



1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Jeremiah, Part 1

Theme: Warning—Danger Ahead

Overview: This study introduces the weeping prophet Jeremiah, whom God called to warn the nation of Judah that judgment was coming. Students will learn to obey the Lord's word even when it makes them fearful, to turn away from whatever they want more than God, to put their hope and security only in the Lord rather than in religious routines, and to speak God's truth even when their own ideas seem better.

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.

INTRODUCTION

Author

The book records “the words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin” (Jeremiah 1:1). God called him as a young man to be “a prophet to the nations” (1:5-6). His scribe, Baruch, wrote down many of his messages (Jeremiah 36:4, 32). Because of his grief over his people’s sin and coming judgment, Jeremiah is often called “the weeping prophet” (Jeremiah 9:1).

Audience

Jeremiah spoke primarily to the people of Judah and Jerusalem—kings, priests, false prophets, and ordinary citizens—during the nation’s final decades before the exile. He also delivered messages concerning the surrounding nations (Jeremiah 46–51) and wrote a letter to the exiles in Babylon (Jeremiah 29).

Date

Jeremiah’s ministry began in the thirteenth year of King Josiah (about 627 BC) and continued through the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, until Jerusalem fell to Babylon in 586 BC and beyond (Jeremiah 1:2-3)—a span of more than 40 years.

Setting

The Assyrian empire was crumbling and Babylon was rising as the dominant world power. Despite King Josiah’s reforms, Judah’s heart had turned to idols, injustice, and empty religious ritual. Jeremiah warned that disaster was coming “from the north” (Jeremiah 1:14), and he lived to see Nebuchadnezzar besiege

Jerusalem, destroy the temple, and carry the people into captivity.

Theme

God would “uproot and tear down, . . . destroy and overthrow,” but also “build and plant” (Jeremiah 1:10). Jeremiah’s message is a warning of danger ahead for a people who had forsaken the Lord, “the spring of living water” (2:13), along with a promise that God would one day make a new covenant with his people (31:31-34).

Why Study Jeremiah?

Jeremiah shows what it looks like to be faithful when God’s message is unpopular. This study calls believers to obey the Lord even when they are afraid, to reject the idols that compete for their hearts, to trust God himself rather than religious places or routines, and to speak the truth even when lies sound better.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: Jeremiah 1:1-19

WEEK 2: Jeremiah 2:1-13, 26-28; 4:1-2

WEEK 3: Jeremiah 7:1-15, 21-23

WEEK 4: Jeremiah 28:1-17

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Obey the Lord's word
even if it makes you
fearful.**

STUDY: Jeremiah, Part 1

THEME: Warning—Danger Ahead

LESSON TEXT: Jeremiah 1:1-19

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Isaiah 6:1-13; Jeremiah 26:1-24; Acts 9:15-16;
Revelation 2:8-11

WARNING TO JEREMIAH

BY MARK SCOTT

Warnings usually carry with them fear and threats of consequences. That was true for the weeping prophet Jeremiah. It was also true for the nation of Judah to whom Jeremiah prophesied. The book of Jeremiah is a long and involved prophetic work. It was completed sometime around the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. It is a discouraging book in that God has to uproot and tear down his people. But it is also an encouraging book in that God was going to provide a new way for his people to be right with him (31:31-34).

In the brief introduction to this book (Jeremiah 1:1-3), we see that Jeremiah was born into a priestly family (Hilkiah), but his was more a prophetic ministry than one of carrying out priestly functions. He lived in Anathoth (a few miles north of Jerusalem) in the Benjamin territory. The *word of the Lord* (a phrase that appears more in Jeremiah than any other book of the Bible) came to Jeremiah during the reign of good King Josiah. Josiah's sons, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, compromised their father's faith resulting in the exile of Jerusalem's people.

Fearful of Age and Ability*Jeremiah 1:4-10*

Since God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29), serving him is no small thing. Jeremiah was undone by the call of God on his life. When the word of the Lord came to him (i.e., when he was called to prophetic ministry), he believed he was *too young* (the Hebrew word used means "lad" or "child," perhaps indicating he was in his teen years or early twenties) and did not know how to speak (cf. Exodus 4:10).

