

Jeremiah

Jeremiah's Yoke

Lesson #9 for November 28, 2015

Scriptures: Jeremiah 16:1-13; 27:1-18; 28; Hosea 1:1-3; Daniel 4:25; 2 Timothy 4:3-4.

1. In this lesson we will see that Jeremiah not only gave messages from God to various individuals, including the king, but also he often had to live out object lessons to illustrate what he had to say. Will the day come when we might have to do something similar? (Luke 9:23) What does it mean to “carry your cross”? Could that ever be literal in any sense?
2. While he was still a young man, Jeremiah was told that he must not marry or have children. He was not to participate in either ceremonies for mourning or celebration feasts. His life was to be a stark and lonely parable. Was Jeremiah's life supposed to be a metaphor?
3. Read Jeremiah 16:1-13. If you were a young person looking forward to a happy life with a wife and children, how would you feel about that message? Compare Hosea 1:1-3. Hosea was asked to marry a prostitute who turned back to her old ways after being married to him. That was clearly to illustrate the spiritual prostitution that had come over the nation of Israel. But, Jeremiah was asked to live a very strict, celibate life which was very rare, even extreme, for that time and culture. At that time when passing along one's name and property to one's children was considered to be very important, why did God ask Jeremiah not to marry? Think about Jeremiah's situation. Compare the story of Abraham.
4. Instead of building that sanctuary-tabernacle-tent in the wilderness in which only the priests were allowed to go in, why didn't God build a set of classrooms for the education of the people? They did not even have a place to gather for “church.”
5. Would it be more painful to remain single? Or, to marry and have children and then see something terrible happen to them? Or, perhaps, even not be able to care for them. Remember that Jeremiah lived through the siege of Jerusalem when for nearly three years they were surrounded by the troops from Babylon, and things became so desperate that people were eating their own dead children. (Jeremiah 19:9; Lamentations 2:20)
6. **Jeremiah 16:3-4:** ³I will tell you what is going to happen to the children who are born here and to their parents. ⁴They will die of terrible diseases, and no one will mourn for them or bury them. Their bodies will lie like piles of manure on the ground. They will be killed in war or die of starvation, and their bodies will be food for the birds and the wild animals.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., Jeremiah 16:3-4). New York: American Bible Society.
7. Would it be fair to bring children into this world under those circumstances? And since there was no birth control, marriage almost inevitably led to having children. Wouldn't you love to give the message of Jeremiah 16 to your family?
8. Perhaps, Jeremiah's solitary life was also supposed to warn the children of Israel of the difficult times that were coming when they would lose so much not only materially but also family and friends, etc. Jeremiah had only the Lord to depend upon. Then again, isn't the Lord the only One who is utterly reliable? We can always count on Him.
9. Read Jeremiah 27:1-18. While the people of Judah were aware of the looming presence of the Babylonian troops, how difficult would it be to sell a message like Jeremiah's? Who

wants to hear that he is going into slavery or having to be forcibly removed from his home and probably to lose all his family, property, possessions, etc.?

As a faithful and true prophet of *YAHWEH*, Jeremiah often stood alone among the religious leaders of his day and his countrymen (e.g., Jer. 26:8-9; 27:16-18), and even among his family and in the city of his birth (Jer. 11:21; 12:6). His life truly exemplified the statement of Jesus, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house" (Matt. 13:57).
(*Believer's Study Bible*)

