

Lesson 4, "Writings and Warnings": As I prepared for this lecture I considered the family of Josiah to be much like mine, and perhaps many of yours, where there is a change in the leadership of a family and the problems that arise out of those shifts and changes.

Godly King Josiah died at the battle of Megiddo after ruling the people of Judah for over 30 years. This caused a shift in the leadership of the people of Judah involving three of Josiah's sons and one of his grandsons. Unfortunately, the sons and grandson of Josiah were not godly men and were evil in God's eyes. External powers were also at play during this time. Threats from Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt presented a driving force in the succession of Judah's kings, as well as affecting the survival of Judah and Jerusalem.

Understanding that God has a plan and that He is always in control seems to me a theme of all of our studies of the Bible. The key is when and how each person or believer comes to accept that and chooses to obey God's commands. It seems to me a simple lesson of choosing to listen and obey or accepting the outcome of your own rebellion. God blesses our obedience and He brings justice on our rebellion. That understanding seems to take knowledge, wisdom and time. Some of us a bit more time than others.

I've shared before that my husband and I have two grown sons. The older son is married and now lives in Dallas. Last year about this time he wanted to come here for a weekend visit. He was having a struggle and he wanted to talk it out with mom. Those of you with adult sons understand how special that desire in a son can be because boys are not usually talkers. For 3 days that young man talked and I listened. Afterwards I felt exhausted, but I was very glad to be available for him.

One morning we sat at my kitchen window and watched the tree outside. I have a bird feeder hanging from that tree in my yard. My son noticed a hawk perched in a tall eucalyptus tree nearby. I commented that I bet that hawk was watching that bird feeder. As soon as I spoke those words that hawk spread his wings and did, indeed, swoop my back yard over that bird feeder. It happened so fast and was so dramatic that my son was startled. He said, "Wow Mom, you totally called that!"

My son thought his mom was pretty smart predicting what that hawk would do. We jokingly referred to it as "the lesson of the hawk". It feels pretty good when your child seeks your advice and actually listens to you.

Today our son and his wife are new parents of a 10 week old son. He's the cutest little thing and looks like a "mini-me" with his daddy. My husband and I were in Dallas recently to visit. I have a cousin and her family who also live there. The kids planned a potluck family dinner during our visit so we could see everyone, and they could meet the new baby. My cousin has two young grandsons as well.

About an hour before they arrived, I asked my son and daughter in law, "Is there anything in your house you feel needs to be put away before the guests arrive? Are you ready for a one year old and a 2 and half year old to be here?" They didn't understand what I meant and thought everything was just fine. They had no clue what I was warning them about.

Once the gang arrived it took only a few minutes with a walking one year old and a wild two and half year old for things to be frantically removed from reach and rooms to be shut off. You know what I mean, right? ... My son whispered in my ear, "We didn't understand what you meant Mom. Lesson of the hawk, right?"... I smiled. :-) I guess I felt a bit like a prophet in my own family, although I don't really want the responsibility of being one.

Jeremiah was known as "the weeping prophet" and his role with the people of Judah and Jerusalem was far more difficult than mine with my family. As my sons are growing into their adult lives, I may have more credibility with them ... praise God! But I do know how frustrating it feels when adult children refuse to listen and they struggle in their lives as a result. I don't claim to have all the answers for my boys, but ... Well; I think you know what I mean.

Lesson 4 is another example of the books of Jeremiah being taken out of order. Our lesson this week is arranged according to Jeremiah's message to each king who succeeded Josiah. First, Chapter 25 was delivered to King Jehoiakim in 605 BC, the same year Nebuchanezzar came to power in Babylon. Jeremiah's ministry began in 627 BC and he predicted the 70 years of captivity by Babylon a full 20 years before it began. Imagine preaching the same message for 23 years, only to be continually rejected! However, Jeremiah had been warned at the time of his calling that the people of Judah would oppose him.

