

Jeremiah

More Woes for the Prophet

Lesson #5 for October 31, 2015

Scriptures: Jeremiah 18:1-10,18-23; 20; 23:14-15; Acts 2:37; Job 3.

1. In this lesson we will discuss some of the problems that Jeremiah experienced from the opposition and persecution that he received from his fellow Jews.
2 Timothy 3:12-13, GNB: Everyone who wants to live a godly life in union with Christ Jesus will be persecuted; ¹³ and evil persons and imposters will keep on going from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived themselves.
2. Have you ever suffered because of your Christian beliefs? If we are not being persecuted, is that an indication that we are not really Christians and/or not witnessing for the Lord as we should be? Because of the opposition he faced, Jeremiah became so discouraged that he wanted to die. He even went to the extent of wishing he had died in his mother's womb.
3. Should we expect to suffer persecution since we are in the middle of the great controversy? Should that be a part of the great controversy? If we understand the issues in the great controversy, does it make it easier for us to stand firm? Jeremiah lived more than 2500 years ago. How well can we understand the context in which he lived and worked? Is it a waste of time to try to understand what was happening to him?
4. Read Jeremiah 23:14-15; 5:26-31. God was willing to come to this earth and die to save all who would respond to His love. But, in these verses we read about prophets who were practicing adultery, lying, and were evil; and we also read about priests who were following those prophets commands. Evildoers were lying in wait, stealing, cheating orphans, even oppressing the poor; and no one objected. How would you describe the society in which you live today? Isn't a prophet supposed to be a spokesperson for God? Aren't the priests supposed to have the job of teaching others the truth about God? How could things have deteriorated so badly? In Jeremiah's day, false prophets claiming to be speaking for the Lord tried to contradict the messages that Jeremiah received from the Lord. (Jeremiah 28:1-4)
5. Why do you suppose all those evils developed in Judah? Didn't they have clear instructions from God on how to avoid all of those problems? What is incredible is that despite all this evil and despite the fact that they almost universally had turned against God, He continued to send messages that He was willing to forgive them, heal them, and even restore them to a right relationship with Himself. But, when people continue to refuse God's generous offers, what can God do? In order to respect their freedom, God must let them go.
6. As we know, the prophet's job is to give God's messages and not just to do the popular thing. Jeremiah was certainly not one whose guiding light was to be "politically correct"!
7. Consider the story of Noah and of other groups down through biblical history. Even in Revelation 12:17, God's final faithful people are called a remnant. Does that suggest that the faithful people of God are always in the minority?
8. Read Jeremiah 20:1-6. Why would a priest in charge of the temple want to have Jeremiah

beaten and put in stocks? Look at the warnings that God gave them through Jeremiah in the previous chapter.

Jeremiah 19:4-9: I am going to do this because the people have abandoned me and defiled this place by offering sacrifices here to other gods—gods that neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah have known anything about. They have filled this place with the blood of innocent people, ⁵and they have built altars for Baal *in order to burn their children in the fire as sacrifices*. . . ⁹The enemy will surround the city and try to kill its people. The siege will be so terrible that the people inside the city will eat one another and even their own children.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., Jeremiah 19:4-9). New York: American Bible Society. [Italic type is added.]

9. Pashhur, the priest who persecuted Jeremiah, did not like what Jeremiah had to say. So, he set about punishing God's messenger. We can assume that he tried to follow God's direction by having Jeremiah beaten and put in stocks as if he were guilty. (See Deuteronomy 25:1-3.) After being released from the stocks, Jeremiah announced a God-given message against Pashhur and his family as recorded in Jeremiah 20:3-6. How do you think you would have responded after receiving such a message? How should we respond when we receive a message of discipline from the Lord? See Acts 2:37. Look at how people responded following Peter's sermon at Pentecost. The people asked, "What should we do?"
10. Despite the fact that Pashhur was so unfair to Jeremiah and then had that very serious prophecy directed at him, we need to read Nehemiah 7:41. Apparently, a large number of Pashhur's descendants were still faithful to God and came back to help rebuild Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity.
11. We need to make note of something that makes the book of Jeremiah more difficult to understand. It is not chronological. Why do you suppose that happened? Was this arrangement intentional? Or, accidental? What happened to Jeremiah's first copy of his messages from God? (See Jeremiah 36:23.) The book of Jeremiah was burned and destroyed (Jeremiah 36:20-26) and then rewritten as Jeremiah remembered parts of it. (Jeremiah 36:32)

If the book of Jeremiah were organized chronologically and compared with the reigns of the kings of Judah, it would look something like this:

Manasseh (696/695-642 B.C.): Jeremiah born about 645 B.C.

Amon (642–640 B.C.): Jeremiah still a child.

Josiah (640-609 B.C.): *Jeremiah 1-6; 14-16.*

Jehoahaz (609 B.C.): Reigned only three months.

Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.): *Jeremiah 17; 7-11; 26; 35; 22:1-19; 25; 18-20; 36:1-4; 45; 36:5-32; 12.*

Jehoiachin (598-597 B.C.): *Jeremiah 22:20-30; 13; 23.*

Zedekiah (597-586 B.C.): *Jeremiah 24; 29-31; 46-51; 27; 28; 21; 34; 32; 33; 37-39.*

After the fall of Jerusalem: *Jeremiah 40-44; 52.*

Jeremiah Died: Sometime around 580 B.C. (Adapted from
SDA Bible Dictionary)

12. Adding to the problem [of the lack of chronologic order of the book of Jeremiah] is the fact that **the Septuagint [LXX] leaves out one-eighth of the book and places the prophecies against the nations (Jer. 46-51) after Jer. 25:13.** No one has been able to give an adequate solution to the problems of chronology. (*Believer's Study Bible*) [Content in brackets and bold type are added.]
13. Nevertheless, we must remember that these words were not the words of Jeremiah as a human being but rather they were the words of God given to His human agent, Jeremiah.
14. But, how do you explain the words in Jeremiah 20:7-14? Do you think those words were given to him by God? Or, was Jeremiah crying out as almost any human being would have from the way he was being treated? His life had become a nightmare. He was ready to curse the day he was born. Are those words truthful? Do they sound even blasphemous?
15. So, why didn't Jeremiah just keep quiet? Read Jeremiah 20:9. What was Jeremiah trying to tell us? What does it mean to say that God's word is like a fire burning in one's bones? Compare Amos 3:8 and 1 Corinthians 9:16. Have you ever felt like you were in the middle of the great controversy? Are we like Job? Or, Jeremiah?
16. It is important to note that even harsh critics of the Bible have to concede one important point: The Bible does not gloss over the human foibles of its most famous characters. There are almost no biblical heroes whose faults are not exposed in the Bible. Does God allow us to cry out in pain and distress when we are troubled? God certainly recognizes that we are all sin-damaged creatures. Consider the following words from Ellen White.

I have no merit or goodness whereby I may claim salvation, but I present before God the all-atoning blood of the spotless Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is my only plea. The name of Jesus gives me access to the Father. His ear, His heart, is open to my faintest pleading, and He supplies my deepest necessities.—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 106.0; *FLB* 102.3; *OFC* 289.4; *RC* 75.4; *Signs of the Times*, July 4, 1892, par. 3.
17. Read Jeremiah 20:14-18. Why do you think God allowed Jeremiah's cries of pain to be included in Scripture? Why would someone want to have died before he was born? Was Jeremiah expressing his depression?
18. At times, we may understand some of the issues in the great controversy. We may intellectually know how God wants us to respond to our circumstances. But, He is very sympathetic to our humanity if we do not always do what we know we should.
19. Do you think the day is coming when all God's people will have Jeremiah-like and Job-like experiences?

Jeremiah 18:1-12: The LORD said to me, ²“Go down to the potter's house, where I will give you my message.” ³So I went there and saw the potter working at his wheel. ⁴Whenever a piece of pottery turned out imperfect, he would take the clay and make it into something else.

⁵ Then the LORD said to me, ⁶“Haven't I the right to do with you people of

Israel what the potter did with the clay? You are in my hands just like clay in the potter's hands. ⁷If at any time I say that I am going to uproot, break down, or destroy any nation or kingdom, ⁸but then that nation turns from its evil, I will not do what I said I would. ⁹On the other hand, if I say that I am going to plant or build up any nation or kingdom, ¹⁰but then that nation disobeys me and does evil, I will not do what I said I would. ¹¹Now then, tell the people of Judah and of Jerusalem that I am making plans against them and getting ready to punish them. Tell them to stop living sinful lives—to change their ways and the things they are doing. ¹²They will answer, 'No, why should we? We will all be just as stubborn and evil as we want to be.'"—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., Jeremiah 18:1–12). New York: American Bible Society.

20. What very important principle of Bible interpretation can we gain from these verses? Clearly, God was suggesting to Jeremiah that His prophecies are at least sometimes conditional. If and when people change their ways, God changes the way He deals with them. We learned in an earlier lesson that when Josiah turned back to God and tried to correct the evils of his father and grandfather, God was pleased with him and assured him that he would not see the evils coming upon the people of Judah. God is always willing to forgive the sins of those who turn back to Him. What about Jonah's message to Nineveh?
21. Was the prophecy discussed above in Items #9 and #10 against Pashhur and his descendants a conditional prophecy?
22. How can we know when a prophecy is conditional or not? Is the second coming of Christ conditional?
23. Read Jeremiah 18:18-23. Once again, Jeremiah was crying out. Why do you think the people of Judah in Jeremiah's day objected so strongly to his messages? How good are we at deceiving ourselves? Why do people believe what they want to believe instead of believing the truth supported by the evidence? Are we ever guilty of doing that?
24. There is much evidence in Scripture suggesting that false prophets and false messiahs will come, especially at the end of time. (Matthew 24:3-4,11,23-24; Deuteronomy 13:1-3; Revelation 13:3-4,7-8) In light of such warnings, how can we know for sure which messages come from the Lord and which messages are not from the Lord?
25. Read Jeremiah 18:11-17. How do you understand verses 11 and 12?

