdom and understanding. Ask Him for the grace to obey even when you do not fully understand what He is asking you to do.

Ask God to forgive you for times when you have strayed from the truth of His Word because it did not make sense to you.

## Chapter 20 - Practicing What You Preach

Ask the Lord to show you if there are any inconsistencies in what you say and do. Ask God to give you the grace to invest in the truth He has revealed to you about Himself and His purpose for your life.



## CHAPTER 21 -

### RETURNED SLAVES

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*8 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to make a proclamation of liberty to them, 9 that everyone should set free his Hebrew slaves, male and female, so that no one should enslave a Jew, his brother. 10 And they obeyed, all the officials and all the people who had entered into the covenant that everyone would set free his slave, male or female, so that they would not be enslaved again. They obeyed and set them free. 11 But afterward they turned around and took back the male and female slaves they had set free, and brought them into subjection as slaves.*  
(Jeremiah 34)

Commitments are easy to make but much harder to maintain. Maybe your commitment to the Lord has been eroded by trials and temptations. Personal weaknesses have

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compromised your testimony for Him. Friends, society, jobs, and other interests have crept in and weakened your once steadfast commitment to the Saviour. God's people in the days of Jeremiah were experiencing this erosion of faith.

In Jeremiah 34, the Lord addresses a particular sin in the life of the nation—the practice of keeping Hebrew slaves.

*8 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to make a proclamation of liberty to them, 9 that everyone should set free his Hebrew slaves, male and female, so that no one should enslave a Jew, his brother.*

Though they had been slaves in Egypt, God's people were subjecting their brothers and sisters to this same evil. God was not pleased with this.

We do not know what part Jeremiah played in this release of slaves, but he had been preaching that God's people needed to be restored to Him and His purpose. The practice of slavery was only one of the many sins Jeremiah had to address. Jeremiah 34: 8 tells us that Zedekiah made a covenant with the people to release all Jewish slaves. Notice the response of the people to this decree:

*10 And they obeyed, all the officials and all the people who had entered into the covenant that everyone would set free his slave, male or female, so that they would not be enslaved again. They*

## Chapter 21 - Returned Slaves

*obeyed and set them free. (Jeremiah 34)*

The practice of taking Hebrew slaves was abolished in the land. What a great day that must have been for the prophet Jeremiah. He must have been encouraged to see the Lord do such a mighty work in the lives of His people by releasing these slaves.

The commitment the people made to the abolition of slavery, however, was short-lived. We read in Jeremiah 34:11:

*11 But afterward they turned around and took back the male and female slaves they had set free, and brought them into subjection as slaves. (Jeremiah 34)*

The people changed their minds and took back their slaves. We do not know what brought about this change. Was it because of the difficulties they encountered without the slaves? Life became harder for these former slave owners who had no one to do the work for them. They may have needed to hire people to do the jobs that had, under slavery, been done freely. This was hard on their pocket-books.

While we do not know why they changed their minds, the factors mentioned above were likely part of their decision to bring back slavery. Their commitment to God weakened when it brought hardship for them. They were willing to obey when obedience was convenient, but they were not willing to suffer.

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

The Lord was displeased with their decision to go back on their commitment. God sent Jeremiah to express His displeasure.

*15 You recently repented and did what was right in my eyes by proclaiming liberty, each to his neighbor, and you made a covenant before me in the house that is called by my name, 16 but then you turned around and profaned my name when each of you took back his male and female slaves, whom you had set free according to their desire, and you brought them into subjection to be your slaves. 17 "Therefore, thus says the Lord: You have not obeyed me by proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother and to his neighbor; behold, I proclaim to you liberty to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine, declares the Lord. I will make you a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. (Jeremiah 34)*

God's wrath would be poured out on those who broke their covenant. They would perish by sword, pestilence and famine. Only recently, Jeremiah had been rejoicing in the work of God in these lives. Now he proclaimed the judgment of God on these same people.

Jeremiah experienced short-lived joys in ministry. He saw the shallowness of God's people. He watched his "successes" turn to ashes. He saw his people turn their backs on God when things got complicated. He experienced deep disappointments. Success for Jeremiah would not be measured in results but in faithfulness to preach the message God gave him.

## Chapter 21 - Returned Slaves

### For Consideration:

Have you been faithful to your commitments? Take a moment to examine the promises you have made.

Have you been willing to suffer hardship to be true to your word and the commitments you have made?

What temptations do you face to go back on your word?

Are results the measure of success? How do you think Jeremiah felt watching the people of his day go back on their promise? Have you ever felt what he must have felt that day?

### For Prayer:

Ask God to give you the grace to be faithful to the godly commitments you have made in life. Ask Him to give you the strength you need when this obligation becomes a burden.

Ask God to give you victory over the things that keep you from being faithful to your promises. Ask Him to show you what you need to do about these hindrances.



## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

Thank the Lord that He is not focused on results but obedience and faithfulness. Ask Him to give you the grace you need when you feel discouraged in ministry and life. Ask Him to help you to be faithful, especially in trying times.

## CHAPTER 22 -

### THE RECHABITES

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*1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: 2 “Go to the house of the Rechabites and speak with them and bring them to the house of the Lord, into one of the chambers; then offer them wine to drink.” (Jeremiah 35)*

In Jeremiah 35, we meet a group of people known as the Rechabites. As the descendants of Rechab, they were a peculiar people. They refused to drink wine, never built houses, sowed seeds or planted vineyards. They lived in tents as nomads, wandering in search of food. This lifestyle was based on a command given them by their forefather Jonadab, the son of Rechab:

*6 But they answered, “We will drink no wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, ‘You shall not drink wine, neither you nor your sons forever. 7 You shall not build a*

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

*house; you shall not sow seed; you shall not plant or have a vineyard; but you shall live in tents all your days, that you may live many days in the land where you sojourn.' (Jeremiah 35)*

For many years these Rechabites had been faithful to their forefather's desire for them as a family.

The Lord asked Jeremiah to invite the Rechabites to the house of the Lord (Jeremiah 35.2). When they arrived, Jeremiah was to set out wine for them to drink. Jeremiah did as the Lord commanded. He brought the Rechabites to the house of the Lord and set out pots of wine before them (Jeremiah 35:5).

The Rechabites graciously explained to Jeremiah that they would not drink wine because of the command their forefather Jonadab had given them. As a family, they had chosen to respect his wishes and refused to drink the wine Jeremiah offered:

*8 We have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, in all that he commanded us, to drink no wine all our days, ourselves, our wives, our sons, or our daughters, 9 and not to build houses to dwell in. We have no vineyard or field or seed, 10 but we have lived in tents and have obeyed and done all that Jonadab our father commanded us. (Jeremiah 35)*

It was only after the Rechabites refused Jeremiah's wine, that the word of the Lord came to the prophet:

## Chapter 22 - The Rechabites

*13 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Go and say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will you not receive instruction and listen to my words? declares the Lord.  
14 The command that Jonadab the son of Rechab gave to his sons, to drink no wine, has been kept, and they drink none to this day, for they have obeyed their father's command. I have spoken to you persistently, but you have not listened to me. (Jeremiah 35)*

God used this encounter as an object lesson for His people. He pointed out how the Rechabites rejected Jeremiah's wine because it was their purpose in life to follow the wishes of their father. Jonadab, as a mere man, commanded his family to abstain from wine, and for years they respected his desire. God, however, spoke to His people repeatedly, but they would not obey or respect His wishes. The Rechabites had more respect for their forefathers than the people of Judah had for their God.

*16 The sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have kept the command that their father gave them, but this people has not obeyed me. (Jeremiah 35)*

The Lord was angry with His people for their refusal to walk in His purpose. Through Jeremiah He told them that He would bring disaster because of their disobedience:

*17 Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing upon Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the disaster*

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*that I have pronounced against them,  
because I have spoken to them and  
they have not listened, I have called to  
them and they have not answered.”  
(Jeremiah 35)*

God, however, chose to bless the Rechabites for their obedience to Jonadab:

*18 But to the house of the Rechabites  
Jeremiah said, “Thus says the Lord of  
hosts, the God of Israel: Because you  
have obeyed the command of Jonadab  
your father and kept all his precepts  
and done all that he commanded you,  
19 therefore thus says the Lord of  
hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab the  
son of Rechab shall never lack a man  
to stand before me.” (Jeremiah 35)*

Have you ever been struck by the long hours an employee will spend at work to make a few more dollars? How does their enthusiasm for these worldly matters compare to our zeal for the King of kings? Is there not something wrong when our society finds greater pleasure in the things of this world than we experience in our God? Were we not created for God? Doesn't our greatest satisfaction and joy come from knowing Him and His presence?

The Rechabites wandered as nomads. They had no home, no property, and only what they could carry from one place to another. They did not enjoy the comforts of those who lived in towns and houses. They were willing, however, to make these sacrifices to be obedient to their father, Jonadab. Obedience to their father became their distinguishing trait. It was their desire and purpose in life.

## Chapter 22 - The Rechabites

What distinguishes us as believers today? Is it a heartfelt passion to please our heavenly Father? Is this what defines our lives? Are we willing to sacrifice the comforts and privileges of life to please our Father? Will we, like the Rechabites, resist all temptations that would call us away from this commitment? Why do evildoers openly boast of their sinful and immoral lifestyles, yet God's people struggle to be known as those who live to please their heavenly Father? Jeremiah's words and the example of the Rechabites continue to challenge us in our day.

For Consideration:

Who were the Rechabites, and what distinguished them from other people in the region?

