

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this series about sharing from our quiet times you may learn to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. We are two teachers and every day during the past week we had a quiet time from 7 selected chapters from JEREMIAH in the Old Testament. Once a week we come together to share what we have learned from our quiet times. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today's topic is A DISCIPLE SHARES WHAT HE LEARNS FROM JEREMIAH-prt 1.

(S) **SHARING FROM SELECTED CHAPTERS FROM JEREMIAH**

This past week we have read, meditated and prayed from Jeremiah chapters 1, 2, 4, 10, 17, 18 and 23. We will use our notes to share important truths and lessons from these chapters and discuss some difficult passages.

Sharing quiet times from Jeremiah chapter 1.

The calling of a young man to be God's prophet. In the thirteenth year of king Josiah, that is in 627 B.C., the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, the son of a *priest* and called him to become a *prophet* of the Lord. Jeremiah speaks in the first person and records his own calling not long after the event.

First. God calls Jeremiah to be a prophet and equips him for the task. Already before Jeremiah was born, God had set him apart and appointed him to be a prophet for Judah and its surrounding nations. Jeremiah was a young man, probably in his late teens, and felt very inadequate for such a task, because he was young and did not know how to speak (6). In the East, it is the custom that older people do not want to listen to younger people. But God nevertheless said that Jeremiah must speak. God promised to give him the right words to speak and to present with Jeremiah when he speaks (7-8). Then God strengthened Jeremiah: In a visionary experience, Jeremiah saw that God reached out his hand and touched his mouth, saying, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth" (9). God told Jeremiah not to fear people, because God would make him like "a fortified city and ... a bronze wall to stand against the whole land." Even when political and religious leaders fight against him, they will not be able to overcome him. The lesson I learn is that when God calls people, he will also equip them for the task he wants them to do.

Second. The task of Jeremiah. The task which God gave to Jeremiah was not easy. God appointed him over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant (10). God called Jeremiah first of all to be a prophet who proclaims judgement. This is very difficult, because the people who refuse to repent would turn against Jeremiah and try to stop his preaching. God sent Jeremiah to proclaim God's judgement over Judah, because of her gross idolatry and unfaithfulness towards God. If Israel refuses to repent, God would uproot Israel from their land and tear down their land. God would destroy and overthrow the temple, the city of Jerusalem and the other towns of Judah. The purpose of preaching God's judgement is to bring people to repentance and salvation. God sent Jeremiah also to proclaim salvation. If Israel repents, then God would build and plant them again. Ultimately, God used his judgement of godless and wicked people to carry out his plan of salvation. Nobody and nothing would be able to hinder God from accomplishing his plan of salvation! The lesson I learn is that the gospel message includes both judgement for those who refuse to repent and salvation for those who repent.

(T) **Sharing quiet times from Jeremiah chapter 10.**

People must choose between trusting in dead idols or trusting in the living God. God says to the people of Judah that they may not learn the ways of the nations, that is, they may not adopt *the religious customs of the nations* around them. These religious customs consisted of worshipping the sun, moon and stars and of worshipping idols, which they made themselves.

First. Astrology should be rejected. The worship of the sun, moon and stars was introduced into Israel by king Manasseh a half a century before (2 Ki 21:3,5). The worship of the starry host led to the exploitation of people by astrologers, who used the signs of the stars to make predictions for payment of money (Jer 8:2). They claimed that the signs of the stars in the sky had influence on people on earth. As a consequence many people believed in astrology and feared the predictions of the astrologers. However, the people of God should never be terrified of these signs of the stars in the sky, because it is God who commands the sun, moon and stars to shine in their appointed times (31:35). *It is God who determines the course of the stars and not the stars who determine the course of man. It is also God who determines the course of man on earth!* The lesson I learn is that Christians must radically reject every form of astrology and horoscopes.

Second. The characteristics of idols. With real satire, the prophet Jeremiah describes what all idols are like. Idols are *man-made* (3-5)! Therefore idols must be much less than man! A man cuts down a tree in the forest. He hires another

man to shape an idol out of the wood and overlay it with a thin sheet of silver or gold. He dresses the idol with clothes (9) and fastens the idol with hammer and nails to the floor so that it will not totter or fall over! The best way to describe idols is that they look like a scarecrow in a melon patch, which cannot even say "Shoo!" to scare the birds away. And if these idols have to be moved, then men must carry them, because they cannot walk by themselves. Jeremiah commands the people of God not to fear idols, because *they cannot do any harm*. And he commands the people of God not to trust in idols, because *they cannot do any good*. Idols are a fraud, lifeless, worthless (14-15), objects of mockery and will certainly perish in the Judgement Day. The lesson I learn is that every person who makes idols or worships idols lacks wisdom in the eyes of the living God.