But God reassured Jeremiah in three ways. First, God reminded him that he was the Creator, the maker of heaven and earth. God had *formed* him (shaped like a potter molds clay) in his mother's womb (Psalm 139:13-16) and therefore knew him intimately. Even before Jeremiah's birth, God had set him apart and *appointed* (made or set) him as a prophet to the nations (which of course would include nations other than just Judah). Second, God challenged Jeremiah not to think about his youthfulness. God would be with Jeremiah, and God would rescue him. Third, Jeremiah would not be inventing the message. When God touched Jeremiah's mouth, he symbolically placed his message in it. Jeremiah's prophetic ministry would be marked by destruction (*uprooting and destroying*) and construction (*building and planting*).

Fearful of the Enemies*Jeremiah 1:11-16*

God provided two visions to show Jeremiah what would transpire in the fearful days ahead. First was the vision of

the *almond tree*. This vision seems unfinished. All Jeremiah sees is an almond tree. But the key to this vision lies in the word *almond*, which means "to watch" or "to wake." The almond tree is the first tree to bud in the spring. It is the "wake-up" tree. It can bud as early as January. So, we have a play on words here. The wake-up tree is calling the people of God to wake up—to judgment.

Second was the more fleshed-out vision of the *boiling pot*. The pot was about to boil over, and it was tilting from the north (the direction from which invading enemies would come) to the south (where Judah was). By this time the Assyrian empire had crumbled. The Babylonians were now the world power and would come with vengeance toward Judah.

King Nebuchadnezzar would make more than one military campaign against Jerusalem. In the end, he would walk through the entrance of the gates and besiege the city by surrounding the walls. God would use the king of Babylon to pronounce judgments on his people. God's people had forsaken him and embraced idolatry.

Fearful of Self*Jeremiah 1:17-19*

Jeremiah had already confessed his youthfulness and his perceived inability to speak. But now he had to face the demons of his insecurity. He clearly did not feel up to this task and had not asked for this assignment. So, God challenged him to "stand up and be a man." "Get yourself ready" was the ancient concept of "girding up one's loins"; we might say, "Pull up your britches and tighten your belt, because here we go."

God challenged Jeremiah not to be *terrified* (dismayed or broken to pieces) or God would terrify Jeremiah. God used three metaphors to embolden Jeremiah (i.e., he was to be a *fortified city*, *iron pillar*, and a *bronze wall* to his own people). God warned Jeremiah that his own people would fight him, but God assured the prophet he would not be overcome. God's promises to be with Jeremiah and to rescue him are like his calls of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-13) and Paul (Acts 9:15-16).

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OVERCOMING OUR RELUCTANCE TO SERVE GOD

BY DAVID FAUST

Dwight D. Eisenhower serves as a key example in Dr. Tim Elmore's article "Why Reluctant Leaders Often Make the Best Ones" (available at timelmore.com). Eisenhower was so popular after serving as the allied commander during World War II that supporters entered him in the 1952 New Hampshire presidential primary election without his permission. He didn't want to run for president, but 24 newspapers promptly endorsed him. Eisenhower finally acquiesced, realizing his country needed him to serve one more time.

A 2020 article in the *Harvard Business Review* identifies three reasons people are reluctant to lead:

1. Interpersonal risk. Some fear that if they step into leadership positions, it might hurt feelings and damage their relationships with friends. They worry, "If you're a leader, people dislike you and talk about you behind your back."

2. Image risk. Other people are reluctant to lead because they don't want to "seem like a know-it-all" or look bad in the eyes of their peers.

3. Risk of being blamed. Still others don't want to be held personally responsible if the group fails, fearing it could cost them promotions or other opportunities in the future.

Excuse Me?

