
A Warning for the Preachers From Jeremiah the Prophet

by: Ronald L. Dart

I was searching the Internet a while back, under the topic of "moral landslide," and I came across an old item posted by Robbie Zacharias and he said something about the Tower of Babel that I did not quite understand. Here is what he said, "In the Biblical narrative, when the Tower of Babel was being built, we're told that God sent a confusion of languages to stem the tide toward humanity's self-deification. The implication was that the uniformity of language would inexorably lead to a homogenization of tastes and the celebration of evil. The human heart being what it is, moves in a herd instinct, irresistibly drawn to the intrigue and allurements of perversion. The confusion of language was one fence that God put up to limit communication and prevent a moral landslide."

Now what a remarkable idea, limit communications to prevent a moral landslide. Speaking from where we stand today, we are right on the brink of a moral landslide. I don't know, maybe we are over the brow of the hill. It's hard for me to see how limiting communication would help very much. Maybe if we look at the whole story of this tower, something will come forward.

The Tower of Babel

It was not long after Noah's flood, and the story is found in Genesis chapter 11. We are told that "The whole earth was of one language, and one speech. {2} It came to pass as they journeyed from the East, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and they dwelt there."

That would be in the land called Mesopotamia, and you know it better as Iraq.

"And they said to one another, "Come let's go make some brick and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and asphalt for mortar {4} And they said, "Let's build a city and a tower whose top may reach into heaven, and let's make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

Now in the first place, that scattering abroad may have been exactly what God had in mind. It may have been the way He wanted things to go. But in the second place, this does sound a lot like self-glorification. We are going to make ourselves a name.

Verse 5, "The LORD (Hebrew: YHVH, Yehovah) came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built."

Now this may be what scholars call an anthropomorphism, that is to say, "a figure of speech, in which God is presented in human form." Now why does God need to come down and see, when He knows and sees everything anyway. I don't know. Now on the other hand, the language is like what we will find later when Sodom is destroyed. I think what we're being told here is for a judgment to be made, it is necessary for the judge to be present, and so God comes down to see.

"And the LORD said {6} "The people is one, and they all have one language, and this they begin to do, and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined doing."

There is no way to hold them back, their imagination has no limits, they will go everywhere and do everything.

"The LORD said, {7} "Let's go down there and confound their language, so they can't even understand one another's speech," {8} So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over all of the face of the earth, and they stopped building the city. {9} The name of it is called 'Babel', because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth, and from that place did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth."

Now I thought it was interesting, the Hebrew word 'Babel' means 'confusion.' Ryrie Notes says: "Babel. Linked by a play on words with a Hebrew verb meaning 'to confuse,' though the Babylonians preferred to use the meaning that was more acceptable to them: 'gate of the gods.'" This type of wordplay is common in the Bible and in this case, it is suggestive of what they were aiming at. Let's build a tower whose top may reach into heaven. In other words, let's build us a Gateway of the gods.

Decentralization

Scattering people and confounding their language is really a useful technique. It might serve well in some locations of the present world. The objective of God in this case was clearly to disempower man, in other words, they were centralizing their authority. Centralization increases power and power corrupts, so let's just decentralize them. God did it and it was sudden and complete. Two men are standing there talking to each other about how to put together a part of this tower, and suddenly, not one word the other is saying makes any sense at all. In this event, decentralization seems to have been successful, at least in postponing what man was going to do.

I'm not sure though what it had to do with preventing a moral landslide? That would require more explanation than Mr. Zacharias provided in that article.

Make the Bible Your World View

Nevertheless, sitting here, watching an impending moral collapse on television, one is led to wonder what's going on? What is the approximate cause of all of this? Now I can tell you where I think we went wrong, but do so I need something to stand on, and I always try to stand on the Bible to look at issues like this. That's my world view and when you come to an issue like this, from a Biblical world view, you find precisely where the responsibility can be laid.

Jeremiah Proclaims "Woe Be to the Pastors"

When this social pattern was repeated before, a prophet named Jeremiah laid the blame right where it belonged.

The passage in question is the 23rd chapter of Jeremiah and he starts it off this way, "'Woe be to the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture" saith the LORD."