What things do people in your society get excited about? To what worldly principles are they devoted?

Have you been excited about your relationship with God? Do you find great joy in obedience to Him? What keeps us from experiencing this joy and devotion?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to remove anything that would keep you from experiencing joy and gratitude in Him. Ask Him to give you a faithful heart.

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Ask the Lord to stir up His people to greater love and devotion to Him. Take a moment to pray this for your church or fellowship group.

Pray that your community would see the devotion and delight your church has in pleasing its heavenly Father. Pray that they would be attracted not to us but to the God who brings such delight to our hearts.

## CHAPTER 23 -

### THE BURNT SCROLL

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*32 Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote on it at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them. (Jeremiah 36)*

Down through the ages, men and women have tried to disclaim the truth of Scripture. Some have shredded and burned copies of the Bible in their distaste for it. The Bible has been banned in countries. Soldiers have been ordered to seek out and destroy any copies they found. Historically, those who translated the Bible were burned at the stake. Those who distributed it were thrown in prison.

Not only has the Word of God been physically attacked—but it has also suffered intellectual attacks. We may not fear the possibility of soldiers breaking into our home and taking away our Bibles, but we do experience the attacks of those who seek to discredit the Bible. We see an



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increasing number of scholars casting doubt on the truth of this Word. For many, the Bible is no longer an authoritative guide for life and doctrine. They feel it is outdated and no longer relevant to our present society. Misinterpretation and distortions of the truth it contains are issues in our day. More and more, the Bible is being placed on the shelf and replaced by popular opinion. "If the majority thinks something is right, it cannot be wrong," is the modern philosophy.

Ever since the beginning of time, it has been the tactic of Satan to discredit the Word of God. In the Garden of Eden, the serpent sought to cast doubt on the Word of God when he said:

*1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"*  
(Genesis 3)

Satan's tactic has not changed. His great desire is to turn people away from the truth of God and His purpose for their lives.

In Jeremiah 36, the Lord asked the prophet to record His words on a scroll. By recording it in written form, he was preserving the words for future generations and making them accessible to more people. God told Jeremiah to write down all the words He had given him to speak against Israel and Judah. I imagine that this would have taken some time.

*1 In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word*

## Chapter 23 - The Burnt Scroll

*came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 2  
“Take a scroll and write on it all the  
words that I have spoken to you against  
Israel and Judah and all the nations,  
from the day I spoke to you, from the  
days of Josiah until today. 3 It may be  
that the house of Judah will hear all the  
disaster that I intend to do to them, so  
that every one may turn from his evil  
way, and that I may forgive their iniquity  
and their sin.” (Jeremiah 36)*

Notice in Jeremiah 36:3 that the Lord desired that when the people heard these words read to them, they would repent and return to Him for forgiveness.

After completing the scroll, Jeremiah asked his friend Baruch to read it in the house of the Lord. Jeremiah, by this time, was forbidden access to the temple. The only way the prophet could communicate the truth God had given him was to have Baruch read the words written in the scroll.

*5 And Jeremiah ordered Baruch, say-  
ing, “I am banned from going to the  
house of the Lord, 6 so you are to go,  
and on a day of fasting in the hearing of  
all the people in the Lord’s house you  
shall read the words of the Lord from  
the scroll that you have written at my  
dictation. You shall read them also in  
the hearing of all the men of Judah who  
come out of their cities. (Jeremiah 36)*

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Baruch did as Jeremiah requested and read the words of the scroll to those who had gathered in the house of the Lord.

When Michaiah, the grandson of Shaphan, heard them, he told the officials what he heard. The officials asked Baruch to read the words of Jeremiah to them personally? The prophecy so struck them that they felt it necessary to take the scroll to the king.

*16 When they heard all the words, they turned one to another in fear. And they said to Baruch, "We must report all these words to the king." (Jeremiah 36)*

Before going to the king, however, the officials asked Baruch to identify the author. He informed them that they had come from Jeremiah. The officials knew that Jeremiah was not only banned from the house of the Lord, but many wanted to kill him. Even though these words came from Jeremiah, the officials felt they were important enough to bring to the king. Before seeking his audience, however, they told Baruch to find Jeremiah and hide. They suspected that the king would not be happy with what he heard.

*19 Then the officials said to Baruch, "Go and hide, you and Jeremiah, and let no one know where you are." (Jeremiah 36)*

The officials brought the scroll to King Jehoiakim and began to read its contents. As they read, the king took his knife and cut each section of the prophecy from the manuscript and throw it in the fire. He did this even though Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah urged him not to do so

## Chapter 23 - The Burnt Scroll

(Jeremiah 36:25). By destroying the words of Jeremiah, the king was showing his contempt for the word of God. Remember that this scroll was written by hand, and there were likely no other copies available.

