

Lesson 7

Sabbath Afternoon, November 07

Now Hear This!

Jeremiah called their attention repeatedly to the counsels given in Deuteronomy. More than any other of the prophets, he emphasized the teachings of the Mosaic law and showed how these might bring the highest spiritual blessing to the nation and to every individual heart. "Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein,"- he pleaded, "and ye shall find rest for your souls." Jeremiah 6:16.

On one occasion, by command of the Lord, the prophet took his position at one of the principal entrances to the city and there urged the importance of keeping holy the Sabbath day. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were in danger of losing sight of the sanctity of the Sabbath, and they were solemnly warned against following their secular pursuits on that day. A blessing was promised on condition of obedience. "If ye diligently hearken unto Me," the Lord declared, and "hallow the Sabbath day, to do no work therein; then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and this city shall remain forever." Jeremiah 17:24, 25.

This promise of prosperity as the reward of allegiance was accompanied by a prophecy of the terrible judgments that would befall the city should its inhabitants prove disloyal to God and His law. If the admonitions to obey the Lord God of their fathers and to hallow His Sabbath day were not heeded, the city and its palaces would be utterly destroyed by fire.

Thus the prophet stood firmly for the sound principles of right living so clearly outlined in the book of the law. But the conditions prevailing in the land of Judah were such that only by the most decided measures could a change for the better be brought about; therefore he labored most earnestly in behalf of the impenitent. "Break up your fallow ground," he pleaded, "and sow not among thorns." "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved." Jeremiah 4:3, 14.

But by the great mass of the people the call to repentance and reformation was unheeded. Since the death of good King Josiah, those who ruled the nation had been proving untrue to their trust and had been leading many astray. Jehoahaz, deposed by the interference of the king of Egypt, had been followed by Jehoiakim, an older son of Josiah. From the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign, Jeremiah had little hope of saving his beloved land from destruction and the people from captivity. Yet he was not permitted to remain silent while utter ruin threatened the kingdom. Those who had remained loyal to God must be encouraged to persevere in rightdoing, and sinners must, if possible, be induced to turn from iniquity. —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 411, 412.

The Lord commanded Moses to send men to search the land of Canaan, which He would give unto the children of Israel. . . . After they had spoken of the fertility of the land, all but two spoke very discouragingly of their ability to possess it. . . . As the people listened to this report, they gave vent to their disappointment in bitter reproaches and wailing. They did not wait to reflect and reason that God, who had brought them out thus far, would certainly give them the land. . . .

Caleb urged his way to the front, and his clear, ringing voice was heard above all the clamor of the multitude. He opposed the cowardly views of his fellow spies, which had weakened the faith and courage of all Israel. He commanded the attention of the people, and they hushed their complaints for a moment to listen to him. . . . But as he spoke, the unfaithful spies interrupted him, crying: "We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we."

These men, starting upon a wrong course, set their hearts against God, against Moses and Aaron, and against Caleb and Joshua. Every step they advanced in this wrong direction made them firmer in their design to discourage every attempt to possess the land of Canaan. They distorted the truth in order to carry their baneful purpose. They represented the climate as being unhealthful and all the people of giant stature. . . .

This was not only an evil report, but a lying one also. It was contradictory; for if the land was unhealthy, and had eaten up the inhabitants, how was it that they had attained to such massive proportions? When men in responsible positions yield their hearts to unbelief, there are no bounds to the advance they will make in evil. . . . If only the two men had brought the evil report, and all the ten had encouraged them to possess the land in the name of the Lord, they would still have taken the advice of the two in preference to the ten, because of their wicked unbelief. —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 106.

Before the distribution of the land had been entered upon, Caleb, accompanied by the heads of his tribe, came forward with a special claim. Except Joshua, Caleb was now the oldest man in Israel. Caleb and Joshua were the only ones among the spies who had brought a good report of the Land of Promise, encouraging the people to go up and possess it in the name of the Lord. Caleb now reminded Joshua of the promise then made, as the reward of his faithfulness: "The land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's forever, because thou hast wholly followed the Lord." He therefore presented a request that Hebron be given him for a possession.... His claim was immediately granted. To none could the conquest of this giant stronghold be more safely entrusted. . . .

