

Jeremiah

Back to Egypt

Lesson #12 for December 19, 2015

Scriptures: Jeremiah 40:7-16; 41-44; Exodus 16:3; Numbers 16:13.

1. With this lesson we come to the end of Jeremiah's prophecies and his life. What a saga it was. It was not a "happily ever after" kind of a story. Why do you think those people were so determined to rebel against God in virtually everything He said through Jeremiah? One thing seems clear: There was not much left that God could do for them. Only a very tiny faithful remnant who were scorned and rebuffed by the rest of the people of Judah seemed to care about God's messages.
2. So, what finally happened to Jeremiah? The "weeping prophet" had even more to weep about. It seemed that every time he warned about something, they were determined to do exactly what Jeremiah had warned against.
3. Could any of us be caught in that kind of scenario? God's grace is incredibly generous; but, it is never forced on anyone. God is incredibly gracious and forgiving; but, that does not give us permission to go on sinning! Those Jews seemed to think that if they had enough lambs to sacrifice, they could just keep on doing what they were doing, and God would keep on forgiving them. Does that sound like indulgences?
4. We pick up our story this week after the final destruction of Jerusalem when Jeremiah was taken along with others to the camp of Nebuchadnezzar for determination of what would happen to each of them. We do not know exactly how Nebuchadnezzar found out about Jeremiah and his work; but, he commanded Nebuzaradan, his commanding officer, to release Jeremiah. (Jeremiah 39:11-14)
5. Do you think that many of the remnant left in Judah had any information or knowledge of Jeremiah's prophecies? If so, don't you think the fact that everything he had predicted had come true would carry some weight?
6. Read Jeremiah 40:7-16. Some of the people from Judah had fled to surrounding countries. When they heard that Gedaliah had been chosen by Nebuchadnezzar to be in charge of the people who were left behind, many of them returned to Judah. Gedaliah was very generous in welcoming them. He invited them to settle in the land, to help themselves to whatever was available, and he said he would deal with the Babylonians when they came. As they spread out through Judah, they gathered large amounts of wine and fruit. (Jeremiah 40:12)
7. Read Jeremiah 41. Unfortunately, not everyone who returned was friendly. Ishmael and some of his friends under his control had come from Ammon, and they murdered Gedaliah and those associated with him. Johanan and another group went after Ishmael, but he escaped with a small group back to Ammon.
8. Since some Babylonian soldiers had been killed along with Gedaliah and his group, Johanan apparently thought that it was necessary for those that were left to flee to Egypt. They wanted to take Jeremiah with them. They hoped that by fleeing to Egypt, they would be beyond the reach of Babylon and would not be killed.
9. Unfortunately, what started out to be a fairly satisfactory solution to the terrible situation in Jerusalem turned worse with the bad behavior of Ishmael. Even the faithful were afraid to

remain in Judah.

10. How often do the righteous suffer because of the sins of others? Think about the experiences we have been studying in the life of Jeremiah. And what about Daniel? Job? Ezekiel? Joseph? Even Jesus? What about the faithful during the seven last plagues?
11. **Read Jeremiah 42.** How can you explain that kind of behavior? These verses seem to describe a genuine desire to know God's will and to follow it. And so, they went to Jeremiah and asked him to pray to God on their behalf. Read especially Jeremiah 42:5-6. They promised to follow God's directions even if it was not what they wanted to do.
12. Ten days later, the Lord spoke to Jeremiah. Jeremiah encouraged the people to remain in the land of Judah. They were told not to continue to be afraid of the king of Babylon. Then, Jeremiah gave a very serious warning against going to Egypt. Look at Jeremiah 42:18 (*GNB*). What does this tell us about God's wrath/anger/fury? God just let them go ahead and do what they were determined to do! Jeremiah said:

"The LORD, the God of Israel, says, 'Just as my anger and fury were poured out on the people of Jerusalem, so my fury will be poured out on you if you go to Egypt. You will be a horrifying sight; people will treat you with scorn and use your name as a curse. You will never see this place again.'"
13. Apparently, Jeremiah realized that they were determined to go to Egypt. Why would they want to go to Egypt? Did they think Nebuchadnezzar would never reach Egypt? Or, having lived through the siege, were they so afraid and terrorized by the Babylonians that they did not want to have anything to do with them in the future? Were they asking Jeremiah to bless them on their trip to Egypt?
14. Have any of us had the experience of receiving advice from God and directly defying it?
15. Do you think the people realized that Jeremiah was a true prophet of *Yahweh*? Did they have any reason to doubt *Yahweh*'s directions? Or, did they just not want to accept God's/Jeremiah's advice?
16. As we know, the people of Judah and even their kings almost universally decided against following the advice given them by Jeremiah. Why do you think they chose at different times to rely on foreign powers instead of relying on God? Did they have any evidence from their previous experiences back to the time of the exodus that God's advice was unreliable? Did they doubt that God was either willing or able to help them? How many prayers do you think had apparently gone unanswered during the siege of Jerusalem? (Jeremiah 7:4)
17. The children of Israel had been praying for hundreds of years to the God who had brought them out of Egypt. They regularly celebrated that release from slavery. Did they really want to go back to that?
18. Have we received any commands from God's modern prophet which might qualify to be like that one from Jeremiah? Do we make any real life-or-death choices on a regular basis? How could we know if a particular choice is a life-or-death choice? Does Satan want us to recognize that some of our choices are life-or-death choices?
19. Read Jeremiah 43:1-7. Imagine saying to a prophet of God, "You are lying!" To Christians in 2015, it seems almost unbelievable that they could have been so brazenly opposed to God's directions which had been given to them through Jeremiah. They even accused Baruch, Jeremiah's associate and secretary, of influencing Jeremiah to lie to them!

