

# LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for July 10: Submit to divine discipline

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The last desperate days of the kingdom of Judah had arrived. The long-prophesied destruction of Israel was just around the corner, though Israel's leaders could not see it. Jeremiah was not allowed to ease the harshness of his prophecies. Jeremiah's messages were now as insensitive as Jonah's (Jonah 3:4). The brutal Assyrians repented in response to Jonah's message. What would the Israelites do when they heard Jeremiah's message?

Implicit in God's messages are calls to repentance. God heartily responds to genuine pleas for mercy and honest commitments to submit to his leadership. Even at this late date, the people of Judah could turn to the Lord and receive compassion.

The same is true for people today. No matter what evil people become involved in, those who heed the divine warnings against sin and evil and turn to the Lord can experience new life, transformation and hope.

## **Spiritual unfaithfulness (Jeremiah 19:3-6)**

The great lessons from the potter's house are found in Jeremiah 18. Nevertheless, God was not finished with pottery. This chapter features a symbolic prophetic act. The act distinctly illustrates Jeremiah's message by depicting God's coming judgment.

Jeremiah was to smash a clay jar (v. 10) and declare God would destroy Judah and Jerusalem in a similar way. Just as a smashed jar cannot be repaired, so Judah would be smashed by the Lord's judgment and not

recover (v. 11).

The reasons for such harsh judgment are listed in verses 4-5: the people of Judah had forsaken the Lord, served foreign gods and offered human sacrifice. Verse 4 states gods that were once unknown now were being worshipped. The worship of Baal, a fertility god, had persisted in Israel for centuries. Normally Baal was presented grain and animal offerings. Baal worship also was accompanied by ritual prostitution. Only rarely were human offerings presented to Baal.

Things had changed in Judah. Verse 5 states the Israelites burned their children as offerings to Baal. This indicates desperation in the people's clamor for Baal's attention. Had the people faced repeated crop failures? Such was not likely. The Babylonians already had campaigned several times in Israel as they invaded Egypt. The people knew the Babylonians would return and they scrambled to convince their agricultural god to go to war for them. Desperate times demanded desperate measures. Such desperation was aimed in the wrong direction.

Here, Jeremiah does not speak of mercy. Nevertheless, his appeals to repentance elsewhere (Jeremiah 18:11) indicate the Lord's call to repentance had not expired. The compassionate Lord responds to desperate hearts (Psalm 42). Even in desperate times, the Lord will receive those who honestly seek him (Jeremiah 29:13).

### **Spiritual blindness (Jeremiah 21:1-5)**

Jeremiah's illustrated message earned him a beating and a night in the stocks (Jeremiah 20:2). Note that Pashhur, son of Immer, in Jeremiah 20:1 is not the same as the Pashhur, son of Malkijah, in Jeremiah 21:1.

Jeremiah's mistreatment, however, did not prevent King Zedekiah from requesting Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord. A crazy, "world-gone-mad" stupor hung over Judah's leaders. They opposed Jeremiah's prophetic

message on the one hand, then requested prophetic favors from him on the other. They didn't want to hear God's message, but wanted God to hear their requests. Meanwhile, the Babylonians were attacking (v. 2), just as Jeremiah had prophesied so many times before.

Zedekiah wanted a miraculous deliverance. God had miraculously delivered Israel on a number of occasions, but he never provided deliverance upon demand.

Jeremiah delivered his harshest message yet: God would turn Zedekiah's own weapons against him (v. 4) and fight alongside the Babylonians (v. 5). God would strike the city with the sword, plague and famine. Zedekiah and the survivors would be carried away and treated without mercy (v. 7). Such was the penalty for walking away from a covenant with the Lord. God would not rescue those who insisted on abandoning the covenant: they would live and die outside the covenant.

Remarkably, mercy only is available from the Lord: our God is a merciful God (Deuteronomy 4:31). Turning way from the Lord means turning away from mercy. Such is the insanity of living life by one's own wisdom: when life strikes hard, the spiritually blind desperately demand miracles instead of humbly seeking, and finding, the Lord and his mercy. The spiritually blind treat God as a servant, not the Lord.

### **Social injustice (Jeremiah 21:11-12)**

Even yet, with the Babylonians at the gates, Jeremiah called his people to prove their repentance by treating others with justice. One's consistent external activities demonstrate one's inward character.

Jeremiah taught this point in his landmark "heart" passage in Jeremiah 17:9-10. God searches the heart, examines the mind and rewards conduct. The three areas of life are consistent with each other, whether focused on good or evil. Jeremiah could point to conduct as indicating the condition of

the heart. Thus, a person committed to practicing lifestyle repentance would display social justice in their personal interactions.

At first glance, it might appear in verses 11-12 that Jeremiah relentlessly preached judgment. Actually, he was relentless in conveying the message one's actions reveal whether one is a true follower of God. This message is still important today, calling believers to examine their lives to discover the truth of their walk before God.