10. Read Jeremiah 27:2. In one of the more incredible stories in this lesson, Jeremiah was asked to actually make a yoke out of wood with leather straps and put it on his own neck in order to give his message to either the kings or their ambassadors from surrounding nations who had come to meet the new king, Zedekiah. The wording of the text is a little confusing; it is possible that Jeremiah was asked even to make yokes for all the ambassadors or the kings themselves!
11. What was the meaning of the yoke that Jeremiah wore? Read Deuteronomy 28:48 and 1 Kings 12:4. In those verses, such a yoke was regarded as an expression of oppression. Jeremiah was trying to represent what was going to happen to the people of Judah in Babylonian captivity. The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* suggests that Jeremiah's yoke was 1 ½ meters (almost 5 feet) long and 8 centimeters (3 inches) thick.
12. Try to imagine yourself approaching the king and his very honored guests—some of them perhaps kings themselves—wearing a yoke and telling them that soon they would be doing the same! Remember that Jeremiah was living in a time when it was not uncommon for a king to order anyone bringing unwelcome news to be killed on the spot!
13. It is quite likely that in addition to coming and welcoming the new king, Zedekiah, to the throne, those kings or their representatives were also plotting rebellion against Babylon. Read Jeremiah 27:5 and Daniel 4:25. Jeremiah wanted to make it very clear even to those pagan rulers that God, the God of the Jews, was in ultimate control of everything. He made things in the beginning, and He can give that control to anyone He chooses. God is trying to tell us that even in the very difficult circumstance of being overrun by a foreign power and dragged off into captivity, He was still in control. Would that give you some hope for the future? Could God really have done something? While still maintaining freedom?
14. Does it give you hope to know that God is completely Sovereign? Many of our Christian friends think that God is so far above us that nothing that we can do will affect Him in any way. The Bible clearly says that is not the case. Luke 15:7 says that all heaven is affected by what we do.

⁷In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., Luke 15:7). New York: American Bible Society.

15. How many of us have been forced into situations which were very uncomfortable for us? Have any of us forced other people into similar circumstances?
16. Jeremiah approached those high level officials at the palace.

The amazement of the assembled council of nations knew no bounds when Jeremiah, carrying the yoke of subjection about his neck, made known to

them the will of God.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 444.1.

17. Read Jeremiah 28:1-9 and Deuteronomy 18:21-22. Try to place yourself in Jeremiah's situation or even to be just an observer in that situation. How often do we believe what we want to believe as opposed to what the evidence really shows? Are we willing to follow the evidence wherever it leads? How do you know who to believe? What about Deuteronomy 13:1-3?

Jeremiah, in the presence of the priests and people, earnestly entreated them to submit to the king of Babylon for the time the Lord had specified. He cited the men of Judah to the prophecies of Hosea, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and others whose messages of reproof and warning had been similar to his own. He referred them to events which had taken place in fulfillment of prophecies of retribution for unrepented sin. In the past the judgments of God had been visited upon the impenitent in exact fulfillment of His purpose as revealed through His messengers.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 445.1.

18. It turned out Jeremiah was not the only one there claiming to speak for God. Unfortunately, Jeremiah's speech was followed by a speech from Hananiah, a false prophet, who directly contradicted Jeremiah's message. And Hananiah's denial message was much more welcome to the ears of the listeners than was Jeremiah's.
19. Read Jeremiah 28:10-11. How did Hananiah respond to Jeremiah's visual prophecy? Hananiah took the yoke off Jeremiah's neck and broke it into pieces. He claimed to be speaking for God and assured the people that this was how the Lord would break the yoke that King Nebuchadnezzar had put on the necks of the nations, and He would do it within two years. So, how should we decide who is telling us the truth? Will the time come in the future when there will once again be false prophets and false Messiah's? (Matthew 24:3-4, 11, 23-24) What about Revelation 1:7?
20. Is it ever easy to accept an unwelcome truth? Will it be easy for those who have to live through the final days of this earth's history?
21. If you had been Jeremiah, how would you have responded? Jeremiah realized that right at that point, there was not much more he could say or do. So, he quietly left.
22. Read Jeremiah 28:12-14. So, what was the sequel to that story?

¹² Some time after this the LORD told me ¹³to go and say to Hananiah: "The LORD has said that you may be able to break a wooden yoke, but he will replace it with an iron yoke. ¹⁴The LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, has said that he will put an iron yoke on all these nations and that they will serve King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia. The LORD has said that he will make even the wild animals serve Nebuchadnezzar."—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation* (2nd ed., Jeremiah 28:12–14). New York: American Bible Society.

