



The Relevance Of Jeremiah's Message To Today's Christendom

An urgent reminder concerning a matter of eternal significance. Wherefore read it to perceive it and perceive it to understand it and understand it that you may live and escape the second death!

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*Adapted from a letter written while on a visit
to Sandakan, Sabah in July 1992.*



THE WORDS of Isaiah in his closing remarks are to be particularly cherished for a timely reminder as we embark upon the reading of the book of Jeremiah: 'But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word' (Isaiah 66:2b). It is a solemn exhortation of how we should undertake the study of God's Word. So, as we attempt to understand the writings of Jeremiah, it is good to remind ourselves of the utter futility of our endeavours if we fail to see how trenchantly relevant and significant the words of the prophecies are to our own lives and situation.

Firstly, we must rid ourselves of the mentality of the Dispensationalist. For though we might have renounced the doctrine of Dispensationalism, yet we might inadvertently uphold the attitudes and inclinations of Dispensationalism in our study of the Old Testament Scriptures. For we are wont to confine the applications of

Jeremiah's prophecies to Theocratic Israel and its people. The Dispensationalist never see the immediate and personal application of these prophecies to their own lives. While they admit that the Old Testament Scriptures are divinely inspired, yet they nullify its relevance and need for our own life and times. This is in diametrical contrast to what Paul had said to Timothy concerning the Old Testament, 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works' (II Timothy 3:16,17). It is certain that herein the Apostle was particularly referring to the Old Testament. Yet the Dispensationalist would largely attribute merely an 'antique' value to Old Testament. They deny its practical relevance and importance to our own day. Surely such mentality is fatalistic and borders on sacrilege. Even though they may affix a futuristic relevance (to a future, so say they, that has yet to take place) to the Old Testament prophecies, it does not in anyway diminish the actual damage because they are applied essentially to a fictitious future.

Israel's cardinal sin in the theocratic epoch was to sacrilegiously engage themselves with graven images and strange vanities. This was religious whoredom and therefore necessitated the sternest divine retribution. Thus the prophet had to carry out the divine commission to administer severe reproofs and to threaten the Jews of the impending dreadful judgments if they were to persist in their impenitence. We may be astounded at the staggering stupidity of the Jews for indulging themselves in this wise. Surely we are to be spared from the guilt of such a grievous error, for are we not far removed from such things? The query typifies the Dispensational mentality.

Could we not be just as guilty as the Jews of the sin of idolatry when we consider the place our souls have given to the world and to the flesh? Have we not secretly rendered the affections and the desires of our hearts to the things of this world when we should have reserved them

for God alone? Consider, for instance, the amount of time and energy that we have dedicated to objects and pursuits that do not give God the glory. How many among us can conscientiously affirm that we are free from the sin of spiritual idolatry? When true religion is defined by 'setting our affections on things above, not on things on the earth' (Colossians 3:2), by 'seeking the things which are Jesus Christ's and not our own' (as in Philippians 2:21), by letting 'our eye be single' (Matthew 6:22b), how many of us can come through scriptural litmus tests?

Jeremiah's scathing indictments of the Jewish sins are intermixed with the proclamation of the approaching judgments of God in his entire general message (the first nineteen chapters). The judgments pronounced are devastating, harsh and relentless in character. God's fury and wrath will pour down like melting fire and the fire would be unquenchable until it has virtually destroyed everything. But Jeremiah takes pain to emphasize that God is to be justified in meting out such judgments. The sternest of the judgments can be attributed to a few things. The judgments were threatened so that the reproofs of sins might be more effectual to bring the Jews to repentance. Secondly they underlined how aggravated the sins of Israel were. Thirdly they were designed to quickly arouse sinners to consider the nature of their errors and to cause them to redress withal.

However the most baffling thing in Jeremiah's story is the downright impertinence of the Jewish auditory to his message. They took confidence and security in the outward performances of their religious duties and the external privileges of religion which they enjoyed. They found it more soothing to believe the messages of the false prophets, who promised peace and blessings in the offing by the maintenance of an accommodating and compromising religion. Hence Jeremiah's reproofing ministry was regarded ignominiously and spurned. His alarming and reiterated warnings were taken as the ranting tirade of a vexed charlatan. The people in Jeremiah's days could have never imagined the validity and relevance of the lofty

charges of the prophet to their own circumstances and lives. They remained incorrigible. They continued in their treacherous defection from God and persisted in playing the harlot. They appeased themselves, in spite of the dictates of conscience and reason, by the proof of outward circumcision and the offering of sacrifices; they forgot the fundamental maxim of true religion that 'obedience is better than sacrifice' (Jeremiah 7:21-24).