Second, Chapter 36 was recorded in the 4th year of Jehoiakim and was a critical year in Judah's history as concern for the siege by Babylon was growing. It also marked the written record of the warning of the Lord to preserve the messages for future generations. The warning was simple actually, (*è*) *if the people will repent, the Lord will relent.*

Finally, Chapters 22 & 23 were Jeremiah's message where God passed judgment on King Jehoiakim and the short reign of his son Jehoiachin. When Jehoiachin was carried off captive to Egypt his uncle, Zedekiah, was made king of Judah. He reigned after Jehoiachin but died before him. This left Jehoiachin as the last king of David's line to sit on the throne of Judah.

As usual there are lessons for us in these writings and warnings, primarily that God wants our obedience to him because His plan is to restore his reunited people. Secondly, these warnings are intended for the people of Judah first, and for the Gentile nations as well, to hold them accountable. To that end, we are to be careful to listen to the true prophets and not the false prophets, and we need to know the difference between them. Finally, God promises the Messiah to be unlike any previous descendant of David, and to be the ideal King for His people.

Upon the death of King Josiah, his son Jehoahaz succeeded him for only three short months. His brother Jehoiakim was made king and ruled Judah for 11 years. Jeremiah was now at the midpoint of his career as prophet. When you consider the unsympathetic response of the people both to him and to his messages, you marvel that Jeremiah wasn't discouraged and ready to quit, but he continued to be faithful to his calling.

He delivered two messages - one to the Jews and one to the Gentile nations.

To the people of Judah he delivered a message of chastening with six points. (è x 6)

1. Four times Jeremiah pronounced the solemn indictment, "You have not listened". I'm sure that did not make him popular.

2. Jeremiah had preached to the leaders and common people of Judah for 23 years and had received the same response. As they disobeyed the law, worshipped idols, and rejected God's servants, the people deliberately provoked God to anger, and the day of His wrath was fast approaching.

3. Nebuchadnezzar wasn't a believer in the true God of Israel, but in his conquests he was accomplishing God's will. God's own people wouldn't obey the Lord when they had everything to gain, but pagan rulers like Pharaoh, Cyrus, and Nebuchadnezzar were servants of God to fulfill His purposes.

4. For the first time, Jeremiah shared the secret that the captivity in Babylon would last 70 years. One reason God determined a period of 70 years was that the land might enjoy the rest that the Jews had denied it. The law of the sabbatical year had been ignored for nearly 500 years.

5. God's command was that the nations submit to Babylon, including the animals.

6. The end of the 70 years would mean not only freedom for the Jewish remnant but also judgment for the Babylonian Empire because of the ruthless way they treated both Jews and Gentiles. It was one thing for Nebuchadnezzar to do God's work, but when his attitude became proud and hateful, he over-stepped his bounds. Babylon fell to the armies of the Medes and Persians in 539 BC.

We can take some lessons from the chastening of the people of Judah.

How many times have we failed to listen to God?

Have we disobeyed God's laws, worshipped idols, and rejected God's servants? Are we provoking God to anger?

Are we aware how God uses even non-believers to bring us into obedience with Him?

Have we kept our attitudes from becoming proud and hateful?

For the Gentile nations Jeremiah used eight vivid images to describe the judgment God would be sending. (è x 8)

1. *The cup of wrath* - A familiar image of suffering and judgment. Judgment begins with God's people, but it will extend to all people if they fail to obey Him. To drink a cup is a symbol of submission to the will of God.
2. *The roaring lion* - God will roar in judgment when He visits the nations. God had spoken in love to his people, but they refused to obey. Now he must speak in wrath. In the last days, the Lamb of God will become like the lion and pour out His wrath on a wicked world.
3. *The winepress* - This is another familiar metaphor for judgment.
4. *The lawsuit* - The Lord first brought charges against his own people for abandoning Him and turning to idols. In this 'trial' there would be a Judge but no jury, an indictment but no defense, and a sentence but no appeal. God had given his people plenty of opportunity to admit their guilt and repent, but they refused. Now it was too late.
5. *The storm* - Like a tornado Nebuchadnezzar's army would move from nation to nation and city to city and leave only devastation behind.
6. *The refuse* - Not to have a proper burial was a disgrace, for then the body was being treated like common rubbish.
7. *The broken pottery* - One day, Jesus Christ shall break the nations like so many clay pots. The Hebrew word translated "pleasant vessel" refers to fine pottery and not just common pots. God wants His vessels to be clean and yielded. If they aren't, He has the right to smash them.
8. *The slaughtered flock* - The shepherds were the leaders of the nation - kings and nobles, priests and false prophets - who had exploited God's flock and not compassionately cared for God's people. Now it was time for them to be slaughtered, and there would be no place for them to hide. Instead of hearing the cries of the sheep, the shepherds would hear their own wailing as they saw their pasture destroyed.