After burning the scroll, King Jehoiakim ordered that both Baruch and Jeremiah be seized and thrown into prison. They escaped, however, by listening to the counsel of the officials who told them to hide.

All Jeremiah's hard work had now been burned up. Many hours of labour for the Lord was now a pile of ashes. We can imagine that this would have been very discouraging. Behind this, of course, was the efforts of the enemy to destroy the word of God.

What is remarkable about this story, however, is the fact that God preserved His word despite the king's efforts to destroy it. God kept it by safeguarding His servants through whom His word came. After the king burned the scroll, the word of the Lord came again to Jeremiah.

*27 Now after the king had burned the scroll with the words that Baruch wrote at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: 28 "Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah has burned. (Jeremiah 36)*

God asked Jeremiah to take another scroll and rewrite all the words that were in the first scroll. Listen to what Jeremiah 36:32 has to say was the result:

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*32 Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote on it at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them. (Jeremiah 36)*

Verse 32 tells us that Jeremiah wrote “all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire.” The small word “all” is significant. It implies that everything that was in the first scroll was in the second scroll. Nothing was missing. Beyond this, however, many similar words were added. In other words, God gave Jeremiah even more than he had in the first scroll. God preserved the prophecy of Jeremiah even through the king destroyed the original copy in the fire. We have Jeremiah’s word today because God would not let it be destroyed.

Since Jeremiah's day, others have sought to stamp out the word of God, but God has preserved it. Not only did God protect this word, but it spread in written form throughout the world. It was passed down from generation to generation so that today, we read it and continue to be challenged by its content. The God who gave Jeremiah the words to speak, also assured that they reached those who needed to hear them. He preserved what He called Jeremiah to preach and anointed it for His purpose around the world. Jeremiah could never have imagined when news came that the first scroll had been destroyed, just how far God would take the words He gave him a second time.

We see from this that we have a God who is bigger than what the enemy does to us. The enemy will strike with his arrows. He will cause us pain and suffering, but above all,

## Chapter 23 - The Burnt Scroll

this is a God who loves and cares for us. He will overrule what the enemy does and expand His kingdom in our lives and around the world.

For Consideration:

What attacks have you seen on the Word of God in your day?

Why are the Bible and the truth it contains so essential? Where would we be today without this truth?

Have you ever been discouraged when you saw your work in ashes before you? How did God work out the details of that seeming loss for Jeremiah?

What encouragement do you find in the fact that God preserved the work He called Jeremiah to do until it had accomplished what He intended? What implication does this have for your life personally?

For Prayer:

Take a moment to thank the Lord for how He has preserved the truth of His Word down through the years.

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Ask the Lord to give you a deeper appreciation of the truth we have in the pages of His inspired Word.

Thank the Lord that when He calls, He also equips and preserves the efforts He calls us to make for His glory.

Ask God to enable you to trust Him even when things do not turn out as you expected.

## CHAPTER 24 -

### FEARING FOR HIS LIFE

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*11 Now when the Chaldean army had withdrawn from Jerusalem at the approach of Pharaoh's army, 12 Jeremiah set out from Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin to receive his portion there among the people. 13 When he was at the Benjamin Gate, a sentry there named Irijah the son of Shelemiah, son of Hananiah, seized Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "You are deserting to the Chaldeans." 14 And Jeremiah said, "It is a lie; I am not deserting to the Chaldeans." But Irijah would not listen to him, and seized Jeremiah and brought him to the officials. (Jeremiah 37)*

The city of Jerusalem was under siege. The Babylonians surrounded it, cutting off supplies. They withdrew, however, when they discovered that Egypt was approaching. This gave the citizens of Jerusalem some needed relief. It was at this time that Jeremiah decided to leave the city and



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travel to Benjamin where he had purchased a piece of property from his cousin (see Jeremiah 32).

When Jeremiah arrived at the Benjamin Gate, he was met by Irijah, a guard. Irijah knew Jeremiah had been preaching about surrendering to the Babylonians. Seeing Jeremiah at the entrance made Irijah suspicious. Irijah's imagination began to work, and he drew some false conclusions:

*13 When he was at the Benjamin Gate, a sentry there named Irijah the son of Shelemiah, son of Hananiah, seized Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "You are deserting to the Chaldeans." (Jeremiah 37)*

Irijah accused the prophet of deserting to the enemy. Jeremiah sought to defend himself against Irijah's accusation. Irijah, however, would not listen. Instead, he arrested the prophet and brought him to the city officials.

This false accusation made things very difficult for Jeremiah. The officials beat him and threw him in prison where he would remain for many days.