If you ever feel unsure about stepping into a service or leadership role, you are in good company. God told Jeremiah, "I [have] appointed you as a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5), but the young priest didn't feel qualified. His first excuse? He thought he lacked the required skill. He declared, "I do not know how to speak" (v. 6). But if Jeremiah really didn't know how to speak, he couldn't have said those words! The problem was, he didn't consider himself articulate enough to be a prophet.

Jeremiah's second excuse? He didn't think he belonged to the right age group. "I am too young," he insisted (v.

6). Sometimes we overlook potential leaders because we assume they are too young (or too old). Chronological age is one way to measure fitness for leadership, but it's not the only way. Barton W. Stone was only 28 years old at the Cane Ridge Revival and Alexander Campbell was 28 when he preached his famous "Sermon on the Law." Jesus began his public ministry at age 30 and accomplished his mission by the time he was 33.

Equip Me!

Jeremiah's excuses didn't prevail. The Lord told him, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you" (v. 7). When we feel reluctant about serving God, here are three facts to remember:

- **God's purpose compels us.** Jeremiah's calling didn't happen by accident. God reminded him, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (v. 5). He designed us for a purpose, too.
- **God's presence accompanies us.** We don't have to do the job alone. The Lord assured jittery Jeremiah, "I am with you and will rescue you" (v. 8). He is with us, too.
- **God's truth equips us.** The Lord told his reluctant spokesman, "I have put my words in your mouth" (v. 9). We aren't prophets like Jeremiah, but we can teach and lead with confidence when Scripture is our guide.

According to researcher Jim Collins in his book *Good to Great*, the most effective leaders display a mixture of indomitable will and personal humility. Maybe a little reluctance isn't a bad quality in a leader after all.

Personal Challenge:

Talk with your small group or a trusted friend about a time when God nudged you to serve, but you felt reluctant. What did you learn from that experience?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. In what specific way have you seen God's love, compassion, and faithfulness at work in and through your life over the past week?
2. Imagine God says to you, "Do not be afraid of _____. " What would he put in that blank for you today?

Ask two people to read aloud **Jeremiah 1:1-19**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. Look through the passage again and respond:
 - Where are God's purposes (for Jeremiah and for Israel) displayed?
 - How does God reveal his presence?
 - How is God's power demonstrated?
4. Look at verse 5 and verses 7-10, focusing on and emphasizing the words *I* and *my*, where God is referring to himself. What do these verses tell you about what God wanted Jeremiah to learn?
5. In his study for this passage, Mark Scott refers to the almond tree (v. 11) as a "wake-up" tree, based on the meaning of the word *almond* in Hebrew. How do this vision and the vision of the boiling pot poured out show Jeremiah and the people what God wanted them to see?
6. What do you learn about God from this passage?
7. What do you learn about people?
8. God calls you to serve him in a way that may be risky, dangerous, and/or difficult.
 - What excuses might someone in your life circumstances make to get out of it? For instance, "I don't know how to . . ." or "I'm too . . ." (Keep a list of the excuses mentioned.)
 - Now, using some of God's replies to Jeremiah in this passage, or other biblical responses, provide a comeback for each excuse.
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. What are you facing this week for which you need reassurance that God is "with you" and "will rescue you"?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Jeremiah 2:1-13, 26-28; 4:1-2**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Turn away from
whatever you want more
than God.**

STUDY: Jeremiah, Part 1

THEME: Warning—Danger Ahead

LESSON TEXT: Jeremiah 2:1-13, 26-28; 4:1-2

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Exodus 20:1-6; Isaiah 44:9-20; 1 Corinthians 8:1-7; 1 John 5:21

WARNING FOR IDOL WORSHIPPERS

BY MARK SCOTT

An idol is a substituted and false god. In fact, idols are *worthless* (Jeremiah 2:5). This word, *worthless*, is memorably translated “vanity” or “meaninglessness” in Ecclesiastes. The lesson’s supplemental texts help us understand this. We are to have no other gods (Exodus 20:1-6). Idols are literally dumb—i.e., they cannot speak (Isaiah 44:9-20; cf. Psalm 115:2-8). There are so-called “other gods,” but there really are not other gods at all (1 Corinthians 8:1-7). We are to keep ourselves from idols (1 John 5:21). This section of Jeremiah begins 13 oracles of God’s case against Judah that continue through chapter 25. The content can be framed up with the help of questions.

