

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
August 9, 2015

Lesson Text: Jeremiah 7:1-15
Lesson Title: Mend Your Ways

Introduction

Jeremiah, who served as both a priest and a prophet, was the son of a priest named Hilkiah. He was from the small village of Anathoth (Jeremiah 1:1), today called Anata, about 3 miles northeast of Jerusalem. As an object lesson to Judah, Jeremiah remained unmarried (Jeremiah 16:1-4). He was assisted in ministry by a scribe, named Baruch, to whom Jeremiah dictated and who copied and had custody over the writings compiled from the prophet's messages (Jeremiah 36:4, 32; 45:1). Jeremiah has been known as "the weeping prophet" (Jeremiah 9:1; 13:17; 14:17), living a life of conflict and burden because of his preaching of judgment by the invading Babylonians. He was threatened, tried for his life, put in stocks, forced to flee from Jehoiakim, publicly humiliated by a false prophet, and thrown into a pit.

God called Jeremiah to be a prophet when he was quite young, possibly around the age of twenty. He began his work in the thirteenth year of King Josiah of Judah and prophesied for more than forty years (Jeremiah 1:2-3). In the forty years preceding Judah's exile to Babylon, Jeremiah was a lone voice in the administrations of five kings. Judah's religious and political leaders were all corrupt. The prophets no longer proclaimed the word of God and the political leaders no longer defended the cause of justice. It was almost impossible to find one righteous God-fearing person in the land.

The first chapter of Jeremiah details Jeremiah's call and commission to declare God's Word (Jeremiah 1:4-5, 7-8). His call was *divine* and his commission was *dangerous*. Chapter two through twenty include his prophecies to Judah which consist of a series of messages. Our lesson text from Jeremiah 7:1-15 is the third in that series. This third message is considered one of the greatest, if not the greatest, in the Old Testament. It contains the heart of the message of Jeremiah, who was himself all heart. This passage in Jeremiah 7 is the foundation for Jesus' words when he cleansed the Temple (cf. Jeremiah 7:11 with Matthew 21:13).

In the early part of King Jehoiakim's reign, when the people had gathered at the Temple for a special feast day, Jeremiah delivered these convicting words. No doubt large numbers of people were there presenting their offerings to the Lord along with the choirs singing and the spiritual leaders chanting their religious words. In spite of all this spiritual activity, something was tragically wrong.

Hear God's Word (Jeremiah 7:1-2)

Verse 1-2

“The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD.”

Three times a year, the Jewish men were required to go up to the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate the feasts (Deuteronomy 16:16). This may have been the occasion for Jeremiah's third message. The temple was probably crowded, but there were not many true worshipers there. The prophet stood at one of the gates that led into the temple courts, there he preached to the people as they came in through the gate.

“Hear the word of the LORD, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD.” Jeremiah said the words he was speaking came to him “from the LORD.” He cried unto the people and admonished them to “Hear the word of the LORD.” It was for “all Judah” as they entered in through the gates to “worship the LORD.” The people were gathering for the purpose of “worshipping,” yet they were in no spiritual condition to worship. The word “worship” is a powerful word meaning “to prostrate yourself on the floor before a sovereign.” He is saying, “As you enter the Temple you are acknowledging God's complete and absolute Lordship over every area of your life (Philippians 3:3).

Jeremiah had no doubt that he was delivering God's message to the people. What he was about to preach was not a product of his thinking, speculation, or conclusion about the spiritual condition of the nation. It was God's message that needed delivered if any change was going to occur. The same holds true today (2 Timothy 4:2).

Question: Who speaks the most authoritative words in your life? Who should be heard and heeded first? What one voice should always be heard above all others? Of course, it is the word of the Lord. His words supersede all others.

Change Your Ways (Jeremiah 7:3-7)

Verse 3

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place.”

