

**Peace** be with you, listening friends. We greet you in the name of God, the Lord of peace, who wants everyone to understand and submit to the way of righteousness that He has established, and have true peace with Him forever. We are happy to be able to return today to present your program *The Way of Righteousness*.

In the last program, we heard that the prophet **Isaiah** wrote much about the Messiah who was to come. Seven hundred years before the birth of the Messiah, God put into Isaiah's mind how this Savior of sinners would come from the presence of God, be born of a virgin, live a holy life, and do miracles that no one else could do. However, Isaiah also prophesied that the Messiah would shed His blood, like a sacrificial lamb, to pay for the sins of the world. And once His sacrifice was completed, He would conquer death and rise from the grave, providing eternal life to all who believe in Him. Today we plan to study about another great prophet of God--**the prophet Jeremiah**.

Jeremiah lived about a hundred years after the prophet Isaiah. As we have already seen, the nation of Israel was no longer a unified nation. It had become two nations: Israel and Judah. In Jeremiah's day, the kingdom of **Israel**, which was to the north, was destroyed. God delivered the people of Israel into the hands of their enemies, because they did not believe the message of the prophets nor did they repent of their sin. Thus, of the nations of the Jews, **only Judah remained**. Judah was the nation to the south; its capital was Jerusalem where the temple that Solomon had built was located. As we have already learned, Judah was the tribe through which God had promised to bring the Messiah into the world.

Jeremiah was a Jew. He was born in a small town just five kilometers from Jerusalem. Jeremiah's father served as a priest in the temple in Jerusalem. In that time, most of the Jews in Jerusalem were still **very religious**, following the traditions of their ancestors, but **they did not heed the Word of the Lord God**. Jeremiah, however, was a man who

cherished the Word of God and obeyed it; he was looking forward to the day when God would send the Messiah into the world.

Now let us hear how God called Jeremiah to be a prophet. In chapter one of the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah wrote:

*The word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." "Ah, Sovereign Lord," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord. Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."*

Thus God called Jeremiah to be His prophet. God appointed him to go to his fellow Jews, and tell them that God would judge them if they did not repent of their sin and turn back to the Lord and His holy Word. Jeremiah's task was heavy and difficult, because **the Jews did not want anyone to tell them that their religious works did not please God**. However, the prophet Jeremiah was not a man-pleaser. Thus, for twenty-four years, Jeremiah preached in Jerusalem and throughout the land of Judah, saying: "God wants me to warn you that if you do not repent of your sins and obey the word of the Lord--God will allow the army of the nation of Babylon to come, enter Jerusalem, destroy and burn both the city and the temple! And they will take you as captives to a faraway land!" That is the message Jeremiah proclaimed to the Jews living in Judah.

Let us read a few excerpts from the writings of Jeremiah where he warned his fellow Jews. In the book of Jeremiah, chapter seven, we read:

*This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "**Stand at the gate of the Lord's house and there proclaim this message:** "Hear the word of the Lord, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the Lord. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord! [God will never judge us because the temple of the Lord is here!]" If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave to your forefathers for ever and ever. **But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.** "Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, ...and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe" safe to do all these detestable things?"*

Thus Jeremiah rebuked the Jews who **pretended to know God** but denied Him by their actions. In chapter seventeen, Jeremiah adds:

*This is what the Lord says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord... **The heart [of man] is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.** Who can understand it? "I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."*

Thus Jeremiah warned the people of Judah, informing them: "If you do not repent of your sins and return to God, the armies of Babylon will destroy the city of Jerusalem and this temple, and you will become their slaves!"

What do you think about this? Do you think the people of Judah respected and heeded the word which the Lord had spoken to them through the mouth of Jeremiah? **Most of them did not heed the warning!** Not even the priests believed the words of Jeremiah. In fact, when the priests heard what he said, they arrested him, whipped him, and put his feet in chains for the day. The priests could not believe that God would allow their enemies, the Babylonians, to enter Jerusalem and destroy the city and the temple that Solomon had built. In their thinking, this could never happen! They were angry with Jeremiah because he predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and wrote God's words in a book.