23. Jeremiah's wooden yoke was broken in pieces by Hananiah. But, God said He would replace it with an iron one. It would be virtually impossible to break an iron yoke.
24. Was that a message of revenge from Jeremiah? Or, was Jeremiah trying to make it even more clear that rebellion against God would result in even more serious consequences?
25. How many of us have learned the hard way the problems connected with being obstinate? Is it difficult to submit to the Lord? Shouldn't we recognize that God's ways are always the

best ways even though we might not like them at the time? Read Jeremiah 28:15-17. What was the result of this exchange between Hananiah and Jeremiah? Jeremiah stated bluntly to all those gathered there that Hananiah was trying to make them believe a lie. And Jeremiah prophesied that before that year was over, Hananiah would be dead; and, in fact, Hananiah died in the seventh month. But, unfortunately, Hananiah's message had had its evil effects. They wanted to believe what Hananiah said. So, instead of preparing themselves, submitting to Jehovah's counsel, and surrendering to Babylon, they resisted to the point that Zedekiah was forced to watch as all his high officials and his family were murdered and then his eyes were gouged out. He died a short time later after being taken to Babylon as a blind man. How would you like to walk hundreds of miles right after having your eyes gouged out?

26. What lessons should we learn from reading Jeremiah 28:15? Compare 2 Timothy 4:3-4 and 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12. The great controversy is all about who is telling us the truth—God or Satan. Anything that deviates from the truth is a lie. As recorded in John 14:6, Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Satan will try in every way possible especially at the end of this world's history to imitate Jesus's manner of coming, His way of speaking, His ability to perform miracles, etc., in order to deceive, if possible, the very elect. (Matthew 24:23-24)
27. What lies perpetrated by Satan himself are commonly believed in the world today? Are some of Satan's lies believed even among Christians? What about the immortality of the soul? Ever-burning hell? The validity of praying to saints? That God is arbitrary, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe? Our only safety is in carefully studying God's Word.
28. Most of our Christian friends who accept the Bible believe that the millennium discussed in Revelation 20 will be a golden time when Jesus will come to this earth and reign in peace. Does it seem to you that we are moving in that direction? Or, are we, as suggested by a number of passages in the Bible, moving toward a time of trouble, plagues, devastation, and destruction just prior to the return of Jesus Christ? Is this another of Satan's lies?
29. Satan's original weapon was deception, and he used it on the angels in heaven. He has become exceedingly adept at using it. The only way to detect a counterfeit is to know, understand, and recognize the truth clearly and precisely.
30. One of Jeremiah's important points in countering Hananiah's lies was to point out that a number of previous prophets had given messages similar to the one Jeremiah was giving at that time. Compare the following message from Ellen White for us.

We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.—Ellen G. White, *General Conference Bulletin*, January 29, 1893 par. 5; February 20, 1899 par. 16; *RH*, October 12, 1905 par. 22; *Life Sketches* 196.2; *CET* 204.1; *TM* 31.1; *3SM* 162.3; *LDE* 72.1; *YRP* 229.4.

31. Many experts have said, "The only thing we learn from history is that we don't learn from history!" What does that mean to us? A careful study of our history makes it very clear that our problem is not the Lord's leading; but rather, it is our lack of following! And even our poor memories of God's leading in the past!
32. Maybe the greatest threat to Christians is a common idea that God will somehow grade on the curve. It is easy for us to look around and feel comfortable because we think we are just about as good as others. Does that make us savable?

