

Jeremiah 26 • The Contrast of God's Messengers

Introduction

Jeremiah and Uriah. Both were prophets of God sent during the same time to the same people with the same message. One's spiritual legacy endures to this day as one of the greatest prophets of all time; the other is but a supporting footnote to the other. It's the story of contrasts on many different levels: the contrasts between how people treat God's messenger and Word, the contrast of how God's messengers handle the situations they're sent into, and the contrast of truly living the message as opposed to merely carrying it. How are we supposed to treat God's messengers today? And what is our responsibility in carrying His Word to the church? Jeremiah and Uriah weren't missionaries or evangelists sent to the unsaved, but prophets sent to call God's people back to Him just as He is calling today for backslidden Christians everywhere to repent and return to Him.

¹In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the LORD, saying, ²“Thus says the LORD, ‘Stand in the court of the LORD’S house, and speak to all the cities of Judah who have come to worship in the LORD’S house all the words that I have commanded you to speak to them. Do not omit a word! ³Perhaps they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the calamity which I am planning to do to them because of the evil of their deeds.’ ⁴And you will say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD, “If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, ⁵to listen to the words of My servants the prophets, whom I have been sending to you again and again, but you have not listened; ⁶then I will make this house like Shiloh, and this city I will make a curse to all the nations of the earth.”’”

[Read v.1-6]

Q: What is the setting provided by knowing that this takes place early in Jehoiakim's reign?

A: Josiah was the last “good” king of Judah who introduced the deepest spiritual revival in their history. Upon his death, his evil son Jehoahaz almost immediately began forsaking God's ways; he only lasted 3 months. His brother Jehoiakim became ruler in his place. Taken with the previous chapter, this is probably around the 4th year of Jehoiakim's reign, meaning that it's probably not even been 5 years since the greatest spiritual revival of the nation's history, and it's backslidden further than from where it started.

Observation: *The book of Jeremiah is not strictly ordered chronologically. The incident detailed in this chapter appears to give a summary of the much larger message he most likely delivered at this time, which is provided in depth in chapter 7-9. Whereas 7-9 focus on the message, 26 focuses on the people's reaction to the message.*

Q: What might be particularly interesting about the group to whom Jeremiah is prophesying? What has drawn them together?

A: They have all come to Jerusalem “to worship in the LORD'S house”. These are all God's people who have ostensibly come together in and for His name.

Q: What are the 3 charges God brings against them in v.4-5?

- They are not listening to God.
- They are not walking in God's Word.
- They are not listening to God's Word through His prophets.

Q: If they're not listening to God, how is it possible for them to come and rightly “worship” Him?

A: It's not possible. They are living dual lives, committed to their own words and ways while simultaneously going through the motions of the things connected to God. Their obedience is only superficial, believing it's enough to just be associated with the things of God to satisfy Him.

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, “Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. “Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’”

Jeremiah 7:3-4

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Q: What happened at Shiloh that God is using as an example to warn them in v.6?

A: During Joshua's time, the tabernacle (the precursor to the temple) was established in Shiloh where it stood until, during Eli's time, the Ark of the Covenant was given over by God into the hands of the Philistines. (1 Samuel 4:10-11) It was a great spiritual lesson of losing the things of God due to following a corrupt and apostate priesthood and that God will not allow Himself to be worshipped in name only.

*For they provoked Him with their high places
And aroused His jealousy with their graven images.
When God heard, He was filled with wrath
And greatly abhorred Israel;
So that He abandoned the dwelling place at Shiloh,
The tent which He had pitched among men,
Psalm 78:58-60*

Q: So what was the lesson they should have learned from Shiloh which parallels their own time?

A: The things of God at Shiloh became repugnant to God because of the people's unfaithfulness and lack of obedience, so much so that He even gave up the Ark of the Covenant. These people have not learned the lesson that the things of God are meaningless without an appropriate commitment of faithfulness from the heart and have rendered the things of God repugnant to Him, even the very temple itself.

Application: *What do you suppose the consequences are for those who attend church and claim to be a Christian in name only, but who really aren't listening and following God from the heart?*

⁷The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. ⁸When Jeremiah finished speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, "You must die!" ⁹Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD saying, "This house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate, without inhabitant?" And all the people gathered about Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.

[Read v.7-9]

Q: What is one of the most common tactics of false teachers and false prophets which betrays the true condition of their own hearts?

A: They defend the things and institutions of God more than His name and Word. (This is most likely because of the personal benefit they derive from these things.) It's the exact same thing that the religious authorities did to Stephen in his day.

They put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us."

Acts 6:13-14

Point: *Have you ever noticed how many internal church battles seem to be fought over keeping a tradition or schedule or structure? Have you considered that the truth of what is going on may be discerned by seeing who is addressing the issue from the point of view of God's Word or not?*

¹⁰When the officials of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the Lord and sat in the entrance of the New Gate of the LORD'S house. ¹¹Then the priests and the prophets spoke to the officials and to all the people, saying, "A death sentence for this man! For he has prophesied against this city as you have heard in your hearing."

¹²Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and to all the people, saying, "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that you have heard. ¹³Now therefore amend your ways and your deeds and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the Lord will change His mind about the misfortune which He has pronounced against you. ¹⁴But as for me, behold, I am in your hands; do with me as is good and right in your sight. ¹⁵Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood on yourselves, and on this city and on its inhabitants; for truly the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing."

