

# **LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for June 19: Live aboveboard**

June 7, 2011

This week's lesson explores the rich content of Jeremiah's famous temple sermon. His message stressed the importance of having a right and truthful relationship with God. Such a relationship is based on true commitment at the heart level, which, in turn, is reflected in justness in one's activities.

## **Hear the Lord's word (Jeremiah 7:1-2)**

Israel's place of worship was the obvious place to proclaim and receive God's message. Surely those who came to worship truly desired communication from the Lord. Jeremiah's message began with the command "Hear the word of the Lord" (v. 2). Genuine believers, whether in Jeremiah's day or ours, welcome God's word.

In Hebrew, hearing means more than mere listening. Hearing includes obeying (or doing; see James 1:22). Jeremiah had a message that God wanted worshippers to obey. No matter what the Lord's message may be, believers come to worship hoping to hear a word from their Lord. Genuine worshippers desire to hear and obey.

Believers should take regular inventory of their purposes and expectations in worship. The elements of worship easily are externalized by those who go "through the motions" without engaging the mind and heart.

True worship has two-way communication at its heart. Genuine followers of Christ believe the Lord responds to authentic expressions of worship. They crave communication from the Lord, knowing he speaks to their lives.

## **Correct your behavior (Jeremiah 7:3-8)**

The core challenge of the message comes in verse 3. God commanded his people to reform their ways. "Reform" is a repentance word that emphasizes the external action God desires to accompany internal repentance. The Old Testament teaches external behavior points to the true condition of the heart. Therefore, God expects to see works of repentance.

James explained the connection of faith and deeds in James 2:14-18, (especially v. 17). Jeremiah and James express similar concepts: one's external actions are direct reflections of the character and commitments of the heart.

A unique feature of Jeremiah's temple sermon is found in verse 4. Here the prophet mimics the repeated response of his people to the Lord's call to reform their ways. By answering, "the temple of the Lord," the people stated they believed God never would send any kind of judgment that would harm his temple. Therefore, the people were safe (see v. 10). Therefore, the people must be right with God. Therefore, Jeremiah must have God's message wrong. These are deceptive words, said Jeremiah, because God eventually would take the drastic step of destroying the temple to get people to think differently about their lives.

In verses 5-6, Jeremiah listed five actions that specified the type of reform God desired: change ways, act justly, don't oppress others, don't shed innocent blood and don't worship idols. Verse 7 repeats the conditional covenant promise indicating these five reforms are required to satisfy the covenant.

Occupation of the Promised Land was contingent upon obeying the Lord's commands (Deuteronomy 4:40; 30:17-18). The nation of Israel was very close to losing their Promised Land. Jeremiah pointedly exhorted his people to return to the Lord and exhibit evidence of a righteous walk with God.

Likewise, believers today should examine their lives and strive to exhibit deeds consistent with faith in Christ.

### **Get real (Jeremiah 7:9-11)**

Jesus taught in John 16:8 that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of its guilty status in sin. This section of Jeremiah expresses a similar observation when it states the Lord is “watching” (v. 11). The Lord told Jeremiah in his call vision (1:12) he was watching his people.

Look at what Jeremiah’s people thought they were getting away with—murder. Yet they thought they were safe (v. 10) before the Lord. Their behavior was miles off the mark, yet they thought they had a right standing before God because they had his temple in their midst.

God knows the conduct of people. He has intimate knowledge of each person’s heart. He knows their purposes, philosophies and commitments. He understands how a person’s actions reveal the truth of the heart.

1 Samuel 16:7 states: “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” Speaking through Jeremiah, the Lord wanted his people to look at their outward appearances or actions and understand what was revealed about their hearts. Lifestyle inspection must be a regular part of the disciple’s regimen.

### **Learn from past failures (Jeremiah 7:12-15)**

Now the Lord directly refutes the response of his people in verse 4. Do they really think they are safe from his judgment? They should remember what happened to the shrine at Shiloh, says Jeremiah.

The story is found in 1 Samuel 4. By that time, the tabernacle tent was in tatters. The sons of the priest Eli thought that they could guarantee an Israelite victory over the Philistines by carrying the Ark of Covenant into

battle. The Israelites were defeated, the sons of Eli were killed, the Ark was captured and Shiloh ceased being the center of Israelite worship. Thus, Jeremiah pointed to Shiloh's dark lesson: God will not be manipulated. He commands his people to maintain right relationships with him. There are countless benefits for those who serve God, but he will not allow complacency and sin to occupy the lives of his people. God desires a wholesome, heart-level relationship with his people.