As we move to Chapter 36, it is the 4th year of King Jehoiakim, the year of the fateful Battle of Carchemish when Pharaoh Necho defeated King Josiah and made Judah a vassal (or subservient) to Egypt. Jehoiakim got his throne only because Egypt had deposed his brother Jehoahaz.

Jeremiah had been ministering for 23 years, and now God commanded him to write his messages in a scroll so they would be permanent and could be read by others. Note that his messages dealt with Israel, Judah, and all the nations, and when he wrote the 2nd scroll, he added other material.

The people in ancient times could neither read nor write, so those who could were extremely valuable. These scribes held positions of great importance and were very respected for their knowledge. Baruch was Jeremiah's scribe. Writing was often done on vellum or papyrus sheets that were sewn or glued together and stored in long rolls called scrolls. After the exile, scribes became teachers of the law. In New Testament times, the scribes formed a powerful political party.

Babylon was destroying city after city and closing in on Jerusalem. As the people came to the temple, Baruch told them how to avert the coming tragedy, but they refused to listen.

God told Jeremiah to write his words on a scroll. Because he was not allowed to go to the temple, Jeremiah asked his scribe Baruch, to whom he had dictated the scroll, to read it to the people gathered there. Baruch then read it to the officials, and finally Jehudi read it to the king himself. Although the king burned the scroll, he could not destroy the word of God.

Because God is in control, He is always able to protect His Word despite the will of man ... or kings. In Chapter 36 we see how God protects His Word, declares His Word, and preserves His Word.

1. God gives His Word through inspiration, that miraculous working of the Holy Spirit through a human writer so that what was written was the divine Word that God wanted recorded. God guided Jeremiah in his choice of words; Jeremiah spoke these words to his secretary Baruch; and Baruch wrote them down on the scroll.

2. God declares His Word once again using human instruments to proclaim His Word to the people. Since Jeremiah wasn't allowed to go to the temple, he sent Baruch in his place. Baruch waited for a day when there would be a good crowd in the temple. When a fast was proclaimed several months later, probably because of the Babylonian menace, he took advantage of it.

3. God is able to preserve His Word. Any king who thinks he can silence God with a knife and a fire must have a very high opinion of himself and a very low opinion of God. The Lord simply told Jeremiah to write another scroll, to which he added even more material, including a special judgment on King Jehoiakim. The same God who gives the Word has the power to protect and preserve the Word. The king had tried to destroy the Word, but instead the Word destroyed him! King Jehoiakim and his officials would be punished for the disrespect they showed to the divine Word of God. The king would have no dynasty, nor would he have the burial of a king. His son Jehoiachin succeeded him and ruled for only 3 months, and Jehoiakim's brother was made king.