Caleb's faith now was just what it was when his testimony had contradicted the evil report of the spies. He had believed God's promise that He would put His people in possession of Canaan, and in this he had followed the Lord fully. He had endured with his people the long wandering in the wilderness, thus sharing the disappointments and burdens of the guilty; yet he made no complaint of this, but exalted the mercy of God that had preserved him in the wilderness when his brethren were cut off.... The brave old warrior was desirous of giving to the people an example that would honor God, and encourage the tribes fully to subdue the land which their fathers had deemed unconquerable. Caleb obtained the inheritance upon which his heart had been set for forty years, and, trusting in God to be with him, he "drove thence the three sons of Anak." ...

The cowards and rebels had perished in the wilderness, but the righteous spies ate of the grapes of Eshcol. To each was given according to his faith. The unbelieving had seen their fears fulfilled. Notwithstanding God's promise, they had declared that it was impossible to inherit Canaan, and they did not possess it. But those who trusted in God, looking not so much to the difficulties to be encountered as to the strength of their Almighty Helper, entered the goodly land. —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 123.

Monday, November 09
Destroying the Message: Part 1

The crisis demanded a public and far-reaching effort. Jeremiah was commanded by the Lord to stand in the court of the temple and speak to all the people of Judah who might pass in and out. From the messages given him he must diminish not a word, that sinners in Zion might have the fullest possible opportunity to hearken and to turn from their evil ways.

The prophet obeyed; he stood in the gate of the Lord's house and there lifted his voice in warning and entreaty. Under the inspiration of the Almighty he declared:

"Hear the word of the Lord, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord. 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. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor; 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, forever and ever." Jeremiah 7:2-7.

The unwillingness of the Lord to chastise is here vividly shown. He stays His judgments that He may plead with the impenitent. He who exercises "loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth" yearns over His erring children; in every way possible He seeks to teach them the way of life everlasting. Jeremiah 9:24. He had brought the Israelites out of bondage that they might serve Him, the only true and living God. Though they had wandered long in idolatry and had slighted His warnings, yet He now declares His willingness to defer chastisement and grant yet another opportunity for repentance. He makes plain the fact that only by the most thorough heart reformation could the impending doom be averted. In vain would be the trust they might place in the temple and its services. Rites and ceremonies could not atone for sin. Notwithstanding their claim to be the chosen people of God, reformation of heart and of the life practice alone could save them from the inevitable result of continued transgression.

Thus it was that "in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem" the message of Jeremiah to Judah was, "Hear ye the words of this covenant,"—the plain precepts of Jehovah as recorded in the Sacred Scriptures,—*"and do them."* Jeremiah 11:6. And this is the message he proclaimed as he stood in the temple courts in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim. —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 412-414.

Tuesday, November 10
Destroying the Message: Part 2

Jeremiah's message to priests and people aroused the antagonism of many. With boisterous denunciation they cried out, "Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the Lord." Jeremiah 26:9. Priests, false prophets, and people turned in wrath upon him who would not speak to them smooth things or prophecy deceit. Thus was the message of God despised, and His servant threatened with death.

Tidings of the words of Jeremiah were carried to the princes of Judah, and they hastened from the palace of the king to the temple, to learn for themselves the truth of the matter. "Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears." Verse 11. But Jeremiah stood boldly before the princes and the people, declaring: "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; and the Lord will repent Him of the evil that He hath pronounced against you. As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring

innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears." Verses 12–15.

Had the prophet been intimidated by the threatening attitude of those high in authority, his message would have been without effect, and he would have lost his life; but the courage with which he delivered the solemn warning commanded the respect of the people and turned the princes of Israel in his favor. They reasoned with the priests and false prophets, showing them how unwise would be the extreme measures they advocated, and their words produced a reaction in the minds of the people. Thus God raised up defenders for His servant. . . .

Through the pleading of these men of influence the prophet's life was spared, although many of the priests and false prophets, unable to endure the condemning truths he uttered, would gladly have seen him put to death on the plea of sedition.

From the day of his call to the close of his ministry, Jeremiah stood before Judah as "a tower and a fortress" against which the wrath of man could not prevail. "They shall fight against thee," the Lord had forewarned His servant, "but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith the Lord. And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible." Jeremiah 6:27; 15:20, 21.

Naturally of a timid and shrinking disposition, Jeremiah longed for the peace and quiet of a life of retirement, where he need not witness the continued impenitence of his beloved nation. His heart was wrung with anguish over the ruin wrought by sin. "O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears," he mourned, "that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! O that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them." Jeremiah 9:1, 2. —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 417–419.