Now I will tell you frankly this chapter has made me shudder from time to time. These are the shepherds of His people that God is talking about. They are the people who preach to them. They are the people who minister to them, and that term 'shepherd' is reserved for the priests, the prophets and the teachers of the law. So, I would not look to the secular progressives as the cause of the problem. I would rather look at them as symptoms of a moral disease and the cause I would lay at the feet of the pastors who destroy and scatter the sheep of God's pasture.

"Therefore, {2} saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people. You have scattered my flock. You have driven them away. You have not visited them, behold, I will visit on you the evil of your doings," says the LORD."

"But wait," we cry, "How can this be? We have preached every week. We have done all our hospital visits. We have cared for the people."

Looking far into the future Jeremiah continues, {3} "The time is going to come when I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them. I am going to bring them back again to their place and they will be fruitful and increase. {4} And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them."

We have a problem here. The LORD has come down and looked at us and said, "You shepherds are not feeding my flock. I'm going to have to set someone over them who will."

Continuing in verse 4, "They will no longer be afraid, nor dismayed, neither shall they be lacking," says the LORD. {5} "Behold, the days come," says the LORD, "that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, a King shall reign and prosper and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. {6} In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely, and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

You know, looking down through time, the prophet sees Christ's first coming and second coming.

"Therefore, behold," he continues in verse 7, "the LORD says, "They shall no more say, "the LORD lives, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt." {8} People are going to say, "The LORD lives, who brought up and led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries where I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land."

I think many people see the reestablishment of the state of Israel in this, but candidly when you look at the prophecy in the whole, it reaches way beyond that.

Jeremiah now decides to speak on his own, "My heart within me is broken because of the prophets. All my bones shake. I am like a drunk man, I'm like a man whom wine has overcome, because of the LORD, and because of the words of his holiness. {10} For the land is full of adulterers; and because of swearing the land mourns; the pleasant places of the wilderness are all dried up, and their course is evil, and they use their power unjustly. {11} For both prophet and priest are profane; In my house I have found their wickedness," saith the LORD."

The Preachers Are Not Teaching God's Law

Did you know this? In Hebrew usage, the prophet is the preacher and the priest are the judiciary. In our society, it might even include Congress. There is no question that the blame for this deplorable collapse of morals is laid at the feet of the preachers and the civil leaders. Oh sure, the people have gone astray, but they gone astray because no one was telling them the right way. Their preachers, their prophets, their priests were not holding their feet to the fire of God's law and telling them "This is way you need to live."

This expression, "the land is full of adulterers" and "because of swearing it mourns" is a good description of the land we live in right now. What is really sobering is that God said, "In my house, right there in my Temple, have I found their wickedness." You don't have to go out into the streets or the byways, or the highways to see what on earth they are talking about. It is right there in the church.

Language Today Is Pictorial

Robbie Zacharias in that same article on the Tower of Babel made an important point. He said, "That was millennia ago. Now for the first time, the whole world speaks the same language, yet it is not propositional, rather it is pictorial, literally focused on flesh and blood. As a result, the whole process militates against reason, because images have become the sum and substance of truth and the written word is no longer user-friendly."

Now I am not sure I follow him through this, but I do know what he is talking about, about the 'written word' not being user-friendly. It is striking how many young people now with college degrees do not read well. They have become reliant on images more than reading, and on audio of course. Consequently, they no longer really read the words well.

Zacharias continues, "For all practical purposes, truth has been relegated to technology, beauty has been subjugated to the beholder and goodness is mocked night after night as millions are idiotized before a box. We have been left as expendable entities in a disposable world. Our experiences have become fragmented quantities in a disjointed world, yet the fearful symmetry remains for at such a time as this. We are called to proclaim, it is written. Is the written word the best method for an infinite God to have chosen to reveal Himself?" Yes, indeed, an emphatic yes.

Now as I said, I'm not actually sure I followed him all the way through this. I think he is speaking figuratively in part of this, but his point will be, that the 'written word' is the way God has chosen to reveal Himself, with this I absolutely agree. I take that to mean that if you don't stand on the Bible, the Word, you are in danger of idolatry, with the use of images which are of little value in reasoning.

