



Word Pictures From Jeremiah

By Keith Greer

Jeremiah is often referred to as the "weeping prophet." If you read his work, the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations, it will become clear why this tenderhearted prophet often wept! At the same time, his messages sharply rebuked God's people for their apathy and indifference and their unfaithfulness. Jeremiah's task was to show God's people their true condition in God's eyes. He needed to make them see themselves as God saw them. To do this, Jeremiah used "word pictures," pictures so vivid and so clear that only stubborn hearts, unwilling to change, could miss their messages. Today, a study of these same pictures can help us draw closer to God and away from the danger of drifting from Him.

"For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters. And hewn themselves cisterns -- broken cisterns that can hold no water."
{Jeremiah 2:13} According to historical information, "the cisterns in Palestine were usually bottle or pear-shaped reservoirs into which water could drain from roofs, tunnels, or courtyards." (Holman's Bible Dictionary) In desert countries, water was a valuable commodity. In our country, we wash our cars, water our lawns, and pour water in bird fountains. Middle Eastern countries look at this as a great waste of a natural resource (someday, we may also).

Jeremiah did not worry about natural water! He addressed a much more serious problem. Israel had forsaken God. Why? God had blessed her in so many different ways. To make matters even worse -- where did they turn instead of to Him? To broken cisterns -- which had no capacity even to hold water! In other words, they turned to the pagan gods of the land, gods made of stone and wood, idols that could not hear, see, or answer them. How did they take such a foolish turn? When men refuse to follow God, they will follow something! The Israelites always needed someone out in front to lead.

During the period of the judges, how long did they remain faithful? As long as the judge lived -- when he died, they returned to their wicked ways. How could they ask for a leader greater than God?

Sadly, man is still guilty of these two evils. How? Instead of believing God's word and the truth it contains -- men believe "other truth." Evolution -- not creation -- is accepted as fact. Men cannot live as animals live and still please God. (Romans 1:18-28) Instead of respecting, and placing value on, human life, men regard it lightly. For example, many perceive abortion and mercy killing just as choices. Millions of people follow the religions of men, instead of the blueprint given in God's word. Worship, work, organization, and the message men need to hear have been redefined and molded to meet the demands of the day.

How can mankind believe he will end up any differently than did God's people in Jeremiah's day? God gave them everything they needed -- just as He has given us. (2 Peter 1:3) When they turned away to follow the teaching and doctrines of men, they wandered farther and farther away from God. Take a cold, hard look at the direction in which the world today is moving. Are men drawing closer to God? It's bad enough to forsake God, but turning instead to the creature is not different from what the people did in Jeremiah's day.

"An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end." {Jeremiah 5:30,31} God had given certain people to help guide Israel in His ways. The priests were to remind them continually of God's law, to make sure they followed its precepts. These priests had become corrupt, and instead of making sure Israel followed the guidelines in the law -- they were leading them in the pagan customs of the land where they were living.

What about God's prophets? The prophets were prophesying falsely. They told things that God had not said or promised. So the priests were corrupting the worship, and the prophets were corrupting the people by leading them in the wrong direction. Believe it or not, there was an even greater problem than these two. What was it? The people

loved to have it so! In plain words, they loved hearing the wrong directions instead of the right ones. How could they prefer lies in place of the truth in God's law? It had gotten so bad that God's people were honoring and sacrificing to false gods in God's temple! They passed their children through the fire to the god Molech. What could they have been thinking? Had any one of these false gods given them the wonderful land in which they dwelt, victory in even one battle, blessings and honor in the sight of the other nations? Moses had warned them that after they received the land, they would forget who made it all possible. Read Deuteronomy 6:10-12.

Could this same thing be happening in our day? "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 complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." {2 Timothy 3:16,17} "As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." {2 Peter 1:3,4} The Bible also tells us that the Holy Spirit revealed God's mind to mankind. (1 Corinthians 2:9-13) According to all these scriptures, God has revealed and given to man all that he needs in order to please Him by obeying those same words.

Today, men crave less of God's word and more of man's human wisdom. More in demand than truth are man's false teachings -- grace only, faith only, salvation without works, eternal security, limited atonement, contemporary worship, social gospel, preaching less about the church and more about Christ, preaching more about grace and less on baptism, divorce for any cause, alternate lifestyles, pro-choice. The list is endless. When men leave truth, they turn to something that is easier on their ears and that requires less obligation in their lives. It may well be true that the majority desires these "false teachings" but they will help them no more than they helped the people in Jeremiah's day. Jeremiah correctly showed Israel where the acceptance of false teaching would lead them -- into God's wrath! Can it do less in our day? Error never brings man good things; it places him at odds with the God of heaven.

"But this is what I commanded them saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people. And walk in the ways that I have commanded you that it may be well with you. Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward." {Jeremiah 7:23,24} Instead of moving forward in their service to God, the Israelites were moving backward. The "counsel" to which they listened did not cause them to move closer to, but further away from, God and His care over them.

