

Disaster and Deliverance

Jeremiah 16

Jeremiah 16:1-16 – *“The word of the Lord also came to me, saying, ²“You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place.” ³For thus says the Lord concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place, and concerning their mothers who bore them and their fathers who begot them in this land: ⁴“They shall die gruesome deaths. They shall not be lamented nor shall they be buried, but they shall be like refuse on the face of the earth. They shall be consumed by the sword and by famine, and their corpses shall be meat for the birds of heaven and for the beasts of the earth.”*

⁵For thus says the Lord: “Do not enter the house of mourning, nor go to lament or bemoan them; for I have taken away My peace from this people lovingkindness and mercies,” says the Lord. ⁶Both the great and the small shall die in this land. They shall not be buried; neither shall men lament for them, cut themselves, nor make themselves bald for them. ⁷Nor shall men break bread in mourning for them, to comfort them for the dead; nor shall men give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or their mother. ⁸Also you shall not go into the house of feasting to sit with them, to eat and drink.”

⁹For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: “Behold, I will cause to cease from this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride.

¹⁰“And it shall be, when you show this people all these words, and they say to you, ‘Why has the Lord pronounced all this great disaster against us? Or what is our iniquity? Or what is our sin that we have committed against the Lord our God?’ ¹¹Then you shall say to them, ‘Because your fathers have forsaken Me,’ says the Lord; ‘they have walked after other gods and have served them and worshiped them, and have forsaken Me and not kept My law. ¹²And you have done worse than your fathers, for behold, each one follows the dictates of his own evil heart, so that no one listens to Me. ¹³Therefore I will cast you out of this land into a land that you do not know, neither you nor your fathers; and there you shall serve other gods day and night, where I will not show you favor.’

¹⁴“Therefore behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “that it shall no more be said, ‘The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,’ ¹⁵but, ‘The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.’ For I will bring them back into their land that I gave to their fathers. ¹⁶“Behold, I will send for many fishermen,” says the Lord, “and they shall fish them; and afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks.”

Background Notes

Back in Jeremiah 13 we saw two signs that Jeremiah was to give to the people of Judah: the sign of the ruined linen sash and the sign of the smashed wine bottles. Both of these signs predicted God’s judgment of the people because they had forsaken Him and His Law. Jeremiah faithfully communicated the message of these signs to the people.

Although these signs made Jeremiah a very unpopular prophet in Jerusalem, it did not greatly affect his lifestyle. In chapter 16, however, the Lord told Jeremiah to give three further signs to Judah, and these signs very definitely affected Jeremiah's lifestyle. The signs were three restrictions that Jeremiah was to follow. He was told not to marry, not to go to funerals, and not to go to parties. Suppose the Lord were to put these restrictions on any one of us - could we handle it?

Besides Jeremiah, God spoke to the people of Israel through the personal and family life of other prophets. Hosea's unhappy marriage was a message from the Lord to the northern kingdom of Israel (Hosea 1-3). Isaiah's children, including their names, were signs to the kingdom of Judah (Isaiah 7-8). The death of Ezekiel's wife was used by God as a sign of God's coming judgment of Judah (Ezekiel 24).

Doctrinal Points

1. Jeremiah's restrictions portrayed the bad news of the near future.

Jeremiah was never to marry, and never to have a family (v1-4). In those days, marriage and family life was the norm, just as it is today. Marriage was considered a blessing from God (which it is!). In Genesis 2:18 God said, *"It is not good that a man should be a lone. I will make a helper suitable for him."*

So this restriction in Jeremiah's life was a sign of what was to come in the near future, when the Babylonians swept through Judah and conquered Jerusalem. Family life would be so totally disrupted that it would be far better not to have married. Mothers, fathers and children would die from plague and starvation during the siege, and those who survived the siege would be killed by the sword or taken away as captives. Bodies would not be buried. The exposed corpses, rotting in the hot Middle Eastern sun, would become food for the birds and beasts.

And that was the point of the second restriction. Jeremiah was not to go to funerals, because when Jerusalem was conquered there would be no time or opportunity to practice the normal mourning and burial of the dead. So many thousands would die that the usual comforting meal after the funeral would be out of the question (v7). *"Both the great and the small shall die in this land. They shall not be buried; neither shall men lament for them, cut themselves, nor make themselves bald for them. Nor shall men break bread in mourning for them, to comfort them for the dead; nor shall men give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or their mother"* (v6).