Third. The characteristics of the living God. With a song of praise, Jeremiah describes the living God. The living God is unique and cannot be compared to anyone or anything. No one can make any representation or image of the living God. The living God is too great and powerful for any man to fathom or even to imagine (6). The God of the Bible is the Creator of everything and no one created and nothing created can ever be greater or more powerful than the Creator! Man-made idols cannot speak, but the God of the Bible constantly speaks and his speaking has effect. When God speaks, the sky thunders and the lightning strikes, the rain gushes down and the wind roars (13). God had chosen Israel to be his people (16), but Israel had chosen worthless idols and gods that never speak. The lesson I learn is that the God of the Bible is unique and cannot be compared to anyone or anything! I can only know who he is by listening to his self-revelation in the Bible.

(S) **Sharing quiet times from Jeremiah chapter 17.**

People must choose between trusting in human leaders or trusting in God.

First. Verse 1-4 describes Judah's sin and judgement. Judah's sin was evident everywhere. Everyone could see it. Just as it is impossible to wipe away letters that are engraved with an iron tool on a sheet of metal, so it is impossible to wipe away the sin from people's hearts. God saw the idolatry of Israel and he saw the hidden sins of their hearts. Therefore God decided to punish them. Israel's enemies would come and plunder their land and their wealth and all their treasures. Because of their own fault, they would lose their inheritance. God would allow their enemies to enslave them in a foreign land. The lesson I learn is that the defeats of every nation in this world is because of their sins against the God of the Bible. It is human sin that causes so much misery in human history.

Second. Verse 5-8 describes the choice God gives to each person. God wants every human being to make a choice between trusting in another human being or trusting in him. Throughout human history, people of all nations have put their trust in humans, in political leaders or military leaders, and in philosophical or religious leaders. The living God warns all such people that they will be cursed by God. Because they have trusted in man rather than in God, they will become like a bare bush in a dry wasteland. They will remain lonely and fruitless all their life and they will never see eternal prosperity. However, throughout human history, there have been people who have trusted in the living God, the God who revealed himself in the Bible. People like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Ruth, king David, the governor Nehemiah and Esther. The living God promises all such people that they will be blessed by God. Because they have trusted in the living God, they will become like a tree planted by a stream of water. They will never fear the difficult times of drought, because they have deep roots that go deep down to the water. They will never be dry and fruitless, because they always have green leaves and bear fruit in every season. The lesson I learn is that my genuine prosperity is dependant on my relationship to the living God of the Bible.

Third. Verse 9-10 describes the hidden heart of man. Why is it that so many people rather trust in man than in the living God? It is because their hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately depraved. The human heart is so deceitful, that by themselves, human beings not only deceive other people, but also deceive themselves and even try to deceive the living God. People deceive themselves by believing that they are *good* and not *evil*. And people who believe that they are *good* do not think that they need to repent and convert to Jesus Christ. People who think that they are *good*, will always blame others for the evil that happens in the world. They are spiritually blind and cannot see just how depraved they really are. People deceive themselves, by thinking that when they have a religion or keep the law, God would overlook their sins and not punish them. And people even try to deceive God by thinking that God cannot see into their hearts. So outwardly they act out the good life, while inside in their hearts there is hatred, sexual immorality, lies, cheating, murder, etc. The living God says that he only knows everything that is in the human heart. He examines not only the outward deeds of people, but also their inward and hidden hearts. The lesson I learn is that my inward nature is deceitful and desperately depraved. God knows everything that is in my heart. Therefore I need the Lord Jesus Christ as my Saviour, to give me a new heart and a hopeful future.

(T) **Sharing quiet times from Jeremiah chapter 18.**

People must choose between following their own plans or following God's intended plan for their life.

First. Verse 1-4 describes the potter and the clay. God gave another revelation to Jeremiah. Jeremiah had to go to the potter's house. There he saw the potter working at the potter's wheel making vessels from clay. But one pot was marred and so the potter shaped it into another pot as it seemed best for him. God used what Jeremiah saw to reveal to Israel what God would do with Israel.

Second. Verse 5-10 reveals that God's threats and promises are conditional. God said, "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as the potter does? Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand. If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not afflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it." This revelation of God emphasises *the close relationship between God's actions and man's behaviour*. When God threatens to destroy a nation and that nation repents of its sin, then God will not execute his threatened judgement! However, when God promises to build up a nation and that nation continues in its sin, then God will not execute his promised salvation. This prophecy emphasises *the conditional nature of God's threats of judgement and promises of salvation*. That is why God's promises of salvation and building up of the nation of Israel can be forfeited (confiscated) by their rebellion against God. And that is why God's threats of judgement and destruction against the Gentile nations can be averted by repentance and conversion to God. The lesson I learn is that I have a personal responsibility to avert God's threat of judgement by repentance and to claim God's promise of salvation by resisting sin persistently.