*15 And the officials were enraged at Jeremiah, and they beat him and imprisoned him in the house of Jonathan the secretary, for it had been made a prison. 16 When Jeremiah had come to the dungeon cells and remained there many days ... (Jeremiah 37)*

We catch a glimpse of the painful conditions in that prison when King Zedekiah came secretly to visit him. After

## Chapter 24 - Fearing for His Life

speaking with the king, Jeremiah made a personal request:

*20 Now hear, please, O my lord the king: let my humble plea come before you and do not send me back to the house of Jonathan the secretary, lest I die there.” (Jeremiah 37)*

Jeremiah pleaded with the king not to send him back to the prison at the house of Jonathan because he feared he would die there (Jeremiah 37.20).

This was not the only time Jeremiah had cause to fear for his life. In Jeremiah 38, he was preaching about surrendering to the Chaldeans (see Jeremiah 38:2-3). He told those who were listening that the person who stayed in the city would die by the sword, famine and pestilence. On the other hand, if they went with the Babylonians into exile, they would live:

*2 “Thus says the Lord: He who stays in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, but he who goes out to the Chaldeans shall live. He shall have his life as a prize of war, and live.  
3 Thus says the Lord: This city shall surely be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon and be taken.” (Jeremiah 38)*

When Shephatiah, Gedaliah, Jucal and Pashhur heard the words of Jeremiah, they felt his influence was weakening the resolve of the soldiers to fight their enemy.

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*4 Then the officials said to the king, "Let this man be put to death, for he is weakening the hands of the soldiers who are left in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm." (Jeremiah 38)*

After hearing Jeremiah's message, these officials approached King Zedekiah for permission to kill the prophet. Zedekiah granted permission. The officials then threw Jeremiah into an empty cistern full of mud. When they let Jeremiah down with ropes, he sunk deep into this mud, where he was left to die.

*6 So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king's son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes. And there was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud. (Jeremiah 38)*

When an Ethiopian eunuch named Ebed-Melech, who knew Jeremiah, heard what had happened, he approached the king on Jeremiah's behalf. Listen to his words to the king that day:

*9 "My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they did to Jeremiah the prophet by casting him into the cistern, and he will die there of hunger, for there is no bread left in the city." (Jeremiah 38)*

## Chapter 24 - Fearing for His Life

Ebed-Melech understood that unless he did something for Jeremiah, he would die abandoned in that cistern. King Zedekiah gave permission to Ebed-Melech to take thirty men to rescue Jeremiah. Jeremiah returned to prison, but his life was spared.

The message the Lord called Jeremiah to preach was a dangerous message. He risked his life teaching the Word of God. Jeremiah understood how risky it was to share the words of the Lord in those days and often feared for his life.

After Jeremiah's rescue from the cistern, King Zedekiah came to see him. The king wanted to hear from the Lord. Listen to the conversation that took place that day:

*14 King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet and received him at the third entrance of the temple of the Lord. The king said to Jeremiah, "I will ask you a question; hide nothing from me." 15 Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I tell you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you counsel, you will not listen to me." 16 Then King Zedekiah swore secretly to Jeremiah, "As the Lord lives, who made our souls, I will not put you to death or deliver you into the hand of these men who seek your life." 17 Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "Thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: If you will surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then your life shall be spared, and this city shall not be burned with*

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*fire, and you and your house shall live.*  
(Jeremiah 38)

When King Zedekiah asked Jeremiah to seek the Lord's will, the prophet expressed his concern that if he spoke the word God had given him, he would put him to death. King Zedekiah promised that he would neither put him to death or hand him over to those who sought to kill him. With this assurance, Jeremiah held nothing back. He spoke clearly the words of God, telling Zedekiah that if he wanted to live, he needed to surrender to the enemy.

Jeremiah lived with tension in his heart. He wanted to live, but he also needed to be obedient to the Lord and preach the message God gave him. It was a lonely and challenging ministry, but God did not abandon the prophet in these times. He used King Zedekiah to rescue him from the prison he feared would be his end. He used Ebed-Melech to save him from certain death in an abandoned cistern. The God who called Jeremiah to this ministry, stood faithfully by his side as he walked in obedience and preached the truth.

For Consideration:

Have you ever been falsely accused? How powerful are the lies of the enemy?

What was it like for Jeremiah in prison in the house of Jonathan? What was it like for him in the cistern? Does God promise that our lives will be free of struggles? What have been your struggles in ministry and personal life?

## Chapter 24 - Fearing for His Life

How was the protection of God evident in the life of Jeremiah?

How easy is it for us to focus on the problems we face and not see the presence of God in those problems?

Consider how God gave Jeremiah the strength to do what he needed to do. Is this strength available to us today? Is there something God would have you do that you have resisted because you did not feel that you had the strength and courage necessary?

For Prayer:

Ask God to protect you from the false accusations of the enemy. Thank the Lord that He understands what it is like to be falsely accused.

Ask the Lord for the courage to obey even when that obedience makes life difficult for you.

Are you facing a trial right now? Ask the Lord to help you to see evidence of His presence in your struggle. Take a moment to thank Him for that presence.