What Happened to You?*Jeremiah 2:1-3*

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, so he followed instructions and went and “proclaimed” (called) to Judah. The proclamation was a call back to their original faithfulness to the Lord. Their *devotion* (*chesed*; i.e., loyal love) was strong in the early days. It was likened to a bride loving her husband. She was faithful in following God’s leading through the wilderness. Israel was *holy* (set apart) to the Lord in its earliest days. She was likened to the *firstfruits* of the harvest. She was also victorious at every turn. In fact, *disaster* (evil) would befall any nation that tried to devour Judah. So, what happened to this earliest devotion?

What Is Wrong with Me?*Jeremiah 2:4-8*

Jeremiah then asked what *fault* (iniquity or wickedness) Judah found in God. Was Israel’s waywardness somehow God’s fault? When God’s people follow worthless idols, they become what they follow (cf. Hosea 9:10). God delivered them out of Egyptian slavery. One would have expected the people to ask, “Where is the Lord?” After all, God led them through a barren, dry, and uninhabited desert. Then he planted them in a *fertile* (*karmel*; i.e., plentiful) land that provided for their every need. One would have thought they would live in total obedience.

Instead, Israel *defiled* (polluted) and made God’s inheritance (his people) *detestable* (abominable or disgusting). Making matters worse, the *leaders* (shepherds) led the way in this rebellion. Priests, teachers of the law, and prophets stoked the disobedience. Instead of God being the source of their revelation, they turned to Baal (the Canaanite god of fertility). What terrible thing had the Lord done to deserve this response?

Why Not Look Around?*Jeremiah 2:9-13*

God brought *charges* (pleadings or chidings) against Judah, and he would also bring them against subsequent generations. While every individual is responsible for their own sin (Ezekiel 18:4), the effects of sin affect multiple generations. So, God called Judah to take a field trip and see if other nations had exchanged their gods. Did the island of Cyprus give up on its god? Did Kedar (the sons of Ishmael) give up on its god? Do nations typically change gods? Jeremiah then added, “Yet they are not gods at all” (which Paul also taught the Corinthians).

Jeremiah sounded like Paul again when he charged Judah with exchanging God for idols (Romans 1:22-23). Even the heavens would be *appalled* (awestruck) by this. God’s people made two mistakes other nations had not made. They forsook their God and tried to be their own god. They jettisoned the *spring of living water* and dug their own *cisterns*.

Who Can Really Save?*Jeremiah 2:26-28*

Jeremiah 2:14-25 (the intervening verses which are not part of the lesson text) basically affirm that Judah had no one to blame but herself. The people brought trouble on themselves. Jeremiah uses the illustration of a thief who is *disgraced* (shamed) when he is caught.

Much like Isaiah (his predecessor), Jeremiah mocked idolatry (Isaiah 44:9-20). The kings, officials, priests, and prophets went belly-up by addressing wood and stone as their father and mother. They turned away from God, but then, in a pinch, cried out for God to save them. That was audacious. Idols cannot really save, as evidenced by their inability to help Judah in her time of need. Judah had as many gods as it had towns, but they were of no consequence.

How Can This Work for Good?*Jeremiah 4:1-2*

After a further call for repentance (in Jeremiah 3), the prophet offered a deal with Judah. If they would *return* (repent or turn around) and put away their idols, seek truth, justice, and righteousness, and swear by God in their vows to him, then God would work everything for good. Essentially Judah would end up advertising for God. The nations would see God’s care for his people and boast of the God of Israel.

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ACCEPT NO SUBSTITUTES FOR GOD

BY DAVID FAUST

The Egyptians worshipped the sun god Ra. The Canaanites worshipped Baal and Ashtoreth. The Greeks honored so many deities they even erected a statue to “An Unknown God” in case they missed one. The silversmiths’ union in Ephesus sold silver statues of the goddess Artemis, so they became upset when Paul’s preaching about the true God interfered with their business model.