Third. God's threat to destroy Israel and use its remnant to build a new nation. Jeremiah saw how a vessel was marred in the hands of the potter and so the potter reshaped the clay into another vessel. In this picture, the intention is not to lay the blame for the failure of the vessel with the potter. The intention is to reveal to Israel, that *when the clay vessel does not become what the potter intended it to be, he will destroy the vessel and use the clay to make another vessel*. When a particular vessel does not come up to the potter's expectations, then he will make something else out of the clay. God's message to Israel is that *God has the right and power to change his original arrangements with the nation of Israel*. God had intended that Israel be his chosen and special people among all the nations, but when Israel does not repent of its sin and rebellion, God will certainly change his original arrangement with the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel will forfeit its special position and God will make other people into his chosen and special people on earth. God *had made* the house of Israel by taking them out of the clay of all nations in the world and made a beautiful vessel out of it. But by the time of Jeremiah only the two and a half tribes of Judah and Jerusalem were left over. And even this small remaining part no longer fulfilled God's purpose. They fell short of God's expectations. The lesson I learn is that God is already now taking people from every nation in the world, who believe in Jesus Christ, and making them into his chosen and special people, just as Matthew 21:42-44 and 1 Peter 2:9-10 teach.

Fourth. Verse 11-12 describes God's call to repentance and Israel's refusal. God called Israel to repent and said, "Look, I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions." In the beginning God had built Israel up. Now he threatened Israel with destruction. His threat could be averted only when Israel repented and turned away from evil to God. However, God already knew how depraved the hearts of people in Israel were. And so *the prophet put in words what Israel had hidden in their hearts*. The nation of Israel answered, "It's no use. We will continue with our own plans; each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart." With this reply, the prophet illustrated how unrepentant Israel was. It was useless for the prophet to rebuke and warn Israel, because Israel had already chosen to reject God's intended plan and follow its own plan! This was Israel's attitude shortly before they went into exile. The lesson I learn is that every person must choose whether he will follow God's intended plan for his life or his own plan.

(S) **Sharing quiet times from Jeremiah chapter 23.**

People must choose between speaking visions from their own mind or speaking the words of God.

First. Verse 13-15 contrasts two kinds of evil prophets. Especially in the northern kingdom of Israel, there were pagan prophets who prophesied by means of pagan spirits. They were the prophets of the idol Baal and they led God's people Israel astray. But especially in the southern kingdom of Judah, there were false prophets who pretended to prophesy in the name of the Lord, but in reality prophesied by means of lying spirits. The prophets of Israel were evil, but the prophets of Judah were worse, because the people thought that they were proclaiming the word of the Lord, while in reality they were proclaiming their own invented messages.

Second. Verse 16-22 contrasts the false prophets with the genuine prophets of Judah. The messages of the false prophets of Judah were characterised by religious formalism and by bringing messages the people liked to hear. Jeremiah 7:4 says that they depended on the temple building in their midst as a guarantee that no disaster would come over them. And Jeremiah 23:17 says that they proclaimed peace for Israel even when Israel despised the Lord. They promised that no harm would come on Israel even when Israel stubbornly continued to follow their depraved hearts. God said that these false prophets spoke visions from their own minds and not from the mouth of the Lord. God said

that the false prophets never stood in his presence and never received their messages from him. Conclusion: Some people claim to be God's prophets, but God himself rejects them as a prophet!

How can we know whether a prophet is a false or a true prophet (18)? How can we know whether a particular message is invented by a false prophet or is a genuine message from God? The Bible says, that there are three very important characteristics of true prophets and true prophecy:

One. All true prophets will live a holy and godly life. The false prophets commit adultery and live a lie, that is, they secretly live a different kind of life (14).

Two. All the true prophets will always preach repentance from sin against the God of the Bible. False prophets try to please their followers. True prophets will unafraid say to people what they must hear (22).

Three. All the prophecies of the true prophets will surely be fulfilled. After the prophecies of for example the prophets Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel were fulfilled, we know today that they were true prophets of God. The words that God speaks through a true prophet will always fully accomplish the purposes of God (20). Therefore, God commands his people not to listen to the false prophets of Judah or to the false prophets in other countries. The lesson I learn is that I must not believe every prophet, but that I must test them on three points: "Does he live a holy life?" "Does he preach against sin against the God of the Bible?" "Are his prophecies being fulfilled?"

(T) ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Every day have a quiet time from one chapter from Jeremiah. The selected chapters are Jeremiah 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 36 and 37. Record the meditations of all your quiet times in a notebook. Once a week meet with a friend or with a house fellowship or discipleship group and share your discoveries, lessons and blessings.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's kingdom" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".