Preachers No Longer Rely on the Written Word

The results of the gradual abandonment of the 'written word,' even in religious contexts, is what follows in Jeremiah's prophecy, verse 12 of Jeremiah 23, "Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness: they shall be driven on and fall therein: for I will bring evil upon them even the year of their visitation," saith the LORD."

Now wait, whose way is it that is so slippery they can no longer stand? In context, it is the preachers and the civil leaders. Because they no longer rely on the 'written word,' they no longer rely on the Word of God. They don't know where they are. They are in the dark.

The preachers are mentioned first, because they are the more to blame. When you think about it, this makes sense even today. It is the preachers and teachers in church who have the obligation to preach righteousness to the people, who will later go on to lead the country. What is righteousness? Psalms 119 verse 172 says, "All God's Commandments is Righteousness." Where are you going to look for moral leadership in this country, if you don't look to the pulpit and the classrooms in churches, I don't know but that's where the Word of God ought to be.

There were, in Jeremiah's view, two sets of these people. One in Samaria, the capital of the House of Israel, the other in Jerusalem, the capital of the House of Judah.

Jeremiah goes on in verse 13 to say this, "I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they preached in Baal and caused my people Israel to err. {14} I have also seen in the prophets of Jerusalem a horrible thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies: they strengthen the hands of evildoers, that no one will return from his wickedness: they are, all of them, like unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah."

You know that is a pretty good description of a moral collapse. In the North it came about from an attempt by Jeroboam to change the whole system of worship. He was afraid people would turn back to God and that they would go back to the King of Judah and kill him. So, he changed it all so the people didn't have to go back to Jerusalem.

In the South it came about as a sexual revolution. They did not preach repentance. The result was a repeat of Sodom and Gomorrah and the besetting sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were violence and sexual depravity.

Preachers Should Sweat

Now what is the result of this for the preachers themselves? This is the sort of thing that makes me sweat and it ought to make every man who ever stands before people to preach God's word sweat.

Jeremiah said, "The way for them is slippery ways in the darkness." They have lost any foundation, for right from wrong, and they tried to preach from their own sick hearts and minds and the result is what psychologists call 'Cognitive Dissonance' and it is that way to the level of near insanity.

I was struck a few years ago on how two of the most obvious preachers out there, men who could rail against sin with the best of them on television, marching back and forth across the platform, who themselves were exposed as sinners committing the same sins they condemned in society. The damage done by that is incalculable and their ways, our ways will be slippery ways in the darkness if we go down that same road.

Let's continue in verse 15 of Jeremiah 23, ""Therefore," thus saith the LORD of hosts "concerning the prophets; Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land."

Don't Listen to The Preachers

So, what are you supposed to do? You go to church, sit in a pew, listen to the sermons, sing songs and go home. What are you supposed to do? Well this is what the LORD of hosts says in Jeremiah 23 verse 16, "Don't listen to the words of the preachers that preach to you. They make you vain, they speak a vision of their own heart and not out of the mouth of the LORD, {17} They keep saying to them that despise me. The LORD has said, "You shall have peace, and they say to everyone that walks after the imagination of his own heart, no evil shall come upon you."

Now I have said this before, bear with me while I say it again, God does not send us a prophet to tell us how well we are doing! He sends us a prophet to tell us what we are doing wrong and call upon us to repent. How long has it been since you've heard repentance come from your pulpit? Where the preacher stands before you and tells you the error of your ways, reads to you from the Word of God the things that you are doing that need to be changed and calls upon you to amend your life, your ways and your doings.

Jeremiah continues in verse 18, "For who has stood in the Council of the LORD, and has perceived and heard his word? Who has given heed to his word, and heard it? {19} Behold a whirlwind of the LORD is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind. It shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked. {20} The anger of the LORD shall not return, until he has executed, and has performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days you shall understand it perfectly."

It kind of implies that in Jeremiah's own day, they just would not get it. But there's more. God has one more thing to say.

Verse 21, God says, "I have not sent these prophets. I never spoke to them, nor told them to go, yet they went and prophesied. {22} Nevertheless if they had stood in my counsel and had caused my people to hear my words, then they would've turned them away from their evil way and from the evil of their doings."