But pagans aren’t the only ones who worship idols. God’s covenant people sometimes make the same mistake. That’s why the first of the Ten Commandments warns, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3) and John cautions believers, “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

While Moses received God’s commandments on Mount Sinai, the Hebrews were melting down their jewelry to make a golden calf. Later, God instructed Moses to put a bronze serpent on a pole, and those who looked toward it in faith were healed from poisonous snake bites. At first the bronze snake was a good thing—a gift from God. But the Israelites turned it into an idol and centuries later King Hezekiah had to destroy it (2 Kings 18:4).

Good Things Viewed as Ultimate Things

Today’s spiritual substitutes are subtle and sophisticated. The author Tim Keller points out that idols don’t always look bad on the surface, but often they are “good things turned into ultimate things—things that constitute our most fundamental significance and security.”

Keller wrote in *Counterfeit Gods*, “An idol is anything more important to you than God. Anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God. . . . Anything that is so central and essential to your life, that should you lose it your life would feel hardly worth living.”

Work is good, but not if it crowds out God. Food is a blessing, but Scripture warns about people whose “god is their stomach” (Philippians 3:19). It’s fine to enjoy

sports and social media, but how much time, money, and emotional energy do these activities deserve? Sexuality is a gift to be enjoyed in marriage, but in Jeremiah’s day the culture had become so preoccupied with sex and accustomed to moral laxity that people forgot how to blush and behaved like “well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man’s wife” (Jeremiah 5:8; 6:15).

It’s good to have healthy self-esteem, but not to elevate our own ideas above God’s wisdom. We should appreciate nature and care for the environment, but never worship created things rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). It’s fine to earn, save, and spend, but Jesus warned, “You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24) and Paul called greed a form of idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

Cisterns and Scarecrows

The true God is like a reliable spring of clean, refreshing water. God-substitutes are like “broken cisterns that cannot hold water” (Jeremiah 2:13). A spring gives and gives; a cistern merely collects rainwater, which eventually becomes stagnant. False gods can’t satisfy thirsty souls.

Here’s another analogy: “Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field, their idols cannot speak” (Jeremiah 10:5). False gods are flimsy, like scarecrows made from wood and straw. They don’t last; they must be propped up; they are mindless and powerless.

But the true God—our Creator, Father, and Redeemer—is unrivaled. Let’s recognize God’s rightful place and pray, “No one is like you, Lord; you are great, and your name is mighty in power” (Jeremiah 10:6).

Personal Challenge:

What false god threatens your love for the true God?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Has God recently called you to serve him in a way that could be risky, dangerous, and/or difficult? How have you responded to him?
2. What is something on which people spend lots of money, time, or energy which is ultimately worthless? (Why do you think they do that?)

Ask two people to read aloud **Jeremiah 2:1-13, 26-28; 4:1-2**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. Throughout this passage, in what different ways did people treat God?
 - How did God respond?
4. Like the church in Ephesus, the Israelites had forsaken the love they had at first (Revelation 2:1-4). What causes people to stray so far from a loving and glorious God?
5. Look again at the charges God brought against Israel (2:9-13). What charges would God bring against his people today?
 - In light of those charges, how should we respond? (See 4:1-2; Revelation 2:5.)
 - How will God respond if we do return to him?
6. What do you learn about God's nature from this passage? (See especially 2:7 and 4:1-2; cf. Luke 15:11-24.)
7. What do you learn about yourself?
8. How can you use this passage to share God's truth and grace with someone who has strayed from God?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. In what area of life are you currently asking, "Where is the Lord?"