Jeremiah knew that God's word had to be delivered in a practical and understandable language. There was nothing angelic or phenomenal about his

message. It was spoken directly to the people in a way they could grasp and understand. Jeremiah was speaking in the name of “the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel.” His Source was the “LORD of armies,” the King of the whole universe. But more particularly, He was “the God of Israel.” His chosen people were the recipients of His covenant and they are now being called upon to change their attitudes and actions, conforming to what God demanded of them.

“Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place.” Jeremiah’s message was specific. The word “amend” means “to make well.” The people of Judah were going to the Temple to worship. Outwardly they appear to be right with God but inwardly there has been no change. They are living in sin and presuming they can worship God without repentance and holiness. If they will make things right with God, He would “cause them to dwell in this place.” The thought is, God would make it possible for them to continue living in Palestine and enjoy God’s favor and blessing. The implication was clear that, if they refused, they would be uprooted and deported elsewhere (Matthew 3:8-9).

Verse 4

“Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these.”

The Jews were believing the “lying words” of the false prophets who had told them that the presence of the temple in Jerusalem would protect them against the Babylonian threat. Underlying this was the concept that God dwelt in the temple and that He would never allow it to be destroyed. The chanting of the people, “The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD” must have sounded beautiful to the people, but it irritated Jeremiah’s ears. It was not in tune with the word of God.

Just because the temple was the “LORD’S,” that did not guarantee the people from being overtaken. The people failed to see that God was not obligated to remain there nor to protect the city once they had abandoned Him in their hearts and in their actions.

In America, we often hear politicians says, “God bless America.” Should any American ask for God to bless a nation that sanctions the murder of innocent babies in their mother’s womb and desecrates the sanctity of marriage with unashamed adultery, cheap divorce, and approval of sodomy? Are we to assume that we are protected from judgment because we attend a worship service on Sunday morning? Do singing hymns and carrying our Bible to church give us a “get out of jail card?”

Verse 5-7

“For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.”

“For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings” Jeremiah is about to tell them the meaning of being right with God and properly worshipping Him. First, when our ways are amended we will “thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour.” We tend to think of justice as belonging to the courtroom, the lawyers and the judges. But when Jeremiah told the people to “thoroughly execute judgment,” he is calling upon each one to individually make wrongs right between each other. A result of biblically worshipping the Lord is that you do whatever is necessary to make things right in every relationship you have. Second, when our ways are amended we will be in a right relationship with “the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.” True worship will be reflected in our conduct toward the weak and less fortunate. Conduct changes when we “amend our ways and doings.” Third, when our ways are amended we are secure and stabilized. For the second time in this section, the Lord says, “Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.”

Note: We have a great deal to learn about true repentance, true worship and the affect it has upon our conduct. Worship is not simply a passive activity of the mind. Jeremiah says it is a righteous activity of the will. If the word of God heard and understood produces anything less than a change in the hearer, worship will never be real.

Do Not Be Deceived (Jeremiah 7:8-11)

Verse 8

“Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit.”

“Behold” means “be confident or sure.” Jeremiah wanted the people to be sure they were trusting “in lying words, that cannot profit.” They were believing the false prophets and their own conclusions that they could go through the form of worship and be right with God. Believing that way “cannot profit.” It is time to abandon the “lying words” and admit the truth.

Verse 9-10

“Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?”

False worship, failure to repent and make amendments to our lives results in self-deception. The people of Jeremiah's day came and "stood before" the Lord in the temple and said, "We are delivered to do all these abominations." The word "delivered" means, "escaped." When they got inside the temple they felt like they were safe regardless of their conduct.

"Will" literally means, "What!" God is saying, "What? Do you steal, murder, commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods and then presume to come into my house and think you are safe?" The people were breaking commandment after commandment and ignoring the need to repent and amend their ways.

Question: Is it good to come to church, to God's house? The answer is yes if coming to God's house results in worship and commitment of your life to live according to God's Word and to do His will. But look at the other side of this question. Church can be the most dangerous place you can be if you come in self-deception and refusal to amend your ways. Every time the word of God is heard and the hearer refuses to amend their ways there is a layer of hardness that forms on the heart that makes repentance and renewal increasingly difficult.

