DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

Call of the Prophet and First Pronouncements of Judgments

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Jeremiah 1:1 through 15:21

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant." (Jeremiah 1:9-10)

BACKGROUND

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, a priest who lived in Anathoth, which was a city of priests located three miles northeast of Jerusalem. At the time of his birth, Judah was ruled by its most wicked king, Manasseh. When Manasseh died, his son Amon continued his idolatrous practices. Thus, Jeremiah grew to adulthood at a time when idolatry flourished in the land.

In 640 B.C., Amon's own servants assassinated him. Josiah, Amon's son, became king and through godly counsel sought the Lord, purged the land of idolatry, repaired the Temple, and called his nation to repentance. Josiah led the nation into revival. It was during the thirteenth year of Josiah's good reign that Jeremiah was called to be a prophet.

Jeremiah's ministry as a prophet included the time between the fall of the Assyrian Empire and the rise of Babylon. Judah's geographical position placed the country in the middle of traffic between the three great powers of that time: Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt. The hostilities between these nations were used to magnify God's call to repentance and bring judgment on Judah for her sins.

The Book of Jeremiah opens with his call from God to be a prophet, and a prophecy of destruction that would come on the nation of Judah from the north (Babylon). The first chapter closes with God's promise to be with Jeremiah and to deliver him.

Chapter 2 begins a series of discourses directed to Judah. Chapters 2 through 8 are an appraisal of Judah's apostasy, depravity, and rebellion, combined with prophesies of judgment—destruction and desolation for the people and land because of their failure to repent and return to serving God.

Chapters 9 through 15 begin with Jeremiah deeply sorrowing in vain for a people who had totally abandoned themselves to everything vile. God lamented for His chosen people who had utterly rejected their inheritance by breaking their covenant with God.

OPENER

The Lord often commanded Jeremiah to use objects as symbols to graphically illustrate His message to the people. In chapter 13, the prophet was instructed to wear a linen girdle (like those worn by the priests to secure their outer clothing). Later, he was told to hide the girdle in a hole. When God told Jeremiah to retrieve it, it was marred and "profitable for nothing." God used this to demonstrate how good it was when Judah walked with Him. However, when the people turned to other gods, they became defiled and worse than the marred girdle.

All the pleadings of the Lord and intercession for the people by Jeremiah did not cause Judah to cry out to God for mercy. Chapter 15 ends with another promise from God that if they would return to Him, He would deliver them from their enemies.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. How did Jeremiah respond to God calling him to be a prophet, and why? Jeremiah 1:4-6

He was reluctant, saying, "I cannot speak: for I am a child." Jeremiah did not feel qualified because of his age and inexperience. He was one year younger than King Josiah, who was twenty-one and had reigned for thirteen years.

Class discussion should bring out that since most people are saved when they are young, God's call into areas of service may also occur when they are quite young. God has a task for each of us, no matter what our age, although obviously the nature of our assigned responsibilities will evolve as we grow older and mature spiritually.

You may want to ask the class to share how old they were when they first experienced the call of God to some specific task for Him. Brother George Hughes used to testify that his first task was picking up the songbooks after services in the Portland tabernacle! Like Jeremiah and Josiah, God can lead us and help us accomplish His purpose in our lives as we seek His counsel and will, no matter what our age.

2. Seven verses in the first two chapters of the Book of Jeremiah contain the phrase "the word of the LORD." What is the significance of this statement in these Scriptures?

The seven verses where this phrase is repeated are Jeremiah 1:2,4,11,13 and Jeremiah 2:1,4,31.

Discussion should bring out that the words spoken and recorded were not Jeremiah's private views or his personal Scriptural interpretations. They were divinely inspired and sent to him, the person God chose to deliver them. Jeremiah was faithful in speaking what he had been commanded by God.

You may want to ask your class how they can know what "the word of the LORD" is and how it is received. Lead them to understand that the Bible is divinely inspired and we can be assured of what it says.

NOTES

3. What two "evils" had the people of Judah committed, as recorded in Jeremiah 2:13? In your own words, explain the examples used in this verse.

First, the people of Judah had "forsaken me the fountain of living waters." And secondly, they had "hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

The people of Judah had forsaken the living God to worship idols. The fountains of living water represent God's goodness, ever pure and available. Cisterns are empty wells dug to catch runoff water from rain. A broken cistern, especially in the arid Middle East, would not hold water for any length of time. This illustration describes the total lack of help, substance, and value in serving idols.

As a follow-up, ask your class how people today turn to "broken cisterns" instead of the "fountain of living water." Some examples may include the use of alcohol or drugs. They might also bring out that, like broken cisterns, worldly pleasures and pursuits are vain attempts to bring contentment and a sense of fulfillment. Those who accept a Calvinistic approach (the teaching that living above sin is impossible) are certainly trusting in a broken cistern. Ultimately, anything that is substituted for the true worship of God would fall in that category.