33. Why do people reject the truth? We reject some messages because we do not want to believe they are true. We reject other messages because they do not fit with our current paradigm or way of thinking. How should we deal with each of these serious issues? Can we be certain that our picture of God and His will is the correct one? If so, how?
34. In our day, will there come a time when even our family relationships might be affected by our relationship with Christ? Read Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 12:51-53; and Luke 14:25-27. How would you respond to a request by Jesus Himself to carry a cross? How many of us are carrying crosses today?
35. When speaking to a friend or acquaintance who is not a Seventh-day Adventist, do we try to sugarcoat our message to make it sound better? Is that a good idea? Doesn't God want us to make the message as attractive as possible? Is that different from sugarcoating our message?
36. As we have seen in this lesson, Jeremiah's life was his message, and his message was his life. He had to illustrate what he had to say in some very unusual and even painful ways.
37. James and Ellen White had four sons. One died in infancy; another one died at the age of 16. Because of their work for God, they had to leave the care of their children in the hands of others for much of their early lives. Do you think you could do something like that? Do you think God expected them to do that? What sacrifices is God asking you to make in serving Him? Has God ever asked you to step out of your comfort zone?
38. How many of us have heard sermons from our own pastors or perhaps someone on the television or a video that sounded a little bit like preaching to "itching ears"? When a pastor speaks very bluntly and plainly—assuming he is speaking the truth—do we appreciate that? Or, does that make us really uncomfortable?
39. When he first began his ministry as recorded in Jeremiah 1:5, Jeremiah was told that he would be a prophet to the nations. His wooden-yoke prophecy was given to three different audiences at different times. First, it was given to Jehoiakim somewhere between 609 and 605 B.C., just before the first conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar; then it was given again to Zedekiah some time around 594 B.C.; and finally, it was given to the kings or possibly their representatives from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon. These nations surrounding Judah all tended to be hostile, and none of them wanted to hear or even to think of the idea that they might be conquered by Babylon. But, they all were.
40. Jeremiah's message was simple and straightforward: Serve the king of Babylon as God tells you to, and you will live, and your country and your city will be preserved. (Jeremiah 27:11-12,17) He said that even the nations would be preserved, and their farmers would be able to continue farming their properties. Jeremiah begged each of his audiences not to be deceived by false prophets. (Jeremiah 27:9,14,16)
41. Zedekiah was the last king to serve Judah, and he did so during that terrible siege. As things got worse and worse, Zedekiah called Jeremiah secretly to hear what God might have to say to him. Look at these words from Ellen White describing what happened.

There was still opportunity for the king to reveal a willingness to heed the warnings of Jehovah, and thus to temper with mercy the judgments even now falling on city and nation. "If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes," was the message given the king, "then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with [457] fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house: but if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall

this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand.” [Jeremiah 38:16-18]—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* 456.3.

The king was even too weak to be willing that his courtiers and people should know that he had held a conference with Jeremiah, so fully had the fear of man taken possession of his soul. If Zedekiah had stood up bravely and declared that he believed the words of the prophet, already half fulfilled, what desolation might have been averted! He should have said, I will obey the Lord, and save the city from utter ruin. I dare not disregard the commands of God because of the fear or favor of man. I love the truth, I hate sin, and I will follow the counsel of the Mighty One of Israel.

Then the people would have respected his courageous spirit, and those who were wavering between faith and unbelief would have taken a firm stand for the right. The very fearlessness and justice of this course would have inspired his subjects with admiration and loyalty. **He would have had ample support, and Judah would have been spared the untold woe of carnage and famine and fire.**—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* 458.1-2. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

42. When people see a looming threat, it is so much easier and more natural to try to fight against it.
43. At the time when Hananiah predicted falsely that Babylon would collapse within two years and the items from the temple and the people that had been taken to Babylon would be returned, Nebuchadnezzar was quenching an internal revolt at home; it might have seemed like there was a possibility that he would not return to Jerusalem.
44. Jeremiah, of course, would have loved it if Hananiah’s prophecy could have been true. But, he knew it would not.
45. Hananiah had spoken using the same prophetic phrases that Jeremiah had used. His message sounded authentic and was much more appealing to his audience. So, how do we differentiate between true messages and false messages when they sound so much alike? When Hananiah finished, Jeremiah just kept quiet. When should we speak up for God? When is it better to keep quiet? Does it help to speak up on behalf of your Christian beliefs at a time or place when you are quite certain that anything you say will be made fun of? Or, despised? Have you ever had such an experience?

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