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Jeremiah 7:1-15, 21-23**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Put your hope and security only in the Lord.**

STUDY: Jeremiah, Part 1

THEME: Warning—Danger Ahead

LESSON TEXT: Jeremiah 7:1-15, 21-23

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Psalm 78:56-62; Jeremiah 26:4-9; Ezekiel 13:10-16; Matthew 24:1-2

WARNING FOR TEMPLE WORSHIPPERS

BY MARK SCOTT

Misplaced trust can lead to feelings of betrayal or disappointment. A politician lies. A sports figure uses muscle-enhancing drugs. A believer (you can fill in the blank). Judah had given themselves false hope by placing their faith in the temple instead of the God who inhabited the temple. Jeremiah 7–10 forms what is called the Temple Address.

God's people had undergone physical circumcision, but their hearts still required spiritual circumcision (Jeremiah 4:4). They had chased after their own lusts (5:8). They did not know how to blush over their sins (6:15). They had failed to ask for the ancient paths (6:16). Therefore, God remained committed to bringing disaster on them from the north—i.e., Babylon (4:6).

Misplaced Trust*Jeremiah 7:1-11*

God's word came to Jeremiah again, and Judah was challenged to hear it. Jeremiah was to stand at one of the gates of the temple and *proclaim* (call) the Lord of *hosts'* (armies) message as the people entered the temple. Judah was told to *reform your ways and your actions*. The word *reform* means "to be pleasing or to be good" toward someone. If Judah would just do this they could continue to dwell in the temple and the Promised Land. Unfortunately, they were deaf to Jeremiah's challenge. *The temple of the Lord* had become a good luck charm. They were trusting in deceptive words that were worthless.

Their presumptuous actions peaked in their blatant sinful behavior while speaking about the temple of the Lord as a magical formula. They were involved in several sins while placing their false hope in the temple. They were not executing justice. They oppressed the sojourner. They oppressed the fatherless and the widow. They murdered people who were innocent. They enthusiastically pursued the idol gods to their own *harm* (evil). They broke Commandments six through nine that God handed down to Moses. They made offerings to Baal. They boasted that they had been rescued but went on doing all these *detestable* (desecrating or unclean) things. The temple, in which they had placed their trust, had become a *den of robbers*. Jesus used this very phrase when he cleansed it (Matthew 21:12-13).

Antecedent Theology*Jeremiah 7:12-15*

Walter C. Kaiser emphasizes the use of "antecedent theology" when reading the Bible. His position is that

instead of borrowing freight from later pages of the Bible to understand the text, the reader should interpret the Bible from what has gone before. That strategy of interpretation can be employed here. The tabernacle, after it had served its purpose during the years the Israelites were roaming in the wilderness, came to rest in Shiloh. (*Shiloh* means "place of rest"; the ark of the covenant temporarily rested there, as well, after the people of God had crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land—see 1 Samuel 4:4.)

The people were proud to have the symbol of God's presence so close by—Shiloh was in the tribal area of Ephraim—but they put their trust in it as opposed to God himself. They continued to practice evil. God spoke to them and called them, but they did not listen or answer him. About 500 years earlier, God had allowed judgment to fall on his people. It was hoped a historical reference such as that would give God's people pause about the way they were acting during Jeremiah's day. God pronounced judgment on the people by casting them out of his sight.

This Is the Way*Jeremiah 7:21-23*

God had given Judah "the way" to follow. But their persistent sinful behavior, evident in verses 16-20, caused God to say, "Don't even pray to me about this." It was wasted breath.

The way of God is obedience. The people thought the key was jumping through all the hoops of their religion (e.g., burnt offerings, sacrifices, etc.). But they had their priorities in the wrong order. The formula from Egypt forward was deliverance, obedience, and sacrifices. God gave them deliverance (out of Egypt), then called for their obedience (the Ten Commandments), and finally gave them the rules about sacrifices (Leviticus 1–7). All the sacrifices in the world could not atone for a disobedient heart. If they obeyed God, then it would go well with them. Misplaced trust does not bode well with God. False hope will not get us home.

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APPRECIATE WHAT YOU HAVE

BY DAVID FAUST

Visitors commented about the rustic beauty of the farm where I grew up, but I was so accustomed to the ponds, woods, and fields, I didn't consider them anything special.