In the 1800s, when the Lord's church split over the Missionary Society, those who promoted that direction called their work "progressive." As they understood it, they were "progressing" in the Lord's work. This proved to be untrue -- they were digressing. Those brethren who held the line tried to warn their brethren. Whenever one takes the first step "beyond" the pattern, the next step becomes easier. Those brethren who wanted to put "colleges in the church budget" (to support so-called Bible colleges from the Lord's treasury) wanted nothing more. Again, the warning went forth that the "door was being opened for any innovations that man would come with in the future." In both cases, those who supported these works denied this would happen. But it did.

Today, these same brethren are fighting a constant battle with the more "modern" element in the church. They must oppose constructing gyms, hospitals, and social life centers; they must fight against drug and alcohol programs, acceptance of denominational preachers in their pulpits, unity and diversity in teaching concerning salvation, and accepting New Hermeneutics -- the theory of "no pattern theology." I support these fights and believe all these things to be unscriptural, but where did it begin? When did the train leave the track? "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds." {2 John 9-11} It began with the first step taken without scriptural authority.

The same scriptures these brethren use to support the Missionary Society, the sponsoring church concept, fellowship halls, and social gospel can be used for all the other programs introduced by other erring brethren. What's my point? There are no

scriptures for either of these sets of programs! Why do you suppose the ultramodern brethren are trying to promote these things in the liberal camp instead of in the more conservative churches (the antis, as we are commonly called)? The answer lies in the earlier point -- when one takes the first step beyond the authority in God's word, more are sure to follow!

So many today believe the Lord's cause progresses when they teach things that cannot be found in the Bible. The "change agents" in the Lord's church tell us that we cannot reach the lost with the "outdated" message of the first-century church. Why? Who made that model and design? Just as in the days of Jeremiah, when men incline their ears to "other teachings" instead of God's word, it never leads to progress; it moves us backward. Man needs to admit the simple truth: he cannot make better the perfect plan designed by the God of heaven!

"...Behold, the word of the Lord is a reproach to them; they have no delight in it ... because from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is given to covetousness, ... they have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, Peace, Peace! Where there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No! They were not ashamed; nor did they know how to blush ... Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you shall find rest for your souls. But they said we will not walk in it." {Jeremiah 6:10-16} I call these passages "Steps to Apostasy." Allow me to explain their danger in any age.

No delight in the word of God. What happens when ears stop hearing the truth? Matthew said "their ears have become dull of hearing." (Matthew 13:15) Today, men seem more interested in cute stories and short sermons; they want very little scripture, and, of course, no application! What we need is more book, chapter, and verse preaching from the pulpits and demanded by those in the pews! When men lose their appetites for God's word, it is because they are being fed something else.

Covetousness. There's nothing wrong with having riches, but if we pursue them, at the expense of our souls, we pay too much. Materialism will cost many of God's children

their souls. Jesus said we need to lay up treasures in heaven. (Matthew 6:19-21) Paul agreed with the Lord. (Colossians 3:1,2; 1 Timothy 6:6-10) The great wise man Solomon, after tasting and experiencing all this old world could offer, understood that if man leaves God out of the equation -- all is vanity and vexation of spirit. (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

Walking on the wrong path. God's prophets were declaring a false peace. God's word is the standard; and He gave us the path to follow in this life. If one does not seek that path, but loves the path of the devil, the devil will present him with an alternative. If we believe and accept the lie, even though it looks very close to the real thing, we will still be just as lost! The closer the wrong path resembles the original, the more dangerous it is. There's only one way to be sure you're on the right path -- look at the book that explains it in great detail -- God' word! (Matthew 7:13,14; 1 John 2:15-17)

Shamelessness -- forgot how to blush. If this doesn't fit the attitude of many people today, I don't understand Jeremiah's words. Take a look at our permissive society. There's brazen openness regarding all types of ungodliness. Homosexuality and lesbianism are looked on as "alternate lifestyles." People divorce at will, live together without benefit of marriage, use vulgar speech, and listen to God's name being taken in vain on prime time TV, by those who are supposed to be "role models." Instead of being ashamed of such conduct, many -- including some brethren -- try to justify it!

Rejection of the only possible cure. Many today expect God to "negotiate" with them. God's terms are not up for debate. If one desires to be free from the burden and guilt of sin, he must take God's remedy, not his own! God's ways are the only sure ways to give man the cure for his fatal sin condition. Other ways leave him in his same sinful condition. In Jeremiah's day the people rejected the only cure for their impending doom. Will you now reject Christ, our only cure for sin?

Jeremiah's word pictures are easy for honest hearts to understand. We know how it ended for the people in Jeremiah's day -- what about us. Will we avoid the same end and learn from the mistakes of the past. The choice is ours to make!