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THE LOOKOUT

JUNE 2023

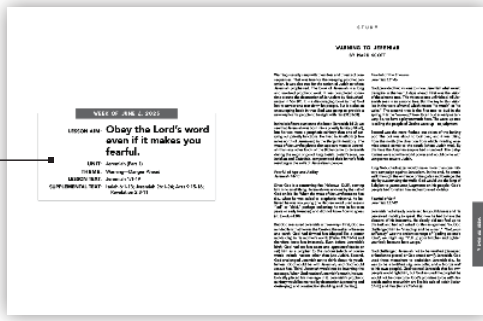
Unit: Jeremiah (Part 1)

Theme: Warning—Danger Ahead

Overview: We see warnings everywhere. Bridge out. Slow down. Don't drink the water. Warnings even predate the fall of humankind (Genesis 2:16-17). In the perfect Garden of Eden, God warned Adam and Eve against failing to trust his goodness. For the June lessons we are studying the book of Jeremiah, written by the weeping prophet, who also wrote the book of Lamentations, the subject of our May study. Students will learn how Jeremiah was warned about fear overtaking him, how worshipping anything other than God ends in judgment, how relying on a man-made temple is trusting in the wrong thing, and how liars like Hananiah will meet their doom.

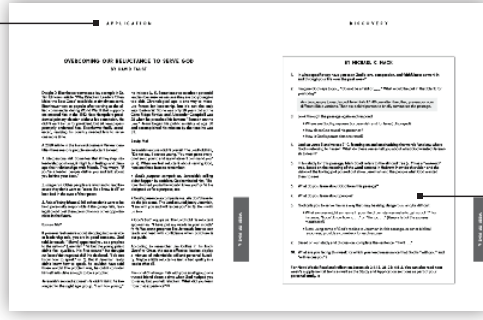
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF JUNE 25, 2023

LESSON AIM: **Speak God's truth
even when your own
ideas seem better.**

UNIT: Jeremiah (Part 1)

THEME: Warning—Danger Ahead

LESSON TEXT: Jeremiah 28:1-17

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Jeremiah 6:13-14; Ezekiel 13:8-9;
Colossians 3:9-10; Revelation 21:8

WARNING FOR LIARS

BY MARK SCOTT

Lying started early and finished late. The serpent said, “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4), and all liars will experience the second death (Revelation 21:8). People have many motivations for lying. Pride, saving face, selfishness, greed, and more can well up in a person and motivate them to be dishonest. Hananiah, it seems, was angered by Jeremiah’s message of doom.

Jeremiah had predicted that the captivity of Judah would be 70 years (Jeremiah 25). And even though Jeremiah was threatened with death (Jeremiah 26), he stuck with the message the Lord had given him about the upcoming exile by placing a yoke on himself (Jeremiah 27). The year is roughly 594 BC, and Jeremiah must correct Hananiah, the false prophet. The narrative and dialogical text might be outlined as follows (using contemporary idioms):

Fat Chance*Jeremiah 28:1-4*

Zedekiah was one of the sons of good king Josiah, but he was not like his father, and he ended up being the last king of Judah before captivity in Babylon. Toward the beginning of Zedekiah’s reign, *Hananiah* (which means, “the Lord is gracious”), *the son of Azzur* (“he that assists”) from *Gibeon* (in the hill country of Benjamin) spoke to Jeremiah in the temple in the hearing of the people and the priests.

Hananiah said he received his message from the Lord, but he lied. He claimed to be quoting God when he said, “*I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon*” (*New American Standard Bible*). The verb tense he used is called a “prophetic perfect” tense (i.e., it hasn’t happened yet, but it is being spoken of as if it had already happened). *Is someone a bit overconfident?*

Hananiah predicted that within two years everything would be back to normal. The *vessels* stolen from the temple would be returned, and *Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah* and the exiles would be brought home (cf. Jeremiah 22:26-27). Fat Chance! The reason he said “two years” was because Nebuchadnezzar had returned home to put down a rebellion (according to Babylonian Chronicles).

I Could Wish*Jeremiah 28:5-9*

It is challenging to determine whether Jeremiah is being sarcastic or genuine in this part of the dialogue. Jeremiah answered, “Amen!” in kind to the priests and the people

in the temple. This passage and Jeremiah 11:5 are the only two references to “amen” in the book. Jeremiah is saying “so be it,” or “I wish it were true.” Even though Jeremiah had predicted the captivity would be 70 years, he still could wish the exile would be over in two years. He would have loved to have the vessels and the people back home where they belonged.

But Jeremiah invoked the teaching of Deuteronomy 18:20-22 to answer Hananiah. The prophets *from early times* spoke about *war, disaster and plague*. They spoke about *countries and kingdoms*. If they spoke about *peace* or anything else for that matter, and it came true, then that prophet was a true prophet. Fulfilled prophecy met the test of truthfulness. Alternatively, if what the prophet said did not come true, then the prophet was not from God and therefore was a false prophet, as was Hananiah.

The Yoke’s on You*Jeremiah 28:10-17*

One can imagine that when Hananiah took the *yoke* from Jeremiah’s neck and *broke* (destroyed or crushed) it, it was done in a violent way. Hananiah used his violence as an object lesson to indicate that God would do the same thing to Nebuchadnezzar’s figurative yoke of bondage.