20. What factors influenced them to go back to Egypt? Was it just that Egypt was farther from Babylon and they thought that Nebuchadnezzar wouldn't get that far? What would you have done if you had been Jeremiah? For years, Jeremiah had been advocating for people to surrender to the Babylonians. So, why didn't he agree to go with the Babylonians? Did God tell him to stay with the "remnant" in Judah? Why did they insist on taking Jeremiah with them? Jeremiah was about 60 at that time?
21. How do we respond when God's Word or His commands seem to cut across our own desires or inclinations? Often, human beings faced with such a dilemma have expressed doubts about the divine origin of the messages. The Jews tried to show their doubt for Jeremiah; but, it seems clear that their minds had not really changed, only the circumstances had changed. Read Exodus 16:3 and Numbers 16:13. Even back in the wilderness, some of the children of Israel wanted to go back to Egypt! They thought the food back there was better! They were determined to do what they wanted to do!
22. How often do we make decisions based on emotional or passionate factors? Do we allow a "thus saith the Lord" to guide us in all our judgments? Do we make every thought captive in obedience to Christ? (2 Corinthians 10:5)
23. Read Jeremiah 43:8-13. Jeremiah was given a very strange command from God. He was told to get some large stones and bury them in the mortar of the pavement in front of the entrance to the government building in the city of Tahpenhas in Egypt. Then, he turned to his Israelite opponents and told them that Nebuchadnezzar, "God's servant," would come and defeat Egypt and set up his throne on those very stones. God even went on to say:

"12I will set fire to the temples of Egypt's gods, and the king of Babylonia will either burn their gods or carry them off. As shepherds pick their clothes clean of lice, so the king of Babylonia will pick the land of Egypt clean and then leave victorious. 13He will destroy the sacred stone monuments at Heliopolis in Egypt and will burn down the temples of the Egyptian gods."—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., Jeremiah 43:12-13). New York: American Bible Society.

24. Clearly, Jeremiah was telling them that Egypt would not protect them. Nebuchadnezzar was going to come. You would have thought that people who had suffered through 2½ years of siege by Nebuchadnezzar back in Judah would find that possibility galling. Somehow, those people thought that by going to Egypt, they would be protected. But, they had several examples of how their thinking about such things had been wrong in the past. (Jeremiah 7:4; 37:7-8) They were certain that God would never allow Solomon's Temple to be destroyed? Surely, they realized that the Egyptian gods were useless figments of warped imaginations, pagan abominations, etc. Did they really think that God did not understand them? Or, know what land they were in?

When self-denial becomes a part of our religion, we shall understand and do the will of God; for our eyes will be anointed with eye-salve so that we shall behold wonderful things out of his law. We shall see the path of obedience as the only path of safety. God holds his people responsible in proportion as the light of truth is brought to their understanding. The claims of his law are just and reasonable, and through the grace of Christ he expects us to fulfill his requirements.—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 25, 1890, par. 5.

25. Are we ever tempted to go back into the slavery of sin? Did they really believe that going

to Egypt would protect them from Babylon?

26. Their relocation to Egypt was not just a change in geography. Read Jeremiah 44:1-10. Jeremiah was telling them that God was at the point of letting them go because they were doing everything possible to war against Him.
27. And what was their attitude? What incredible answers did they give to Jeremiah who confronted them for their sins? Read **Jeremiah 44:15-19**. Why did they think that the Queen of Heaven had done anything for them? Was it just that they preferred the fertility cult ceremonies? Or, did the Devil have complete control of them? Apparently, they were saying that back in the days before Josiah's reform, they were burning incense to and worshiping the Queen of Heaven and they were visiting the fertility cult temples and pouring out drink offerings to her, and things were going pretty well. However, after the reforms of Josiah—which as we have noted in previous lessons came too late—all “hell” broke loose.
28. What did God through Jeremiah say to them in response? Read Jeremiah 44:20-30. It was exactly because of all the evil things they were doing that God could no longer work with them and could no longer help them. That was why they were in the mess they were. And finally, Jeremiah said that God had said:

“I will hand over King Hophra of Egypt to his enemies who want to kill him, just as I handed over King Zedekiah of Judah to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia, who was his enemy and wanted to kill him.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., Jeremiah 44:30). New York: American Bible Society.
29. So, how should we respond to those who are deep into their sins and still seem to be doing very well? What about the entertainers who are doing everything possible against God's directions and yet seem to be wildly successful—at least financially? The Devil is alive and well on planet earth! The Devil does not need to trouble people who are already on his side. All God can do without violating their freedom is to let them go!
30. The Bible has clearly spelled out the differences between good and evil. (Romans 7:7; Micah 6:8; Joshua 24:15; Matthew 22:37-39; Deuteronomy 12:8) Are there advantages to doing good even apart from God and religion? Sam Harris, a known atheist, wrote the following comment in his book called *The Moral Landscape*:

Consider what would happen if we discovered a cure for human evil. Imagine, for the sake of argument, that every relevant change in the human brain can be made cheaply, painlessly, and safely. The cure for psychopathy can be put directly into the food supply like vitamin D. Evil is now nothing more than a nutritional deficiency.—Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2010), Kindle Edition, p. 109.
31. That, of course, is complete nonsense because science cannot solve such problems. By contrast, Ellen White said: “With us, everything depends on how we accept the Lord's terms.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 118.1.
32. Is it a mistake to assume that salvation could come with no conditions? We need to recognize that conditions for salvation are not the same as works. We need to understand clearly the problems with two false teachings: 1) Salvation by works, otherwise known as legalism; and 2) Salvation as completely non-conditional, otherwise known as “cheap

grace.”

33. Are we clear on what the conditions for salvation are? God “cannot” admit to heaven anyone who will start the rebellion all over again. Those who are fully convinced of the rightness of God’s cause and the superiority of His government and realize that doing His will is always for our best good in the long term are welcome there.
34. How would you respond to an atheist who says he does not believe in Jesus or God or anything about religion; but, he believes his life is better than yours?
35. The cause of all the evil in the world is the Devil. If you are comfortably in his camp, why should he trouble you? But, if you are attempting to follow God, you are a great threat to him and he must do everything possible to pervert you or destroy you.
36. As we have seen, the final events in Jeremiah’s history and his life were full of murder, intrigue, and absolute rebellion against God. Going back to Egypt was not a new idea. See Jeremiah 2:18,36; 41:17-18; 42:13-18; and 46.
37. Do you think God encouraged Jeremiah to opt for staying in Judah so he could travel with these people to Egypt and continue to try to influence them to follow God? Do you think there were some in that group who remained faithful to God? Jeremiah had told them that everyone who went to Egypt would die as a result of war, famine, or disease. Why didn’t they believe him? How many do you think there were in that small remnant that finally went back to Judah?
38. Why is it so hard for human beings to learn from history? Would you agree with those who have said, “The one thing we learn from history is that we don’t learn from history”?
39. It is interesting to note that conservative Jews still commemorate the assassination of Gedaliah as recounted in our story for this week. It probably took place during the seventh month—which for the Jews is called Tishri—in 586 B.C.
40. Do you think that those Jews had become so accustomed to war, violence, and killing that the death of someone did not seem to matter much to them any more?
41. To some, the stories from so long ago seem remote and almost unreal. But, in recent times, clay bullae which were seal impressions made out of clay and hardened by heating in the fires that destroyed Jerusalem have come to light. The clay bullae shown at the end of this handout were impressions made by Baruch, Jeremiah’s scribe; by “Yehucal, son of Shelemiyahu, son of Shovi”; and by Gedaliah, son of Pashur. Seeing these tiny records produced by those biblical characters themselves injects a little bit of reality into the incredible stories we have studied.
42. In Jeremiah 42-45, we read the absolutely unbelievable story of what happened after the Babylonian conquest and destruction of Jerusalem. For those of us reading this story in 2015, it is incredibly sad. Nebuchadnezzar had tried repeatedly to set up leaders in Jerusalem with whom both he and the people could work. Every one of them either turned against him or was assassinated. If you had lived in the days of Jeremiah, would you trust anyone? On what basis would you trust someone?
43. If you are to survive until the time of Jacob’s trouble and have to stand “singly and alone,” on whom would you rely at that point?

And there are many in the church who take it for granted that they understand what they believe, but, until controversy arises, they do not know their own weakness. **When separated from those of like faith, and compelled to stand singly and alone to explain [40] their belief, they will**

be surprised to see how confused are their ideas of what they had accepted as truth. Certain it is that there has been among us a departure from the living God, and a turning to men, putting human wisdom in place of divine.—Ellen G. White, *5 Testimonies* 707.2 (1889); *GW* 298.3; *CWE* 39.3; *Mar* 45.2; *AG* 30.3; *LDE* 70.1. [Bold type is added.]

44. We do not know exactly what happened to Jeremiah. It is almost certain that he eventually died in Egypt. Let us hope that some of the authorities there treated him fairly. Also, we do not know exactly what happened to the people who were with him.
45. How often do we rebel against clear commands from God? Is it true that every time we sin, we are rebelling against God? Or, are most of our sins those of ignorance? Do any of us want to return to spiritual Egypt?

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Here are some pictures of the clay bullae of Baruch, Yahucal, and Gedaliah son of Pashur.