It seems incredible that the Jews should continue obstinately in the ways of their heart. 'No man repented him of his wickedness... every one turned to his course as the horse rusheth into the battle' (Jeremiah 8:6). Despite the repeated calls to return and to repent, the Jews adamantly abode in their own ways. By their deceit, they covered their sins and ignored the urgent tone and stirring plea in Jeremiah's voice. The Jews never believed that Jeremiah's prophecies would soon be realised. Alas, the calamity overtook them suddenly like a whirlwind. It was then too late for repentance and reformation.

We would be obviously exasperated and astonished at the Jewish response to Jeremiah's frequent calls to repentance. What was actually a demonstration of forbearance and kindness was perceived as offensive and insulting by the Jews. How great the anguish and pain that Jeremiah had to suffer from the church of his days. Little wonder he is called the weeping prophet. For a span of about 40 years, Jeremiah continued to discharge faithfully his public ministry and during this time he had to endure rejections and failures without cessation.

It is most likely that we would find it difficult to understand the significance and application of Jeremiah's message to our own lives. Perhaps we need to apply 'eye-salve' to our spiritual perception to espy all things uprightly. Indeed this is what our 'Laodicean churches' urgently require (Revelation 8:18b). This is a generation that knows not what conviction of sin is. Hence they think that they have need of nothing, not knowing they are 'wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and

naked' (Revelation 3:17).

Our generation is no better than Jeremiah's, perhaps worse. The Apostle Paul in his swan-song epistle graphically portrayed the scenario of today's visible church: 'men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud... traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof... ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth' (II Timothy 3:2-7).

We live in an era, wherein even within evangelical Christendom, false prophets abound, comforting sinners in Zion with the message 'peace, peace'. The many who sit on the pews Sabbath after Sabbath are under the impression that the impending wrath of God is not meant for them. Many are ignorant of the fact that the concept of religion which they adhere to and practise is actually a blatant travesty of the teachings of the Bible. When the honest truth is sometimes made known to them concerning their true nature and disposition, they react instinctively with a defensive mechanism that is not unlike that which was employed by the people in Jeremiah's days. 'Judge not'; 'Don't be censorious'; 'Thou speakest falsely' (Jeremiah 43:2b). When the Gospel is preached faithfully, it becomes offensive to the carnal mind. Indeed the preaching of the cross is offensive to those who are lovers of self (Galatians 5:11). Christ Jesus is the Rock of offence to those who have 'a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof' (I Peter 2:8). Like in the days of Jeremiah, those who hate the true Gospel conspire together against God's true servants. They appoint and ordain their own prophets to prophesy soothing words unto them. Like the people in Jeremiah's epoch, they have a craving itch to know about the future without a commensurate willingness to obey the Word of God. Yet the omniscient God searches and tries the reins and recesses of man's heart. His verdict against a treacherous generation is this: 'For ye dissembled in your hearts' (Jeremiah 42:20a). The only future that awaits them: 'So shall my fury be poured

forth upon you... and ye shall be an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach' (Jeremiah 42:18b). Surely 'the sword, the famine, and the pestilence' would suddenly overtake them when it is too late for them to repent.

What shall we say of ministers who lull their people with a sense of false assurance with their easy, wide-gate, broad-way gospels? Well, let Jeremiah speak: 'The prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place' (Jeremiah 14:13). What does the Lord say concerning them, 'The prophets prophesy lies in My name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart' (Jeremiah 14:14). Let the Lord speak again: 'Behold, I am against the prophets... that use their tongues, and say, He saith... and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them' (Jeremiah 23:31,32).

I, for one, believe that our own times urgently require a prophet of no less fortitude than Jeremiah and a message of no less austerity than that of Jeremiah's. Perhaps, it is more appropriate for us to turn our exasperation and shock to our own obstinacy which prevent us from repenting as we ought to. For the opulence and affluence of our days far exceed that of Jeremiah's. Believe me, dear friends, the generation of Jeremiah will arise to condemn ours in the day of judgment. Hence the pathetic comment that described the Jewish tragedy might be more appropriate when applied to our own cases, 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved' (Jeremiah 8:20). ❖

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