4. Why did God consider Judah's sin to be greater than the sin of Israel? Jeremiah 3:6-8

Judah had watched God's judgment executed against the Northern Kingdom, Israel, when it fell to the Assyrians and the people were taken into captivity. Through Jeremiah, God compared Israel's backsliding to a woman who had left her husband and become a prostitute. Israel continued this wicked lifestyle despite the repeated calls of her husband, God, to return. Israel's sister, Judah, was even more treacherous because she saw the depravity and final outcome of her sister, yet still rejected God's call to return to Him.

Ask the class to consider the responsibility they have because of the Gospel they have received. Lead your class to understand that we are accountable for what has been entrusted to us.

5. During Jeremiah's ministry, other prophets prophesied falsely, and the priests ruled over the people by following the directions of these false prophets. According to Jeremiah 5:31, why did the people tolerate this?

Jeremiah 5:31 reveals that the people of Judah not only accepted the false teachings, but they loved them. The people had been in a backslidden condition for so long that they became accustomed to the practice of worshiping idols and performing outward rituals rather than serving God from their hearts. In time, they no longer recognized the fact that God's blessing and favor had been removed from them.

Ask your class why they think some people today become satisfied with less than the truth. Discussion may bring out a variety of reasons. Your class may note that some people are satisfied with a form of religion because it is easier; rituals of worship make them feel good about themselves without requiring any personal sacrifice or commitment. Others may not want to relinquish control of their own lives to God, or are resistant to the concept of being accountable to their Creator. The point should emerge that when self is enthroned instead of God, there will be resistance to the truth.

6. During Josiah's reign, God told the people of Judah, through the Prophet Jeremiah, that He would allow them to continue to inhabit their country if they would "amend" their ways and their "doings." (See Jeremiah 7:1-3.) Define the word *amend*. What is meant by "amend your ways and your doings?"

Webster's defines amend as: "To correct; to rectify by expunging a mistake; as, to amend a law. To reform, by quitting bad habits; to make better in a moral sense; as, to amend our ways or our conduct." The Hebrew term means "make well; make them good." Amend *differs from the word improve because it implies correcting something that was previously wrong;* improve *does not.*

God was not calling Judah simply to improve and make some spiritual adjustments; the people needed to repent, and their repentance needed to be evidenced by their deeds. God wanted them to amend their ways in order to honor His law both outwardly and inwardly. They could no longer be hypocritical in their spiritual walk.

This message, recorded by Jeremiah, may have been given at the time when the Temple repairs were completed. The people thought that the Temple's presence in their city and their ritual practices would save them from their enemies. However, Jeremiah confronted both the people and the religious leaders, emphatically letting them know that although they worshiped God by rituals at the Temple, they were still sinful in their daily lives.

Ask your class for ways that we can maintain a sincere worship of God rather than allowing it to become just a routine or a ritual. Examples might include considering the sacredness of our location, and remembering that the motive is not to be seen, but to worship.

7. Jeremiah 9:23-24 indicates that the Jewish people trusted in their own wisdom, might, and riches. In our day, too, people tend to trust in human wisdom, power, and wealth. If we are sincerely trusting God, how will that trust be evidenced in our lives?

Class responses to this question will likely bring out that a true trust in God will be evidenced by the

fact that we commit our lives into His Hands. We strive to obey Him in all areas of life. We look to Him for guidance in decisions, and appeal to Him for comfort and help in time of need. We have an assurance that He is in control, and even in times of adversity or trial, we have a deep settled peace that keeps us going forward.

8. Why did God lament over forsaking His house and His heritage? Jeremiah 12:7-13

God lamented because the Southern Kingdom had broken the covenant and had refused His call to repentance. Thus, God had determined to send judgment on the people. He inspired the prophet to use several different word pictures to describe the plight of Israel: a lion viciously turned against its Maker, a bird about to be attacked, and a vineyard that had been trampled and left in ruins. Judah's rebellious response to God's pleadings to return to Him caused God to ultimately allow other countries—instruments of His divine judgment—to brutally take away the remaining land that had been given to the Children of Israel for an inheritance.

Remind your class that in this passage it was God lamenting, not the Prophet Jeremiah. Ask your class to give examples of what causes God to grieve today as He looks on His creation.

9. The prophet lived through an evil and difficult time in his country's history, and in Jeremiah 15:10, he cried out in bitter anguish of soul, feeling himself pitted against the whole world. What promise was given to him in Jeremiah 15:11? What promises give us encouragement as we face difficulties in our lives?

The promise was, "It shall be well with thy remnant." The Lord was promising the prophet that the enemy (Babylon/Nebuchadnezzar) would treat him well at the time when the rest of the nation would be taken into captivity. (This promise was fulfilled in Jeremiah 39:11.) As you discuss this question, you may wish to refer to God's promise to Jeremiah when He called him to be a prophet (see Jeremiah 1:17-19).

The Lord has promised us that He will never leave us or forsake us. Remind your class that Jeremiah's account gives us assurance of the validity of God's promises. Lead the class to understand that even if we never have another day without difficulty in this life, as Christians, we have the hope and promise of eternal life.

CONCLUSION

Jeremiah was given the enormous task of calling an idolatrous nation back to God, knowing the people would not respond favorably. He witnessed firsthand God's longsuffering and love for His people as He pled with them to repent. We can draw comfort in knowing that we, like Jeremiah, serve a loving and merciful God.