

The Rebellious People

Jeremiah 13

Jeremiah 13:1-11 – *“Thus the Lord said to me: ‘Go and get yourself a linen sash, and put it around your waist, but do not put it in water.’”* ² *So I got a sash according to the word of the Lord, and put it around my waist.*

³ *And the word of the Lord came to me the second time, saying,* ⁴ *“Take the sash that you acquired, which is around your waist, and arise, go to the Euphrates, and hide it there in a hole in the rock.”* ⁵ *So I went and hid it by the Euphrates, as the Lord commanded me.*

⁶ *Now it came to pass after many days that the Lord said to me, ‘Arise, go to the Euphrates, and take from there the sash which I commanded you to hide there.’”* ⁷ *Then I went to the Euphrates and dug, and I took the sash from the place where I had hidden it; and there was the sash, ruined. It was profitable for nothing.*

⁸ *Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying,* ⁹ *“Thus says the Lord: ‘In this manner I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. ¹⁰ This evil people, who refuse to hear My words, who follow the dictates of their hearts, and walk after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be just like this sash which is profitable for nothing. ¹¹ For as the sash clings to the waist of a man, so I have caused the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to cling to Me,’ says the Lord, ‘that they may become My people, for renown, for praise, and for glory; but they would not hear.’”*

Background Notes

In Jeremiah 13:1-11 the Lord directed Jeremiah to give the people of Judah a sign, or an object lesson, as a warning of the future Babylonian captivity. This captivity and exile was coming upon them soon, as judgment for Judah’s rebellion and idolatry. So the prophet Jeremiah symbolically acted out a warning to the Jewish people about the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army.

The biggest question about this object lesson is verse 4. Jeremiah was living in Jerusalem. Did the Lord request him to travel all the way to the Euphrates River, which was several hundred miles away? That’s a very long round trip, just to enact an object lesson. And then Jeremiah would have had to make the round trip again, as we see in verse 6.

Since this was long and tedious travel in Jeremiah’s day, several alternative views have been proposed. One view is that this was a vision that the Lord gave Jeremiah - but there’s no indication in the text that this was merely a vision. Another view is that Jeremiah did indeed travel to the Euphrates River in Babylon (where Daniel and others were already in captivity), but he only made one round trip. He stayed on in the area until the time came to retrieve the rotted and ruined linen sash, and then he returned to Jerusalem.

A third interpretation is more likely. Near Jeremiah's hometown of Anathoth was a deep crevice in the rocks, called Perath. In the Hebrew text, the word "river" does not appear, and "Euphrates" and "Perath" are the same word in Hebrew. In fact, "Perath" may have represented the Euphrates. Thus, in this view, Jeremiah was directed to travel only a few miles north of Jerusalem to enact the object lesson. This interpretation makes more sense, since this object lesson was a message to the people who were still living in Judah.

Regardless of what view of the location is taken, it is the **message** of the object lesson that is important.

Doctrinal Points

1. God's rebellious people were like a ruined linen sash.

In this object lesson, Jeremiah was to wear a linen waistband or belt in public, for a certain amount of time. Then he was to take the linen sash to Perath, and hide it in the crevice of a rock. (Again, Perath may have represented the Euphrates, because of the similarity in Hebrew.) After many days, Jeremiah was to return and retrieve the linen waistband, which was now ruined and worthless.

What was the meaning of this object lesson? The linen sash represented all of Israel. God wanted Israel to be close to Him in fellowship. He wanted His people to represent Him, and to reflect His glory (v11). Linen was the material of the priestly garments, and it represented the fact that God had wanted Israel to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. (See Exodus 19:6.)

But the people of Israel had failed in their responsibilities. They had become rebellious. They had turned away from worshiping the Lord, so their fellowship with the Lord was broken. As a ruined and worthless nation, they would be sent away into captivity in Babylon (on the Euphrates River) for discipline.

This lesson is still true today. The Lord wants to have close fellowship with His people. We are to represent Him and reflect His glory. But when we rebel in areas of submission and obedience, and when we dabble in sin, our fellowship with the Lord is broken. Our testimony becomes like that ruined and worthless linen sash, and God must discipline us, just as He did His people Israel. God's rebellious people are like a ruined linen sash.

2. God's rebellious people were like smashed wine bottles.

Jeremiah 13:12-14 - *"Therefore you shall speak to them this word: 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "Every bottle shall be filled with wine.'" And they will say to you, 'Do we not certainly know that every bottle will be filled with wine?' ¹³ "Then you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord: "Behold, I will fill all the inhabitants of this land—even the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—with drunkenness! ¹⁴ And I will dash them*

one against another, even the fathers and the sons together,” says the Lord. “I will not pity nor spare nor have mercy, but will destroy them.”