How much time passed between verse 11 and verse 12 is hard to say. But sometime later, God had a message for Hananiah via Jeremiah. “Hananiah, the Lord is going to replace the wooden yoke with a yoke of iron.” It will start with Judah and spread to other nations as well. God was going to use Babylon to accomplish his will no matter what lies Hananiah had told. The extent of every nation’s servitude was evident in the phrase that it will be even to *the wild animals*.

The place for object lessons and metaphors was over. Jeremiah said directly to Hananiah, “*The Lord has not sent you,*” and even worse, “*you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies.*” Next came the crucial, stinging sentence of death. “The Lord says: ‘I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die.’” The epilogue of the story is that roughly two months later, *Hananiah died*, and so did his false prophecy. The yoke was on Hananiah. ■

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APPLICATION

TRUST RUST

BY DAVID FAUST

A voter shakes his head in disgust while listening to a political debate. Neither candidate impresses him. "I don't believe a word they say," he mutters to himself.

A married man flirts with a woman at his workplace and their emotional connection grows into a sexual encounter. After his wife confronts him, the man is ashamed and repentant. He ends the affair, and after months of counseling, he and his wife are working hard to preserve their marriage.

After a series of poorly handled layoffs, a company's employees suffer low morale and worry about their job security.

A church's longtime senior minister retires, and the congregation faces a time of uncertainty as a new, younger preacher steps in.

What do these situations have in common? In each case, trust is low and needs to be rebuilt.

Building Trust

Our culture suffers from a bad case of truth decay. Lies are corrosive, and trust is vital to healthy relationships. For a marriage to work well, a husband and wife must be honest with each other. Morale breaks down when followers can't count on the integrity, competence, and good intentions of those in charge. Society suffers when government officials, company executives, and church leaders become embroiled in scandals. The result is "trust rust"—an erosion of confidence that eats away at our culture like rust ruins a car or metal tools corrode when left out in the rain.

Here are five things that weaken trust and five things that strengthen it.

1. *Inconsistency weakens trust, but faithfulness increases it.* It's difficult to trust someone who says one thing but does another, or who acts one way in public but behaves differently in private. Rather than being erratic and unpredictable, trustworthy individuals consistently fulfill their promises and keep their word even in small matters.

2. *Self-centeredness erodes trust, but unselfishness builds it.* Most of us have "phonydetectors" in our hearts, and we can tell if someone really cares. Suspicion grows when we sense others are pursuing personal gain more so than the well-being of others. Unselfish service generates trust.

3. *Defensiveness and secretiveness harm trust, while transparency and accountability improve it.* Trust rusts when individuals shift blame and refuse to acknowledge their weaknesses and failures. Trust grows when we admit our mistakes and accept responsibility for our decisions and actions.

4. *Unclear moral standards erode trust, but firm commitment to biblical principles builds it.* Truth frees people; lies confuse and enslave. The ethical guardrails found in Scripture can keep us on the right road. If we want to have healthy, trusting relationships in the home, church, and workplace, we must pursue what is right in the Lord's eyes, not merely what is comfortable and convenient.

5. *Impatience damages trust, but patience enhances it.* Damaged trust can be rebuilt, but the rebuilding process takes time and cannot be rushed.

In 1921, a sea captain named Robert Fergusson noticed that fish oil prevented rust from forming on his ship's metal deck. Working with a chemist, Fergusson developed one of the world's first rust-preventive paints. His discovery led to the beginning of a company we know as Rust-Oleum.

Thankfully, there is a solution for "trust rust." The Bible tells us the remedy: "Put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor" (Ephesians 4:25).

Personal Challenge: Using David's prayer recorded in Psalm 139:23-24, ask the Lord to search your heart and unveil any lies you have been believing, telling, or living. Personalize Jesus' prayer recorded in John 17:17 and tell the Lord, "Sanctify me by the truth; your Word is truth. Make me a person who believes, tells, and lives the truth." ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. What have you done over the past week to make sure your priorities are in the right order?
2. When have you told the truth even when a lie sounded better or was easier?

Ask two people to read aloud **Jeremiah 28:1-17** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. Jeremiah had earlier prophesied the Babylonian captivity—which was punishment for the evil ways and practices of the people and for not listening to his prophets—would last 70 years (Jeremiah 25:8-11). Hananiah’s false prophecy was therefore in direct opposition to what God told Jeremiah. How would you summarize the conflict between Jeremiah and Hananiah?
 - Why would the people have preferred Hananiah’s prophecy over Jeremiah’s?
 - How would you characterize Jeremiah’s responses to Hananiah throughout this chapter?
4. In what ways was Hananiah’s so-called prophecy *rebellion* against the Lord?
5. What do you learn about people from this passage?
6. What do you learn about God?
7. What warnings do you see for people who claim to speak for God or for those who teach? (*cf. Deuteronomy 18:20; Matthew 7:15; James 3:1.*)
8. God’s Word instructs us to “put off falsehood and speak truthfully” (Ephesians 4:25). In what places or situations do you expect this to be the most difficult for you to implement this week?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: “I will . . .”
10. In what ways will you need God’s help in putting off falsehood and speaking the truth this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Jeremiah 18:1-12; 24:1-10** as we continue studying the book of Jeremiah with a new theme, “Hope for the Hopeless.” You can also read next week’s supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