By the way, according to the Law, the people were not to practice the mourning customs of shaving their heads or cutting their bodies to show their grief (v6). Deuteronomy 14:1 says, *"You are the children of the Lord your God and you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead."* However, the Jewish people had become wrongly involved in these pagan death rituals.

The third restriction that the Lord placed on Jeremiah was that he was not to go to any festive occasions, because the soon-coming Babylonian invasion would bring all rejoicing and gladness to an end.

In verses 10-13, the Lord told Jeremiah that if the people had the audacity to ask why God was judging them, he was to reply that it was not only the past sins of their forefathers, but for the sins of the present generation as well. The people of Jeremiah's day were even worse in their idolatry, rebellion, and disobedience. *"You have done worse than your fathers, for behold, each one follows the dictates of his own evil heart, so that no one listens to Me" (v12).*

For this reason the Lord was hurling them out of the Land of Israel and into the land of Babylon. *"Therefore I will cast you out of this land into a land that you do not know, neither you nor your fathers; and there you shall serve other gods day and night, where I will not show you favor."* Jeremiah's restrictions portrayed the bad news of the near future.

2. Jeremiah's prophecies included the good news of the far future.

Jeremiah 16:14-21 - *"Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "that it shall no more be said, 'The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,'¹⁵ but, 'The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.' For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers."¹⁶ "Behold, I will send for many fishermen," says the Lord, "and they shall fish them; and afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks.*

¹⁷ For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity hidden from My eyes.¹⁸ And first I will repay double for their iniquity and their sin, because they have defiled My land; they have filled My inheritance with the carcasses of their detestable and abominable idols."

¹⁹ O Lord, my strength and my fortress, My refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come to You from the ends of the earth and say, "Surely our fathers have inherited lies, worthlessness and unprofitable things."²⁰ Will a man make gods for himself that are not gods?²¹ "Therefore behold, I will this once cause them to know. I will cause them to know My hand and My might; and they shall know that My name is the Lord."

In verses 14-15 Jeremiah looked beyond the bad news of the near future to the restoration of Israel in the far future. By "far future" we mean not just the return of the Jewish people from Babylon when the Persians came to power, but the return of Jews to Israel at the present time and in the future, in the Last Days. Notice that they will return from all the countries where the Jews have been scattered (v15).

Clearly this prophecy is not to be spiritualized to the Church. It is not speaking of Christians - it's a prophecy that the Jewish people, as a nation, will literally return to the Lord, and to the Land that He gave to their fathers. Is that Land to be interpreted as some spiritualized "Church Land"? No, of course not! It's the Land of Israel!

In verses 16 through 18, Jeremiah returned to the bad news of the immediate future. The Babylonian forces would hunt down those people who had managed to escape the Babylonian “fishnet.” Their iniquity was not hidden from the Lord, and they would reap what they had sown.

But then in verses 19-21, Jeremiah returned to the good news of the far future. In these last three verses we see that not only will Israel turn from all her idolatry and return to the Lord, but the foreign nations will turn from idolatry as well! It seems almost too good to be true - but it will happen when the Lord returns. What a great day that will be! Jeremiah's prophecies included the good news of the far future.

Practical Application

Take a “His Land” tour with Dr. Dave!

You'll notice in the sermon outline on your handout that I left the word “His” as a blank. I gave you the letter “H” as a clue, knowing that most of you would guess ahead of time and fill in the blank with the word “Holy.” In Zechariah 2:12 the Land of Israel is called the “Holy Land.” And I love to lead our study tours to the Holy Land!

But notice – in Jeremiah 16:18 the Lord referred to the Land of Israel as **“My Land.”** *“And first I will repay double for their iniquity and their sin, because they have defiled My land; they have filled My inheritance with their detestable and abominable idols.”*

It's **His land!** The Lord owns the world, but the land of Israel is unique. It's **His Land** for **His people**. The nations are not to divide it up. The prophet Joel predicted that this is one reason why God will judge the nations: *“They divided up my land.” (Joel 3:2).*

It's great to see what God is doing in His Land even now, in preparation for the future. Come join us and see for yourselves! Take a “His Land” tour with Dr. Dave!