

The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations

Lesson 13: Jeremiah Threatened; the Yoke of Babylon -- Jeremiah 26:1–28:17

There is a kind of courage that only shows up when a sermon goes wrong. Jeremiah stands in the temple court and preaches exactly what God told him to preach, that unless the people repent, this temple will become like Shiloh, a ruin, and this city a curse. The words are barely out of his mouth before the priests and prophets seize him and a mob roars, “You shall die!” In a single sentence the faithful preacher goes from messenger to defendant, on trial for his life for the crime of telling the truth. It is the oldest collision in the world: the comfortable lie against the costly truth, and the people choosing the lie.

We learn, almost in passing, just how real the danger was. There was another prophet, a man named Uriah, who prophesied the same kind of warning Jeremiah did. When the king sought to kill him, Uriah fled to Egypt, but the king’s men hunted him down, dragged him back, and put him to the sword. That is the world Jeremiah lives in. The threat against him is not theater. Faithful prophets really did die for the word of God. And yet Jeremiah keeps preaching, because the One who sent him is more real to him than the swords around him.

Then God asks Jeremiah to do something stranger and harder than preach. He tells him to make a yoke, the heavy wooden harness laid across the neck of an ox, and to wear it through the streets of Jerusalem. The message is unmistakable and unwelcome: submit to the yoke of Babylon and live. Do not fight it. Do not believe the smooth voices promising a quick deliverance. Bend your neck under God’s hard providence, and you will be spared. Resist, and you will be destroyed. It is one of the most counterintuitive sermons in Scripture, and it is preached with a man’s own shoulders.

Of course someone offers the people what they would rather hear. A prophet named Hananiah stands up in the temple and announces, in God’s name, that within two years Babylon will be broken and the exiles will come home. Then he takes the wooden yoke off Jeremiah’s neck and snaps it in front of everyone, a piece of religious theater that must have brought the crowd to its feet. But God was not in the snapping of that yoke. “You have broken wooden bars,” God says, “but you have made in their place bars of iron.” And within the year Hananiah is dead. These chapters force a question we cannot dodge: when God’s word is hard and the comfortable lie is sweet, which voice will we believe?

Group Discussion: Jeremiah nearly died for preaching the truth, while Hananiah won the crowd by promising what they wanted to hear. Why are comfortable lies so much easier to receive than costly truth, and how can a community of God’s people learn to value the faithful hard word over the popular smooth one?

Personal Reflection: God asked Jeremiah to bend his neck under the yoke of a hard providence and trust Him in it, rather than fight for the quick deliverance everyone wanted. Where in your life right now is God asking you to submit to something difficult you would rather resist, and what would it look like to wear that yoke in trust?

Read Jeremiah 26:1–28:17

Study Questions

1. Read 26:1–6. God tells Jeremiah to speak “all the words that I command you... do not hold back a word,” even knowing it may provoke a deadly reaction. What does this reveal about God’s call to faithfulness regardless of the response it brings?
2. Jeremiah was commanded not to “hold back a word,” even the unwelcome ones. Where are you tempted to edit, soften, or hold back part of God’s truth to protect yourself or keep the peace?
3. Read 26:7–16. When the mob cries “You shall die!” Jeremiah answers, “I am in your hands; do with me as seems good... only know that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves.” What does his response teach about courage, integrity, and trusting God with the outcome?
4. Jeremiah did not defend himself with clever compromise but with calm truth, leaving his life in God’s hands. When you face hostility for your faith, do you tend to trust God with the outcome or to protect yourself by bending? What would trusting Him look like?

5. Read 26:20–24. The account pauses to tell how the prophet Uriah, who preached like Jeremiah, was hunted down and killed, while Jeremiah was spared through Ahikam. What does this sober contrast teach about the real cost of faithfulness and God's providence over His servants' lives?
6. Uriah's death reminds us that faithfulness is not always rewarded with rescue in this life. How does it affect your willingness to follow God when you accept that obedience may be costly and not always shielded from suffering?
7. Read 27:1–11. God commands Jeremiah to wear a yoke as a sign that the nations must submit to Babylon, whom God has appointed for a season. What does this teach about submitting to God's hard providence rather than resisting His declared will?
8. God called His people to bend their necks under a yoke they hated, trusting that submission to His providence was the path of life. Where is God calling you to stop fighting a hard circumstance He has allowed and to submit to it in trust?
9. Read 28:1–17. The false prophet Hananiah promises peace and breaks Jeremiah's yoke, but God replaces it with "bars of iron," and Hananiah dies within the year. What does this confrontation reveal about the difference between true and false prophecy and the danger of preaching comfort God has not spoken?

10. Look back over all three chapters, the temple sermon, the fate of Uriah, the yoke, and the clash with Hananiah. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is forming courage, submission, or a love for costly truth in you this week.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Deuteronomy 18:20–22, the test of a true prophet, that what he speaks in the LORD’s name must come to pass; 1 Kings 22:1–28, Micaiah standing alone with the hard word against four hundred prophets promising victory; Acts 4:18–20, Peter and John answering the threats of the council, “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard”; Matthew 11:28–30, the gentle yoke of Christ, “Take my yoke upon you... and you will find rest for your souls”; 2 Timothy 4:3–4, the warning of a time when people “will not endure sound teaching” but gather teachers “to suit their own passions.”

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