Now we come to Chapter 22 and Jeremiah confronting King Zedekiah at the palace. Jeremiah discloses the truth about those 4 kings, then he makes a promise about the Messiah, the Righteous Branch who would one day reign and execute justice in the land. è Five kings with five different characteristics of what they represented:

1. *Zedekiah and callousness* - Zedekiah was sitting on David's throne, in David's house of cedar, benefiting from the covenant God had made with David, and yet the king wasn't serving the Lord as David had served him. Jeremiah gave the leaders a small window of opportunity: If they would repent and do justice, God would deliver the city and establish David's throne. Their hearts, however, were hard and they would not listen. The ruins of Jerusalem would be a monument to their wickedness.
2. *Jehoahaz and hopelessness* - Jeremiah announced that Jehoahaz would never return to Judah, but would die in Egypt. Instead of clinging to a dead past or trusting in a deposed leader, the people should have been dealing with the issues of that hour and looking to the Lord for His help. Josiah was dead; Jehoahaz was exiled; it was time for Zedekiah to follow the example of his godly father, Josiah, and lead the people back to the worship of the true God. But this didn't happen.
3. *Jehoiakim and covetousness* - During a time of international crisis, Jehoiakim was more concerned about building his own spacious palace than he was about building a righteous kingdom, and he used unpaid Jewish labor to do it. The nation was decaying and dying while the king was admiring his palace, the spacious rooms, the large windows, and the decorated cedar paneled walls. The king and his nobles who lived carelessly in the cedar palace would soon suffer terrible pain like a woman in travail. The Lord had warned them, but they felt so secure that they would not listen. The peace promised by the false prophets would never materialize. For the city of Jerusalem, it was the end.
4. *Jehoiachin and childlessness* - He reigned only 3 months and 10 days before he was deported with the queen mother to Babylon and replaced by his uncle Zedekiah. He was a wicked man and Jeremiah suggests that his mother was as much to blame as his ungodly father. Jeremiah had warned both the king and the queen mother, but they wouldn't listen. Jehoiachin had at least 7 children by several wives, but none of them would sit on the throne of David. He would treat Jehoiachin as though he was childless, making him the last surviving king in David's line.

Matthew Chapter 1 traces Christ's ancestry through his legal father Joseph. However since Jehoiachin is in that family tree, none of his descendants can claim the throne because of the curse pronounced in the book of Jeremiah. Our Lord gets his Davidic throne rights through his mother Mary in Luke chapter 3, whose genealogy is through David's son Nathan and thus avoided Jehoiachin, a descendant of Solomon.

5. Messiah the King and righteousness - Because the leaders disobeyed the law and refused to trust God, they destroyed the nation and scattered the flock among the Gentiles. God, however, promised to regather His people and transform the remnant into a nation. A remnant did return to Judah after the captivity, rebuild the temple, and restore national life. David's family tree might have been cut down, but a branch or shoot would grow from the stump and become Ruler of the nations.

When you put your faith in Jesus Christ, His righteousness is put into your account and you are declared righteous before God. This is called "being justified by faith".

Finally in Chapter 23 Jeremiah contrasted the present corrupt leaders with the coming Messiah, the perfect King who would come from David's line to reign over Israel. The King is called a righteous Branch because he will sprout up from the stump of David's fallen dynasty. This new growth will have God's own characteristics. Like the Creator, the Branch will be righteous.

But how did the nation of Judah become so corrupt? A major factor was false prophecy. The false prophets had a large, enthusiastic audience and were very popular because they made the people believe that all was well. By contrast, Jeremiah's message from God was unpopular because it showed the people how bad they were.

Jeremiah 14:14 summarizes this entire section: "These prophets are prophesying lies in My Name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart." Jeremiah pointed out their worst faults which included:

- A wrong motive,
- A wrong message, and
- A wrong attitude.

1. Their disgraceful conduct was a wrong motive. True prophets know how serious it is to be called by God to declare His Word, and they accept the responsibility with fear and trembling. The false prophets were committing adultery and thronging the houses of prostitution. Then they would go to the temple and pretend to worship Jehovah, turning God's house into a den of thieves. The word *adultery* includes their worship of idols, turning from the true God to whom Israel was 'married' and being unfaithful to their covenant promise.

2. They gave a dishonest and wrong message. The false prophets offered the people a *false hope* claiming, "The Lord says you will have peace, ... no harm will come to you". Of course, this was a popular message, and the frightened people grabbed it and held onto it. But the prophets hadn't heard that message from God. Instead of peace, a storm was brewing from the Lord. God was about to vent His Holy anger on His sinful people, and when they finally understood His purposes, it would be too late to stop the whirlwind. ... Not only did the false prophets give the people a false hope, they also ministered under a *false authority* (vs. 21-24).

