

Purpose

- To learn about Jeremiah
- To learn about Daniel
- To discover some of the minor prophets

Materials

- Bibles
- Handouts

Background Information**JEREMIAH**

Jeremiah was the undertaker of the Old Testament, the hospice worker in whose care the nation of Judah spent its dying days. He witnessed the moral decay and ultimately the death of the nation of Judah under the boot of a conquering army. He felt powerless to stem the tide of his nation's departure from God. All he could do was stand up and announce the coming judgment and then go home and cry.

You wouldn't turn to the book of Jeremiah for a positive, uplifting message. He didn't say much about the glorious days of the Messiah's future kingdom. Jeremiah was too busy bandaging the wounds of a population infected with a deadly moral plague to reflect on the glory of a future day. His message was a combination of terror, tears, warning and weeping.

By most standards Jeremiah was a miserable failure. For 40 years he served as God's spokesman to Judah; but when Jeremiah spoke, nobody listened. Consistently and passionately he urged them to act, but nobody moved. He certainly did not attain material success. He was poor and underwent severe deprivation to deliver his prophecies. He was thrown into prison and into a cistern; he was taken to Egypt against his will. He was rejecting by his neighbors, his family, the false priests and prophets, friends, his audience, and the kings. He stood alone declaring God's message of doom, announcing the new covenant, and weeping over the fate of his beloved country. But in God's eyes, Jeremiah was one of the most successful people in all of history. Success, as measured by God, involves obedience and faithfulness. Regardless of opposition and personal cost, Jeremiah courageously and faithfully proclaimed the word of God. He was obedient to his calling.

When God first called Jeremiah as his spokesman, King Josiah was on the throne of Judah. Because Judah had been scattered out over the vast Assyrian empire it was now only a tiny slice of land. King Josiah was a godly king and things seemed to be going pretty well in Judah. Josiah had torn down the idol altars and pagan worship centers. The worship of God was in full swing and the temple was full on the Sabbath.

God called Jeremiah during the 13th year of Josiah reign. Unfortunately the good times led by King Josiah didn't last very long. Just a few years after Josiah's death the people had returned back to their disobedient ways. Jeremiah had his work cut out for him.

Jeremiah knew that the job of a prophet was a difficult, thankless job. Jeremiah was twenty years old and told God he wasn't old enough and couldn't speak well in public. God warned Jeremiah that everyone would be against him (kings, officials, priests and the people) except God. Imagine how hard that was for Jeremiah. How would you feel if everyone at school was against you and made fun of you except God? That wouldn't be easy or much fun.

Many times Jeremiah wished he could pick a new career path or even a place out in the wilderness, a hunting lodge where no one could find him. He wanted a little rest, a few minutes of peace and quiet, without people breathing down his neck. One time Jeremiah decided that he just wouldn't speak anymore. When he quit talking God words became fire in his bones. He had to speak or he would be consumed.

Needless to say, Jeremiah was not chosen "man of the year" by the local chamber of commerce. He was hated, hunted, thrown in a pit, imprisoned, attacked but, worst of all, ignored. As he prophesied, Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian ruler, swept down on Jerusalem and destroyed the city. Walls were pulled down, the temple was burned to the ground, and the few people who survived were marched off to Babylon in chains. This was what Jeremiah had warned the people would happen. But God did not completely abandon them. The few people who remained in Babylon prospered. They built homes, grew crops, started businesses, and tried to make a new future for themselves. They were gaining in strength.

Jeremiah did exactly as God wanted him to do; he was a pillar of iron for God. Jeremiah's family turned on him and he didn't even have a wife to support him. When bad times fell on the people Jeremiah did not say, "I told you so."

Would you believe that 600 years later when Jesus came on the scene and people saw how tender and compassionate he was many said that Jesus was another Jeremiah?

DANIEL

Daniel is best known for spending a night in a lions' den – and living to tell about it! But Daniel was far more than a lion tamer. He spoke God's message to the world leaders of his day. He knew what it was like to be at the top of the heap; he also knew what it was like to be ignored. Daniel interpreted dreams, spoke with angels, and wrote history before it happened.

Daniel was born in Judah but barely graduated from middle school before he was taken to the city of Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylon armies were expanding their empire to the west. Tiny little Judah was swallowed up almost without resistance. The Babylonians were kind to the people they conquered and only took a few young men from Judah's most prominent families. They chose the brightest and the best. One of them, Daniel, was about fifteen years old. They took Daniel 700 miles from home, changed his name, and taught him to speak Akkadian. Daniel studied science, religion, and the politics of Babylon.

Daniel as well as three of his friends (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) held prominent positions with the Babylonian government. Daniel, in particular, held such a

position because of his ability to interpret the king's dreams that tell of God's unfolding plan.

Trouble began when Daniel refused to eat at the first meal. He was served things that Jewish people were forbidden to eat. Daniel felt he would be offending God and committing idolatry. King Nebuchadnezzar was a good king but he could not let this go. Daniel's three friends also refused to eat what was provided at the banquet. They even had the nerve to ask for vegetables and water for ten days. They declared that if they looked thinner or sicker than those who ate the king's food, they would join them at the banquet table. If not, they could continue to eat the vegetarian plate each day. In the end, of course, God blessed their obedience. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were all thrown into the fiery furnace and the lion was released into the pit. God intervened and the next morning the king was shocked to see all sitting calmly in the furnace talking. They were also singing songs and praising God.

Belshazzar ruled Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar died and God sent him a message written on the wall. Daniel was summoned to interpret the message predicted Babylon's fall to the Medes and Persians. Daniel's predictions came true that very night and Darius the Mede conquered the Babylonian kingdom.

Daniel became one of Darius's most trusted advisers. His privileged position angered other administrators, who plotted his death by convincing the king to outlaw prayer. In spite of the ruling, Daniel continued to pray to his Lord. As a result, he was condemned to die in a den of hungry lions. Again, God intervened and saved him, shutting the mouths of the lions.

Daniel had a series of visions during the reigns of Belshazzar, Darius and Cyrus. These dreams dramatically outline God's future plans. Daniel survived more than seventy years in the ups and downs of a secular society.

MAJOR AND MINOR PROPHETS

Next week we are going to talk about one more prophet. There are many other major and minor prophets in the Bible. We do not have time to discuss them all. Check out the books at the end of the Old Testament to find out more about each of these prophets.

Procedure

- Read handout 50-1.
- Read background information of Jeremiah.
- Answer questions on 50-2.
- Read background information on Daniel. Also read handout 50-3.
- Answer questions on the bottom half of 50-2. Send this to me.
- Quickly mention the background information on prophets.
- Handout 50-4 gives you a list of the minor prophets. See if you recognize any of them.
- Handout 50-5 are just for fun. I have answers if you want them.