## A Fiery Prophet and a People of Wood

Ask God to give you the courage to step out into the calling He has for your life, knowing that He who called is faithful to provide you with strength, skill and boldness to fulfil that calling.

## CHAPTER 25 - RETURNING TO EGYPT

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*19 The Lord has said to you, O remnant of Judah, 'Do not go to Egypt.' Know for a certainty that I have warned you this day 20 that you have gone astray at the cost of your lives. For you sent me to the Lord your God, saying, 'Pray for us to the Lord our God, and whatever the Lord our God says, declare to us and we will do it.' 21 And I have this day declared it to you, but you have not obeyed the voice of the Lord your God in anything that he sent me to tell you. 22 Now therefore know for a certainty that you shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence in the place where you desire to go to live." (Jeremiah 42)*

Jeremiah 39-46 is one of the saddest parts of the entire book. In these eight chapters, God pours out His wrath not once, but twice on His rebellious people.



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Jeremiah 39 recounts the story of the fall of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar attacked the city after cutting off its supplies. In its weakened condition, he had no problem capturing the city. King Zedekiah tried to flee but was captured and brought before Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar killed Zedekiah's sons as he watched, and then plucked out his eyes before binding him and taking him to Babylon (Jeremiah 39:4-7).

The enemy proceeded to break down the walls of Jerusalem, leaving it defenceless. Babylon burned the king's palace and many of the significant houses in the city (Jeremiah 39:8). They led Jerusalem's inhabitants away to Babylon. The only people remaining in the land were the poor and destitute—those Babylon did not need. Nebuchadnezzar chose Gedaliah, the grandson of Shaphan, as governor over this small remnant (Jeremiah 40:5). Jeremiah remained with the people among the ruins of Jerusalem.

The people who remained rallied around Gedaliah. The Jews, from neighbouring regions, came to Jerusalem to live under the leadership of this new governor (Jeremiah 40:11-12). The Lord blessed them under Gedaliah's leadership. We see evidence of this in Jeremiah 40:12.

*12 then all the Judeans returned from  
all the places to which they had been  
driven and came to the land of Judah,  
to Gedaliah at Mizpah. And they gathered  
wine and summer fruits in great  
abundance. (Jeremiah 40)*

Those who remained “gathered wine and summer fruit in great abundance.” Despite what had happened, the blessing of God was evident in the lives of these people.

## Chapter 25 - Returning to Egypt

Things seemed to be going well until a conspiracy against Gedaliah was uncovered.

*13 Now Johanan the son of Kareah and all the leaders of the forces in the open country came to Gedaliah at Mizpah 14 and said to him, "Do you know that Baalis the king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to take your life?" But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam would not believe them. (Jeremiah 40)*

For some reason, when Gedaliah was told of this conspiracy, he refused to accept it. Sometime later, however, the plot against the governor took place:

*1 In the seventh month, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama, of the royal family, one of the chief officers of the king, came with ten men to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, at Mizpah. As they ate bread together there at Mizpah, 2 Ishmael the son of Nethaniah and the ten men with him rose up and struck down Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, with the sword, and killed him, whom the king of Babylon had appointed governor in the land. 3 Ishmael also struck down all the Judeans who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah, and the Chaldean soldiers who happened to be there. (Jeremiah 41)*

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Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, came to Gedaliah and, as they ate together, rose up and killed the governor, the Judeans who were with him, along with some Babylonian soldiers present that day.

The assassination of their governor sent shock waves through the city. Fearing what Babylon would do when it heard of this event, the people approached Jeremiah, asking him to seek the will of the Lord for them in this situation. Jeremiah prayed and ten days later received a word from the Lord for the people.

*9 and said to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your plea for mercy before him: 10 If you will remain in this land, then I will build you up and not pull you down; I will plant you, and not pluck you up; for I relent of the disaster that I did to you. 11 Do not fear the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid. Do not fear him, declares the Lord, for I am with you, to save you and to deliver you from his hand. 12 I will grant you mercy, that he may have mercy on you and let you remain in your own land. 13 But if you say, 'We will not remain in this land,' disobeying the voice of the Lord your God 14 and saying, 'No, we will go to the land of Egypt, where we shall not see war or hear the sound of the trumpet or be hungry for bread, and we will dwell there,' 15 then hear the word of the Lord, O remnant of Judah. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: If you set your faces to enter*

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*Egypt and go to live there, 16 then the sword that you fear shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine of which you are afraid shall follow close after you to Egypt, and there you shall die. (Jeremiah 42)*

It was the will of the Lord that people remain in Judah. He promised to deliver them from the hand of Babylon. They were not to go to Egypt, seeking its protection. If they did, they would perish in Egypt. The sword they feared would follow them to Egypt.