On an April afternoon in 1974, I proposed marriage to Candy at Niagara Falls and she said yes. She and I were attending college then in upstate New York, and it was only a short drive to Niagara Falls. Because we lived nearby, we took for granted the falls' natural wonder.

Later, we ministered for 10 years with a church on Long Island. Visitors came from miles away to see the New York City skyline and the Statue of Liberty, but we didn't give those attractions much thought because we saw them so often.

Taking Blessings for Granted

Do you ever take God's blessings for granted? At times, your daily work may be frustrating and monotonous, but are you thankful to have a job? Are you glad your family members are around even with their irritating quirks? Despite your aches and pains, do you appreciate the health God has given you? Do you notice and thank the medical professionals who care for you . . . the janitors who clean up after you . . . the restaurant workers who serve you . . . and the neighbors who are kind to you?

Emmanuel Musinga came to the United States as a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo, where his tribe faced violent persecution. He planted a church to serve the many Congolese refugees finding their way to Indianapolis. Emmanuel serves the church without pay and does other jobs to support his family, and he frequently mentions his deep gratitude for the opportunities our country provides for work, education, and housing. Talking with him increases my own appreciation for the freedoms we enjoy in America.

Taking God for Granted

Ingratitude diminishes our love for God. We can become so accustomed to holy things—so familiar with religious routines—that we lose the wonder of worship. Do we appreciate the privilege of praying to the heavenly Father who invites us to cast all our cares on him? Have we lost the joy of our salvation and forgotten how he called us from darkness to light and from death to life? My friend's Congolese congregation rents a church building on Sunday afternoons and members contribute money to the church's savings account, hoping someday they can have a meeting place of their own. When is the last time you thanked the Lord for the building where your church meets, and for the freedom to gather there without interference?

The Jews took their relationship with God for granted, assuming it was enough simply to show up for worship. The Lord told Jeremiah to stand by the temple gate and greet those who arrived with a solemn warning: "Do not trust in deceptive words and say, 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!'" (Jeremiah 7:4). Casual, occasional lip service cannot replace an authentic daily walk with God. These half-hearted worshippers needed to treat others justly, care for the vulnerable, and quit relying on fake gods. They needed to reform their conduct and appreciate their blessings.

By the end of the book of Jeremiah, they learned the hard way that those blessings could be taken away.

Personal Challenge:

Make a list of physical and spiritual blessings your heavenly Father has given you. Offer him a prayer of thanks.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How have you shared God's truth and grace recently with someone who has strayed from him?
2. Have you ever realized or had someone advise you that your priorities were out of order? What happened? What did you learn or change?

Ask two people to read aloud **Jeremiah 7:1-15, 21-23**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. How would you summarize the main issues God was addressing through Jeremiah?
 - What specific ways and actions of the Israelites needed to be reformed/changed?
4. The people were using the phrase, "the temple of the Lord" like a magical incantation (sort of like saying "Beetlejuice" three times). What does this tell you about their spiritual condition?
5. Note the conditional (if . . . then) statements in verses 5-7. What do these tell you about God's expectations for his people?
 - How were the people acting presumptuously with God?
6. What do you learn about God from this passage?
7. What do you learn about people, especially those who profess to follow God?
8. In what ways did the Israelites have their priorities (seeking and obeying God first, followed by offering sacrifices at the temple, etc.) backwards?
 - What was God calling them to do to get their priorities in the right order?
9. Think about areas in which you—or Christians in general—get priorities in the wrong order. Examples of the right order are these: God–marriage–children; God–work–money; God–church–ministry. (There are many others.) How do we get these out of order and what can you do to put them in the right order?
 - In what one area of life do you want to improve at walking in obedience?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
11. What help do you need from God to live out his priorities this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Jeremiah 28:1-17**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FOUR

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

STUDY: 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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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 “phony detectors” 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.”

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

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?
4. How would you characterize Jeremiah's responses to Hananiah throughout this chapter?
 - 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: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.