The Lord then tells what He will do because of their disobedience. This is one of many places in the Bible that show that God's foreknowledge of our free choices in no way infringes upon those free choices. After all, why would the Lord have pleaded with them to turn from their evil if they didn't have the freedom to obey or disobey Him? Then, too, why would He punish them for not obeying if they didn't have the freedom to obey? What's clear is that the Lord knew exactly what their free choices would be even before they made them. This crucial truth is also seen, for instance, in Deuteronomy 31:16-21. Even before the children of Israel enter the Promised Land, the Lord tells Moses that He knows they will "turn to other gods and worship them" (*Deut. 31:20, NIV*). Here is more evidence that God's foreknowledge of our choices does not impinge on the freedom we have to make those choices. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Friday, October 30.)

Deuteronomy 31:16-18: The LORD said to Moses, “You will soon die, and after your death the people will become unfaithful to me and break the covenant that I made with them. They will abandon me and worship the pagan gods of the land they are about to enter. ¹⁷When that happens, I will become angry with them; I will abandon them, and they will be destroyed. Many terrible disasters will come upon them, and then they will realize that these things are happening to them because I, their God, am no longer with them. ¹⁸And I will refuse to help them then, because they have done evil and worshiped other gods.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., Deuteronomy 31:16–18). New York: American Bible Society.

26. Have you ever felt like there was a fire burning in your bones? Have you ever felt compelled to speak out on God’s behalf?
27. How can we, with the help of the Holy Spirit, form within ourselves a foundation based on Scripture that is so solid that we cannot be deceived? (Matthew 24:24-25) In light of the great controversy, could you explain to a fellow Christian who is going through a time of terrible suffering why such things happen? Or, do you think that we are simply chess figures being moved around on a board, either by God or Satan?
28. The Christian church has a long history of being persecuted. In A.D. 197, Tertullian wrote a message he called the *Apologeticum*. In that message he said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Do you think that might be true? If so, why? Those who remain faithful during a time of persecution do so because they have a serious conviction.
29. Read Jeremiah 20:7-9. Would it ever be correct to say that God has deceived us? How do you explain this complaint from Jeremiah against God? Have you ever felt like it was impossible to keep quiet?
30. On April 18, 1521, Martin Luther was standing trial before Emperor Charles V at the Imperial Diet of Worms in what today is Germany. He was being commanded to recant his writings. While we do not know for sure that he said at the time of his trial those famous words: “Here I stand. I can do no other,” we do know that he said this near the end of his speech:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason—for I can believe neither pope nor councils alone, as it is clear that they have erred repeatedly and contradicted themselves—I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one’s conscience is neither safe nor sound. God help me. Amen.—Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 39.

31. Is this not a statement of someone who has a fire burning in his bones?
32. How would you compare the troubles Jeremiah was going through as discussed in this lesson with those of Job? Of course, Jeremiah was told by God that He would be with him but that he would suffer that kind of persecution. Apparently, at the time, Job did not know anything about why those things were happening to him.
33. So, when trials come upon us, is it all right to cry out against the evil that may be affecting us at that moment? What did Jesus do on the cross? (Matthew 27:46)

34. Many of our Christian friends who believe in the supreme sovereignty of God do not accept the idea that something that we might do here on planet earth could affect God in any way. According to their theology, He is so far above us that nothing we can do could affect Him in any way. Does your understanding of the books of Job and Jeremiah agree with that idea? What about Luke 15:7,10?
35. Can you name any other prophet who seemed to feel like he was at the end of his rope? What about Elijah at Mount Horeb? (See 1 Kings 18 and 19.)
36. Read Jeremiah 18:1-23. What is your understanding of this passage? Are we no more than clay in God's hands? Or, when we mess things up, does God do everything possible to try to help us get back to the right shape or on the right track? (See Romans 8:28, *GNB*.)
37. We know that there are a number of prophecies in the Old Testament that were never fulfilled in the way God wanted to fulfill them. Consider for example Ezekiel 40-48 regarding the "Future Temple." Is that a good example of the idea of a conditional prophecy?
38. Do you find that true Christianity is a popular idea among those who live around you? Or, has Christianity become despised? Is there anything we can do individually to help our neighbors and friends have a more positive attitude toward God? Toward our church? And even toward us?

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