The people did not like Jeremiah's message. Some accused him of lying:

*1 When Jeremiah finished speaking to all the people all these words of the Lord their God, with which the Lord their God had sent him to them, 2 Azariah the son of Hoshai and Johanan the son of Kareah and all the insolent men said to Jeremiah, "You are telling a lie. The Lord our God did not send you to say, 'Do not go to Egypt to live there,' (Jeremiah 43)*

Despite the warning of Jeremiah, under the leadership of Johanan, the people packed their bags and left for Egypt to seek its protection. That day they left the land God had given their forefathers and return to Egypt from which they had been delivered many years before.

In Egypt, the people of God lived in rebellion against the Lord. They began to worship the gods of Egypt and forgot

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the God of their fathers. Jeremiah warned them about this, but they would not listen to his words:

*15 Then all the men who knew that their wives had made offerings to other gods, and all the women who stood by, a great assembly, all the people who lived in Pathros in the land of Egypt, answered Jeremiah: 16 "As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not listen to you. 17 But we will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we did, both we and our fathers, our kings and our officials, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no disaster. (Jeremiah 44)*

The Jews living in Egypt openly rejected the words of the Lord through His servant Jeremiah— “we will not listen to you,” they said. The children of Israel turned from God to serve the gods of Egypt. They did not learn their lesson when Babylon captured Jerusalem, as Jeremiah had prophesied. Their hearts were hardened. They would no longer listen to His voice.

God told Jeremiah in Jeremiah 43:8-13 to take some large stones and bury them in mortar at the entrance to Pharaoh’s palace. Jeremiah prophesied that the king of Babylon would invade Egypt and burn the temple of the gods. He would set his throne upon the stones Jeremiah had buried. God’s rebellious children would either perish there

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in Egypt or be taken into captivity. Egypt would not save them.

Many years before these events, God had, through His servant Moses, delivered His people from the bondage of Egypt. He gave them a land of their own, blessed them as a people and made them great. Now in their disobedience, they had returned to Egypt where they would perish without a home and without hope.

What would it have been like for Jeremiah to see Judah emptied of its citizens? What would it have been like for him to see them abandon their God? This is how Jeremiah's ministry would end. He would walk down empty and charred streets in Jerusalem and realize that after preaching for forty years, this was what it came to. He would preach to those who willingly gave up everything God had promised to live in the land of their former captivity. He would watch them reject his message. We are not all called to "success," but like Jeremiah, we are called to obedience.

For Consideration:

What happened to Jerusalem under the judgement of God? Should we ever assume that God will not judge us for our actions?

What evidence was there of the blessing of God on the people who remained in Jerusalem?

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The people of God chose to rely on Egypt more than their God. What are we tempted to trust more than God in our day?

What was the response of the people of God living in Egypt to the message of Jeremiah?

What do we learn about the spiritual condition of the people of God in Egypt?

How does Jeremiah end his prophetic career? Would you be willing to obey God if you knew that your ministry would end like Jeremiah's? How important is success to you compared to obedience?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord that He does judge sin and rebellion. Pray that you would live your life in the reality of this judgement to come.

Ask God to forgive you for times when you have trusted in other things more than in Him.

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The people of God turned from the blessings and promises of God and abandoned the city of Jerusalem for Egypt. Ask God to give you grace not to surrender to the temptations and fears that come your way.

Ask God to help you to be obedient no matter the results. Ask Him to help you to be more focused on obedience than on “success.”





## CHAPTER 26 -

### SINK TO RISE NO MORE

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*60 Jeremiah wrote in a book all the disaster that should come upon Babylon, all these words that are written concerning Babylon. 61 And Jeremiah said to Seraiah: "When you come to Babylon, see that you read all these words, 62 and say, 'O Lord, you have said concerning this place that you will cut it off, so that nothing shall dwell in it, neither man nor beast, and it shall be desolate forever.' 63 When you finish reading this book, tie a stone to it and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates, 64 and say, 'Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more, because of the disaster that I am bringing upon her, and they shall become exhausted.'" (Jeremiah 51)*

As the book of Jeremiah ends, the prophet speaks the word of God about various nations. We have already heard the message he gave to Egypt about the coming of

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Babylon to destroy (Jeremiah 46). He spoke similar words to the Philistines (chapter 47), the Moabites (chapter 48), the Ammonites, Edomites, as well as the inhabitants of Damascus, Kedar, Hazor and Elam (chapter 49). All these nations were held accountable to God for their sins. Jeremiah's ministry was an international one expanding far beyond the borders of Israel and Judah.

While these nations did not have the opportunity to hear the word of the Lord as Judah did, they were still accountable to God. They would perish, though their citizens, for the most part, were ignorant of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jeremiah's words remind us that everyone is accountable to God and those who do not know Him are not excused because of ignorance.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord God shows us His missionary heart. His concern is not just for His people but also for people of all nations. God reaches out to these nations through Jeremiah to show them that they are accountable to Him.