In verses 12-14, was Jeremiah asked to dramatize another object lesson? Most likely he presented this message as a parable. In the parable, all the wine bottles were to be filled with wine. At first this may have sounded like a time of prosperity. The people liked this idea (v12), but Jeremiah corrected their mistaken thinking. He told them that the filled wine bottles represented the people’s drunken, stupid, and irrational behavior (v13). They would be destroyed like broken wine bottles when the Babylonians invaded (v14).

During times of prosperity, but there was rebellion in their hearts, God’s perspective of His people was not at all positive. We need to examine our own hearts, especially in times of prosperity. God’s rebellious people are like smashed wine bottles.

3. God’s rebellious people were like a scattered flock of sheep.

Jeremiah 13:15-27 – *“Hear and give ear. Do not be proud, for the Lord has spoken.*

¹⁶ Give glory to the Lord your God before He causes darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains; and while you are looking for light, He turns it into the shadow of death and makes it dense darkness.

¹⁷ But if you will not hear it, My soul will weep in secret for your pride. My eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears, because the Lord’s flock has been taken captive.

¹⁸ Say to the king and to the queen mother, “Humble yourselves! Sit down, for your rule shall collapse, the crown of your glory.” ¹⁹ The cities of the South shall be shut up, and no one shall open them. Judah shall be carried away captive, all of it. It shall be wholly carried away captive.

²⁰ Lift up your eyes and see those who come from the north. Where is the flock that was given to you, your beautiful sheep? ²¹ What will you say when He punishes you? For you have taught them to be chieftains, to be head over you. Will not pangs seize you, like a woman in labor?

²² And if you say in your heart, “Why have these things come upon me?” For the greatness of your iniquity your skirts have been uncovered, and your heels made bare. ²³ Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil.

²⁴ “Therefore I will scatter them like stubble that passes away by the wind of the wilderness. ²⁵ This is your lot, the portion of your measures from Me,” says the Lord, “because you have forgotten Me and trusted in falsehood. ²⁶ Therefore I will uncover your skirts over your face, that your shame may appear. ²⁷ I have seen your adulteries and your lustful neighings, the lewdness of your harlotry, your abominations on the hills in the fields. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! Will you still not be made clean?”

This warning message came to the people of Judah: because of their pride and their refusal to give glory to God (v15), darkness would overtake the nation (v16). The Babylonians would strike from the north (v20). The king and the queen

mother (v18) were probably King Jehoiachin and his mother, Nehushta (see 2 Kings 24:8). Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians would take the king, the queen mother, and all of Judah (including those in the cities of the far south) into exile in 597 BC and 586 BC.

At the time of invasion, Jeremiah would weep for the people, because they would be like sheep without a shepherd (v17). They were once a flock of beautiful sheep (v20), but they were about to be scattered - captured and ruled over by the very foreigners Judah had once relied on (v21). They would be like a woman in childbirth. Why? Judah had rebelled against the Lord, and turned away from Him into idolatry. Now Judah was about to reap what she had sown.

The Lord used the language of sexual assault in verse 27: *"I have seen your adulteries and your lustful neighings, the lewdness of your harlotry, your abominations on the hills in the fields."* The people of Judah had committed spiritual adultery, including literal physical adultery and prostitution when they participated in the pagan religious rituals.

Judah had reached the point of no return: *"Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots?"* (v23). The obvious answer to both those questions is No! In other words, Judah had reached the point of no return. Therefore, Judah would become like scattered sheep, and like dust blown away in the desert winds of Babylon (v24). This was their portion, because they had forgotten the Lord and believed lies (v25).

This is just as true today as it was then. God's rebellious people are/were like a scattered flock of sheep.

Practical Application

Let's not be heartless preachers and prophets!

More than once we've seen that Jeremiah was not a heartless prophet, though he had to pronounce God's judgment on the people. Again in chapter 13 we see that Jeremiah was not aloof or indifferent, or detached, or cold toward the people he had to warn. Verse 17: *"But if you will not hear it, my soul will weep in secret for your pride. My eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock has been taken captive."*

Jeremiah was not like some preachers today, who pronounce the truth of God's judgment on sin without any compassion for their audiences. Let's be more like Jeremiah. Let's truly care about the people to whom we reach out with the gospel. Let's not be heartless preachers and prophets!