Not only did the people and the priests refuse to accept the words of God's prophet, Jeremiah. The king of Judah also rejected them. In fact, when the king read the book which Jeremiah had written, **he cut up the book** with a knife and threw it into the firepot in the courtyard so that the entire book was consumed! That is what the king of Judah did. He did not repent of his sin, and he did not accept the word of the Lord. Yes, the king burned the book of Jeremiah, **but he could not change God's decree.** God simply directed Jeremiah to rewrite all His words in another book.

If you study the book of Jeremiah, you will see how **the king and the priests and the people of Judah greatly persecuted Jeremiah**, imprisoning him often. Once they put Jeremiah in a deep, muddy pit. But God came to his rescue, sending to him an African man who pulled him out of the pit.

Something important to consider is that although most Jews **refused to listen** to the prophet Jeremiah, this does not mean that they were not listening to anyone! **They**

**were listening** to men who called themselves prophets--but they were **false prophets!**

The Scriptures tell us about many men who made themselves out to be prophets of God, but in reality they were hypocrites and deceivers, because **their messages did not come from God**. Consequently, while Jeremiah was proclaiming God's judgment which was to befall Jerusalem, the false prophets were speaking to the people of Judah, saying, "No, no! The disaster Jeremiah is predicting will not happen! Babylon cannot destroy Jerusalem! No one can destroy the temple of God! You will not see disaster! You will only have peace! Nothing but Peace!"

But Jeremiah spoke to all the Jews saying,

*This is what the Lord Almighty says: "**Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds!**"*

Thus Jeremiah warned the Jews to beware of the words of those who preached falsehood. However, unfortunately, most of the people of Judah did not heed the warning of God's prophet, Jeremiah. Instead **they believed the words of the false prophets**. Nevertheless, in the end, after it was **too late**, the king, the priests, the people, and the false prophets found out who had proclaimed **the true word of God!** They found out because everything that Jeremiah had announced concerning the destruction of Jerusalem came to pass. God's Word always comes true.

Listen to what the Scripture says:

*So in the ninth year of the reign of Zedekiah, [King of Judah]...**Nebuchadnezzar** king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army. They camped outside the city and built siege works all around it. The city was kept under siege... By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine in the city had become so severe that there was no food for the people to eat. **Then the city wall was broken through**...[Thus the soldiers captured the king of Judah]... He was taken to the king of Babylon...where he pronounced sentence on him. There at Riblah the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of [the king of Judah] before his eyes... Then he put out Zedekiah's eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon... [Then Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon and his soldiers] set fire to the temple of the Lord, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down. ...and broke down all the walls around Jerusalem. Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard carried into exile some of the poorest people and those who remained in the city, along with the rest of the craftsmen and those who had gone over to the king of Babylon. But Nebuzaradan left behind the rest of the poorest people of the land to work the vineyards and fields. <sup>27</sup>...**So Judah went into captivity, away from her land!***

Thus we see how **God fulfilled everything** that He had predicted through the mouth of Jeremiah, His prophet. Now all the Jews knew that the words of Jeremiah had been **the words of truth**. However, this knowledge was of little benefit to them, because they were now captives in the hands of the Babylonian soldiers!

How should we conclude our lesson today? Perhaps we can finish with this thought: In the Day of Judgment, every descendant of Adam will finally know what is true and what is false. However, **God wants you to discern what is true and what is false now-- because on Judgment Day it will do you no good to know the truth which you disdained during your lifetime on earth!** On the Day of Judgment it will be too late to

repent, because you will have perished in your sins! That is why the word of God says: ***"Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation!"***

***"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world!"***

In the next lesson, we will see what happened to the Jews who were carried away to Babylon....

God bless you as you consider this promise from the Lord, penned by the prophet Jeremiah. The Lord God says,

***"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."***

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