Many people in the world do not have the opportunity to hear the word of the Lord? What will happen to these nations and people? Will they be spared from the wrath of God because they have never heard? What we see in Jeremiah indicates that they will have to answer to God. All nations are under the curse of sin, whether they understand it or not. All countries need to hear the call of God and the salvation that the God of Israel alone can provide. What a challenge this is to the church today! Men and women are perishing in ignorance of God's purpose. We must reach them with His word. Consider what the apostle Paul told the Romans:

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*14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? (Romans 10)*

In Jeremiah 50, the prophet has a word for the nation of Babylon. This nation could not claim ignorance of God. Babylon was the nation God used to execute His judgment against His people. Babylon, however, never did turn to the Lord. She used the strength and glory God had given for her personal goals. She did not recognize the God of Israel for His work among them. The Bible tells us that she became arrogant and proud. God spoke to this attitude in Jeremiah 50 when He said:

*31 "Behold, I am against you, O proud one, declares the Lord God of hosts, for your day has come, the time when I will punish you. 32 The proud one shall stumble and fall, with none to raise him up, and I will kindle a fire in his cities, and it will devour all that is around him. (Jeremiah 50)*

Even as Jeremiah spoke this prophecy, the Lord was raising up an alliance of nations to attack and destroy Babylon:

*9 For behold, I am stirring up and bringing against Babylon a gathering of great nations, from the north country. And they shall array themselves against her. From there she shall be taken. Their arrows are like a skilled*

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*warrior who does not return empty-handed. (Jeremiah 50)*

God would take vengeance on Babylon for what she had done to His people and His temple:

*28 "A voice! They flee and escape from the land of Babylon, to declare in Zion the vengeance of the Lord our God, vengeance for his temple. 29 "Summon archers against Babylon, all those who bend the bow. Encamp around her; let no one escape. Repay her according to her deeds; do to her according to all that she has done. For she has proudly defied the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. (Jeremiah 50)*

According to Jeremiah, Babylon's destruction would be so complete the beasts of the desert would dwell in her land, and she would be devoid of inhabitants:

*39 "Therefore wild beasts shall dwell with hyenas in Babylon, and ostriches shall dwell in her. She shall never again have people, nor be inhabited for all generations. 40 As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring cities, declares the Lord, so no man shall dwell there, and no son of man shall sojourn in her. (Jeremiah 50)*

To symbolize what would take place to Babylon, Jeremiah wrote his prophecy on a scroll and sent it to Babylon. It was brought to Babylon by Seraiah who read its content to

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the Babylonians. When he finished reading the words of the scroll, Seraiah tied a stone to the manuscript and cast it into the Euphrates River saying:

*Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more, because of the disaster that I am bringing upon her, and they shall become exhausted" (Jeremiah 51:64).*

Even as this stone took the scroll to the bottom of the river and kept it there, so the nation of Babylon would be dragged to the bottom and never rise again. God would avenge His people.

Everyone is accountable to God and in need of His forgiveness and salvation. People from every nation and religion must stand before the Judge and give an account to Him. Ignorance of His word is not an excuse. You can be guilty and not know it. Jeremiah announces to the pagan nation of Babylon that the day was coming when she would stand before her Creator. He proclaimed the same truth to the Philistines, the Edomites, the Moabites and the inhabitants of many different nations. God held every country accountable to live for Him as their Creator.

Jeremiah began his ministry as a timid youth, who told God that he did not know how to speak (Jeremiah 1:6). He ended his career challenging kings and nations to walk in the truth of God's word. The hand of God was on Jeremiah to protect and keep him. God did not permit him to take a wife or have a family. He suffered because of what he preached. He endured great hardship and ended his ministry with all who heard him rejecting his message. He may not have had crowds of people repenting and turning to God, but he was faithful even when things were difficult. His was a life lived in total devotion to the God who had called him. Though he left this world with little fruit to show

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for his forty years of service, I believe his reward will be great for what he did not have in fruit for his labours, he had in faithful obedience.

For Consideration:

Are those who do not know God, accountable to Him?

Why is it essential that we communicate the message of the gospel to all people?

Babylon lived in great wealth and prosperity for a time but would have to answer to God for its actions? How do success and ease give us a false sense of security?

What is the difference between seeing results for our labour and being faithful? Can we be faithful and see little results?

For Prayer:

Take a moment to pray for those who share the good news of the gospel with foreign nations. Ask God to bless their efforts.

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Ask God to help you to make obedience to Him your top priority in life.

Ask God to give you the faithfulness of Jeremiah even when you do not see fruit for your labours.

Ask God to show you how you can be His instrument to communicate His salvation to those who do not know.





## Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path Book Distribution (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement.

F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them freely or at cost price to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

These books are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books have now been translated into several languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

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