Teacher's Note: After forty years of preaching and pastoring churches, I have watched as people have been able to come and sit comfortably in church while their whole life is a contradiction to the word of God.

Verse 11

"Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD."

In a powerful metaphor, God said, "You have made my house a place where thieves store their stolen merchandise and hide from justice." If the words of this verse sound familiar it is because the One who most often quoted Jeremiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, at the same place in Jerusalem, six centuries later, encountered the same thing (Matthew 21:13). God's "house" had "become a den of robbers." A "den of robbers" was a place where thieves met and stored their spoils. It is a place where thieves hid to avoid justice. They leave the "den" to steal and return with more spoils.

As sad as the reality of the people's actions were, the sobering reality of this verse is "...even I have seen it, saith the LORD." Sin cannot be hid! God sees everything we do.

Learn from the Past (Jeremiah 7:12-15)

Verse 12

“But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel.”

Jeremiah’s preaching must have caused the people to question what God was going to do because of their actions. Jeremiah reached back into Israel’s history and used an illustration of the tabernacle when it was located “in Shiloh.” “In Samuel’s time, over 400 years before the days of Jeremiah, the sons of the high priest Eli turned their ministry at the tabernacle into a personal racket, extracting bribes and sexual favors from worshippers there (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25). To make matters worse, some Israelites decided to treat the tabernacle’s ark of the covenant like a magical object by taking it into battle (4:3-5). But Israel lost the battle, the ark was captured, and Eli’s wicked sons were killed (4:6-11). Therefore God ‘forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men’ (Psalm 78:60). Jeremiah’s audience need only take a trip to God’s *place which was in Shiloh* to understand what He can do to Jerusalem as well. The ark of the covenant did not serve as an object of magical protection, and neither will the temple.” (Standard Lesson Commentary 2014-2015 (KJV).

Verse 13-14

“And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh.”

Jeremiah's purpose in the history lesson was what God did to Shiloh He would also “do unto this house,” or, the temple. The temple was “called by God's name” (Jeremiah 7:10, 12, 14) in the sense that it was a symbol of God's presence. His "name" refers to His revealed attributes. God had spoken to the people “rising up early” but they “heard not.” When God “called” them to repent through the message of the prophets, they “answered not.”

If Judah did not change her ways God would thrust her from His presence just as He had done with the Northern Kingdom (Ephraim) in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:5-20). “Therefore,” because they refused all of God’s admonitions, God “will do unto this house...as He did to Shiloh.” The temple was “called by God's name” (Jeremiah 7:10, 12, 14) in the sense that it was a symbol of God's presence. His "name" refers to His revealed attributes.

Verse 15

“And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim.”

God's second history lesson was the story of "Ephraim." "Ephraim" represents the northern kingdom of Israel, since it was the leading tribe (2 Kings 17:23). The people of Judah know their "brethren" to the north had been taken captive to Assyria by God's design (2 Kings 17:1-23). God told Judah He would "cast them out of His sight" just as He did the northern kingdom.

God wanted Judah to know that she should not expect any preferential treatment. He would deal with her sin just as He did with Ephraim. The message is applicable to us as well. Where there is unconfessed sin and indifference judgment is sure to follow. God help us to learn from the lessons of Israel and Judah.

Conclusion

Jeremiah's message to Judah was bold and to the point. They were to "mend their ways and doings." They should not expect to avoid judgment because they had a temple and the outward appearance of being right with God. They were "churchgoers" with their scrolls tucked under their arms. But they were a people in desperate need of repentance and revival.

The message of Jeremiah is needed today among God's people. We have become a people proud of our tradition, fundamental beliefs, and conservative values. We know how to talk the talk and walk the walk. We assume because we are saved by grace, no judgment or punishment for unconfessed sin will ever come to us. If you are unrepentant about any sin, you are presuming upon God's grace. Heed Jeremiah's message today. "Mend your ways and doings."

Amen.