

A BIBLICAL STUDY ON JEREMIAH

LESSON FIFTEEN: JEREMIAH'S MARCHING ORDERS

by Sandy Harber

"Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them." Jeremiah 1:17

Jeremiah's call to serve the Lord concluded with his marching orders: 1) gird up your loins; 2) arise; 3) speak; and, 4) be not dismayed. In view of what had preceded ("therefore") it was time to be up and doing. He had God's words preloaded in his mouth (v. 9), he had God's authority over the nations (v. 10), he had God's promise of protection (v. 8), and he had foreknowledge of what was to come via the visions (vv. 11-16).

"Gird up your loins" referred to the practice of tucking up the long robe and, thus, freeing the legs before engaging in physical exertion. It symbolized preparation for action. "Orientation is over, Jeremiah. Now get on with your duties!" Preparation is an essential part of any project. To jump right in to any endeavor without some preplanning is to court disaster. Imagine the result if your contractor began building your house without waiting for the blue prints from the architect.

Jeremiah had received his blueprints, now it was time to get up and start moving forward. He could not wait for the people to come to him where he was. He had to go to them. This is how God operates. He does not wait for sinners to seek Him out because they never will. God comes to where the sinners are with a mission "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). And, aren't we glad He does?

Next, Jeremiah is commanded to speak all the words that God had put into his mouth. No doubt those words included the contents of the two visions. Judgment was coming swiftly. An enemy from the north would enter the very gates of Jerusalem. Jeremiah's job was to tell the people plainly that they had sinned against God and their window of opportunity to repent was closing.

Jeremiah's message would be unpopular. The people would be against him. But God commanded him not to be "dismayed at their faces." He would be facing an angry mob of people on more than one occasion. Fear, terror, and anxiety were reasonable responses to the hostility he would be facing. But God warned him not to be afraid of what the people could do to him. God had already promised to be with him and deliver him (v. 8). The same Hebrew word is translated "dismayed" and "confound" in verse 17. It basically means "broken in spirit by terror and anxiety." God warns him that if his faith in His promises should wane so that he, Jeremiah, should become anxious and terrified of the people, then God would become a terror to him. And the people would see that Jeremiah had no confidence in the God he claimed to represent. He would be disgraced. He would lose all credibility. God needed a man who would stand firm in the face of opposition. Jeremiah never forgot God's warning. In years to come he would plead, "Be not a terror unto me; thou art my hope in the day of evil" (Jeremiah 17:17). Instead, he asks God to let those who persecute him be terrorized ("confounded") in the day of evil (Jeremiah 17:18).

God assured him that He had given him all the strength that he needed to stand against everyone who opposed him (v. 18). God made him (past tense - it had already happened) like an iron pillar and bronze wall. Iron and bronze are symbols of strength. When God calls us to service He equips us to do the job required. Jeremiah was strong in the Lord. He could stand against kings, princes, priests, and ordinary people (v. 18).

The political and religious leaders of Judah would fight against Jeremiah's message. The people would side against him. But they would not win because God was with him (v. 19). For Jeremiah the victory was not in winning over the opposition (which didn't happen), but in standing firm and trusting God in all circumstances. "Trust and obey" is the path to victory.

"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is." Jeremiah 17:7