¹⁶Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and to the prophets, "No death sentence for this man! For he has spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God."

¹⁷Then some of the elders of the land rose up and spoke to all the assembly of the people, saying, ¹⁸"Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah; and he spoke to all the people of Judah, saying, 'Thus the LORD of hosts has said,

"Zion will be plowed as a field,
And Jerusalem will become ruins,
And the mountain of the house as the
high places of a forest.'"

¹⁹"Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the favor of the LORD, and the LORD changed His mind about the misfortune which He had pronounced against them? But we are committing a great evil against ourselves."

[Read v.10-15]

Q: What is different about the priests' and prophets' charge compared to Jeremiah's response?

A: Their charge is that merely prophesying against the things of God should be enough to be declared guilty, whereas Jeremiah holds to the greater issue of God being the Source. It truly reveals people who care more about the things of God than the Word of God, the very heart of the issue to begin with.

Q: How does Jeremiah respond?

A: With the truth. He is uncompromising in telling the whole truth both about God's message as well as what will happen if they pursue their present course against him personally.

Q: What is revealed in v.15 which indicates why Jeremiah probably didn't run away, even in the face of imminent personal danger?

A: "...the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words **in your hearing.**" His first and foremost duty is to God's Word, both as its messenger and as an example of living it.

Point: God may send His messengers into difficult situations, but they are to never waiver from the truth, nor to retreat without His direction to do so.

[Read v.16-19]

Q: Strictly speaking, why did the priests and prophets actually have no case against Jeremiah?

A: He could only be convicted as a false prophet under the Law by either prophesying in the name of other gods, or if even one of his prophecies did not come true. It's actually an indictment that they themselves don't actually know God's Word by which they want to put Jeremiah to death. The officials and people see this and acquit him.

Point: The second tactic most often employed by false teachers/false prophets is the misapplication and misinterpretation of God's Word while holding to the assertion that they themselves are experts in same.

Q: Why is the example of Micah and Hezekiah a very potent lesson for these people?

A: The time of Hezekiah was one of the few spiritual revivals that took place in Judah's history. So the example is that unlike Hezekiah's time when a prophet's message was heeded and judgment averted, this present people had not learned that lesson and were in danger of bringing all that Jeremiah said to pass.

Point: The elders seemed to know God's Word and will better than the false spiritual leaders. The false leaders were devoted to distorting God's Word, Jeremiah and the elders were devoted to establishing God's Word, and the crowd vacillated back and forth from one side to the other because they weren't properly rooted in God's Word.

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Application: *The example of nearly everyone's behavior involved so far is whether, like Hezekiah, they "fear the LORD" more than man. How does this apply to us personally when our commitment to God's Word comes into conflict with people and things associated with the church?*

²⁰Indeed, there was also a man who prophesied in the name of the LORD, Uriah the son of Shemaiah from Kiriath-jearim; and he prophesied against this city and against this land words similar to all those of Jeremiah. ²¹When King Jehoiakim and all his mighty men and all the officials heard his words, then the king sought to put him to death; but Uriah heard it, and he was afraid and fled and went to Egypt. ²²Then King Jehoiakim sent men to Egypt: Elnathan the son of Achbor and certain men with him went into Egypt. ²³And they brought Uriah from Egypt and led him to King Jehoiakim, who slew him with a sword and cast his dead body into the burial place of the common people.

²⁴But the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, so that he was not given into the hands of the people to put him to death.

[Read v.20-24]

Q: How is Uriah different than Jeremiah?

A: Although both provided almost the same, identical message, it appears that unlike Jeremiah, Uriah did not stand his ground and fled for his own sake. The implication is that he might have been more concerned about his life than his ministry.

Q: But even if true, how does this actually bolster the elders' support for Jeremiah expressed above in the example of Hezekiah and Micah?

A: Because even though the messenger was killed, it did not revoke God's judgment communicated by the message. It was a real-life example that the only right response to God's Word is to listen to it, obey it, and put it into practice.

Q: Who is this Ahikam who protected Jeremiah?

A: He was one of Josiah's foremost counselors who, when God's Word was rediscovered in the course of renovating the temple, was sent by Josiah to inquire as to the meaning of God's Word. He is someone that remained grounded in God's Word in spite of the spiritual ups and downs of Josiah and the sons who came after him.

Q: Why do you suppose that v.24 stipulates that Ahikam kept Jeremiah out of "the hands of the people" and not the religious leaders?

A: Just like the religious leaders of Jesus' time handed Him over to others to carry out their wishes, so would these current leaders influence the crowd to do their bidding.

Point: *A third tactic employed by false teachers/false prophets is to incite the crowd for their own purposes. As long as the crowd is ungrounded in and uncommitted to God's Word, they can be wrongly influenced to act for the things and name of God even when it's contrary to the actual Word of God.*

Epilogue

Whether it's just an individual, a congregation, or an entire spiritual movement, the fact that they continue to participate in the things of God, or associate their activities with His name, does not constitute proof in and of itself that they're actually still following God. The proof is in the degree to which they are committed to keeping His Word. Once that commitment is compromised, everything in reality is compromised. In biblical terms, truth cannot co-exist alongside error; so the truth is replaced with a close misrepresentation of God's Word while seeking a majority support of the crowd rather than the exclusive application of God's Word and ways.