God hadn't spoken to them, yet they prophesied. God hadn't called them, yet they ran with their message. If they were truly prophets from God, they would have lived godly lives and encouraged the people to turn from their wickedness. Instead, they taught a popular 'theology' that made it convenient for people to be religious and still live in sin. ... Jehovah wasn't a local deity like the pagan idols, but a transcendent God who reigns above all things and fills heaven and earth. Nor was he blind like the idols, unable to see the sins of the people. (vs. 24) Because they listened to the false prophets, the people believed lies about God. è **What we believe about God determines how we live.**

3. *They had a disrespectful and wrong attitude.* The key Hebrew word in this section is *massa*, which means "a burden". Jeremiah used it to refer to bearing burdens on the Sabbath in chapter 17, but in this context it means the burden of the message that the Lord places on His prophets. Some scholars translate it "oracle", but "burden" is acceptable. ... God cautioned Jeremiah not to encourage the careless attitude of the priests, people, and false prophets when they asked him, "What is the burden of the Lord?" The phrase *burden of the Lord* was almost a cliché; it was used to poke fun at God's true prophet. ... Their attitude toward God's message was careless and disrespectful; they weren't taking seriously God's message or God's messenger. The false prophets had distorted the truth to make it mean what they wanted it to mean, and yet they called their messages the "oracles of the Lord". ... Jeremiah was to reply, "You are the burden". The Living Bible catches the spirit of the passage:

"When one of the people or one of these 'prophets' or priests asks you, 'Well Jeremiah, what is the sad news from the Lord today?' you shall reply, 'What sad news? You are the sad news, for the Lord has cast you away!'" (vs. 33)

How then can we tell false prophets from true prophets? The NIV Life Application Bible lists four warning signs of false prophets. These are characteristics we need to watch for, even today.

- 1) They may appear to speak God's message, but they do not live according to his principles.
- 2) They water down God's message in order to make it more palatable.
- 3) They encourage their listeners, often subtly, to disobey God.
- 4) They tend to be arrogant and self-serving, appealing to the desires of their audience instead of being true to God's Word.

True prophets and false prophets are as different as straw and grain. Straw is useless for food and cannot compare to nourishing grain. To share the gospel is a great responsibility because the way we present it and live it will encourage people either to accept it or reject it. Whether we speak from a pulpit, teach in a class, or share with friends and loved ones, we are entrusted with accurately communicating and living out God's Word. As you share God's Word with friends and

neighbors, they will look for its effectiveness in your life. è **Unless it has changed you, why should they let it change them? If you preach it, make sure you live it!**

Allow me to circle back to my story of our visit to Dallas.

My greatest pleasure from our trip to visit our kids and new grand baby came when our family gathered for that potluck dinner on Sunday. My family's custom is to gather and to say grace for the food. I confess that my husband and sons are not yet bold enough in their personal faith to pray openly when the larger family is gathered, even when it's at our home. We used to leave that honor to my dad, but since he passed it has fallen to me or I usually ask one of my cousins to say grace.

At my son's home in Texas, I announced that the food was ready and asked my son, "Are you ready?" To which he nodded, called the family to pray, and he blessed our family, his baby son, and the meal. For me ... that was the real blessing of our trip, to witness our son step into the 'leadership' of his own home and his own family. How provident because that the leadership and headship of his home and family was what we were discussing last year when God gave us the lesson of the hawk.

- Are you a Jeremiah, a 'weeping prophet' in your family?

Wish justice for enemies

Beg for mercy for our beloved ones

Encouraging words:

- Don't be discouraged (Joshua 1:9)
- Trust in God's plan to redeem ALL His children
- Know that God will use even adversaries and non-believers
- Remember it's their journey/choice and not yours
- Pray always