[The Pharisees] taught much that was contrary to the Scriptures. Jesus said, "They bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers." The Pharisees enjoined a multitude of regulations, having their foundation in tradition, and unreasonably restricting personal liberty. And certain portions of the law they so explained as to impose upon the people observances which they themselves secretly ignored, and from which, when it served their purpose, they actually claimed exemption.

To make a show of their piety was their constant aim. Nothing was held too sacred to serve this end. To Moses God had said concerning His commandments, "Thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes." Deuteronomy 6:8. These words have a deep meaning. As the word of God is meditated upon and practiced, the whole man will be ennobled. In righteous and merciful dealing, the hands will reveal, as a signet, the principles of God's law. They will be kept clean from bribes, and from all that is corrupt and deceptive. They will be active in works of love and compassion. The eyes, directed toward a noble purpose, will be clear and true. The expressive countenance, the speaking eye, will testify to the blameless character of him who loves and honors the word of God. But by the Jews of Christ's day all this was undiscerned. The command given to Moses was construed into a direction that the precepts of Scripture should be worn upon the person. They were accordingly written upon strips of parchment, and bound in a conspicuous manner about the head and wrists. But this did not cause the law of God to take a firmer hold of the mind and heart. These parchments were worn merely as badges, to attract attention. They were thought to give the wearers an air of devotion which would command the reverence of the people. . . .

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets." To show their esteem for the dead prophets, the Jews were very zealous in beautifying their tombs; but they did not profit by their teachings, nor give heed to their reproofs.

In the days of Christ a superstitious regard was cherished for the resting places of the dead, and vast sums of money were lavished upon their decoration. In the sight of God this was idolatry. In their undue regard for the dead, men showed that they did not love God supremely, nor their neighbor as themselves. The same idolatry is carried to great lengths today. Many are guilty of neglecting the widow and the fatherless, the sick and the poor, in order to build expensive monuments for the dead. Time, money, and labor are freely spent for this purpose, while duties to the living—duties which Christ has plainly enjoined—are left undone.

The Pharisees built the tombs of the prophets, and adorned their sepulchers, and said one to another, If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have united with them in shedding the blood of God's servants. At the same time they were planning to take the life of His Son. This should be a lesson to us. It should open our eyes to the power of Satan to deceive the mind that turns from the light of truth. Many follow in the track of the Pharisees. They revere those who have died for their faith. They wonder at the blindness of the Jews in rejecting Christ. Had we lived in His day, they declare, we would gladly have received His teaching; we would never have been partakers in the guilt of those who rejected the Saviour. But when obedience to God requires self-denial and humiliation, these very persons stifle their convictions, and refuse obedience. Thus they manifest the same spirit as did the Pharisees whom Christ condemned. —*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 612, 617, 618.

Thursday, November 12
For Our Admonition

God will work with those who will listen to His voice.

The Word of God is to be the man of our counsel, and is to guide our experience. The lessons of Old Testament history, if faithfully studied, will teach us how this can be. Christ, enshrouded in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, was the guide and the light of the children of Israel in their wilderness wandering. Here was an unerring Guide.

In all their experiences, God was trying to teach them obedience to their heavenly Guide, and faith in His power to deliver them. Their deliverance from affliction in Egypt, and their passage through the Red Sea, revealed to them His power to save. When they rebelled against Him, and went contrary to His will, God punished them. When they persisted in their rebellion, and were determined to have their own way, God gave them that for which they asked, and in this way showed them that, that which He withheld from them, He withheld for their own good. Every judgment that came as a result of their murmurings was a lesson to that vast multitude, that sorrow and suffering are always the result of transgression of the laws of God.

The history of the Old Testament was recorded for the benefit of those who should live in the generations following. The lessons of the New Testament are as greatly needed. Here again Christ is the instructor, leading His people to seek that wisdom that cometh from above, and to gain that instruction in righteousness that will mold the character after the divine similitude. Both Old and New Testament Scriptures teach the principles of obedience to the commandments of God as the terms of securing that life which measures with the life of God, for it is through obedience that we become partakers of the divine nature, and learn to escape the corruptions that are in the world through lust. Therefore its maxims are to be studied, its commands obeyed, its principles, which are more precious than gold, brought into the daily life. —*This Day With God*, p. 254.

Friday, November 13
For Further Reading

Conflict and Courage, "Jeremiah, God's Mouthpiece," August 19, p. 237.
Ye Shall Receive Power, "Jeremiah," September 15, p. 267.