Do you realize what he is saying here? Here we have a man who God would not speak to, wouldn't have anything to do with, but He says this one thing, "If this man will cause my people to hear my words, then even they can turn them away from the evil of their doings." What can I say in response that? The bottom line for the preachers right here, even if I haven't sent you, if you will just stick to my words, even you can turn this situation around, and it is at this point that I take great heart and admonition to keep my nose in the Bible and to read the Bible to you.

Preachers that Preach Lies

"How long shall it be in the hearts of the preachers that preach lies," Jeremiah continues in chapter 23 and verse 26, "They are preachers of deceit of their own heart."

You know it's funny how many times preachers will come along, and they tell you that they had a dream or a vision or they say, "God spoke to me and God told me this."

Jeremiah said, {27} "They think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbor like their fathers had forgotten my name for Baal. {28} The prophet that has a dream, let him go on and tell his dream, and he that has my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?" says the LORD."

Once again, the bottom line is the 'word', not dreams, not visions, not people who said, "The LORD spoke to me and told me this." I have no way of knowing whether God talked to them or not, but I do have in my hands, the tried and tested written Word of God and I know what it says.

For those of us who preach these days, it is the 'written word' that we go by. We cannot preach from our own imaginations and expect to carry any authority at all.

God continues, {29} ""Is not my word like a fire?" says the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. {30} Therefore, I am against the preacher," says the LORD, "that steal my words everyone from his neighbor."

Now I must tell you, one of the great failures of Christian scholarship in these last days has been the undermining of people's faith in the Scriptures. They have in effect stolen God's words from their people. Some teachers tell people, "You don't need to read the Old Testament any longer, especially there's no need to read the Law," and yet the Law tells us two great things, how to love God, and how to love our neighbor. It is not telling us how to feel about God or feel about our neighbor, but what we ought to do to love God and to treat our neighbors right.

"Behold," {31} "I am against the prophets," says the LORD, "that use their tongues to say, "The LORD says:" {32} Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, and tell them and

cause my people to err by their lies and by their frivolity. I didn't send them, and I didn't command them. They will not profit this people at all."

The Oracle of the Lord

Then He says this to Jeremiah himself, Jeremiah 23 verse 33, "When this prophet, priest, or people shall ask you to say, "What is the Oracle of the LORD?" You shall say to them, "What Oracle? I will even forsake you," says the LORD."

These words should make any preacher, myself included, shutter. Jeremiah goes on to say, {37} "Thus shall you say to the prophet, "'What is the Lord's answer to you?' or 'What has the LORD spoken?' {38} But since you say "The Oracle of the LORD," Therefore thus saith the LORD, "Because you say this word and I have sent unto you, saying, "Don't say it," {39} Therefore, I, even I, will utterly forget you, I will forsake you, I'll forsake the city I gave you and your fathers and cast you out of my presence {40} And I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you and perpetual shame which shall never be forgotten."

What is he talking about? He is talking about people who preach in their own name, and by their own authority, instead of going straight to the 'Word of God,' the written word.

The Written Word

There was a time when God spoke to man and He did so at various times and in various ways, then there came a time when He spoke to us by his Son, and now He's been silent for a long time and all we have is the 'written word.' But that's a lot, actually.

Robby Zacharias again, said "As cultural fads ebb and flow the inescapable truth emerges that century after century, the power of the 'written word' has surpassed and will continue to surpass the exhilarations of momentary experience, which are conceived and die in an instant. We tenderly set a halo on the forehead of feeling, or miracle, but in times of greatest loss, it is the written word that carries us through, not feelings."

I find myself falling back on that all the time, because my own emotions, my own feelings, the still small voice speaking to me in the dark hours, is not always faithful and is not always true, but the 'written word' of God is always there.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think that we have a modern “Tower of Babel?” Has knowledge increased to the point that ““now nothing will be restrained from [humanity] which they have imagined doing?”” (Genesis 11:6)
2. If so, how do we not get sucked into ‘Babylon?’ How do we come out of ‘her’ in a spiritual sense?
3. Do you think that the moral decline should lie on the Church teachers? Or do all Christians need to share the blame?
4. Paul rebukes the Hebrews for not reaching the teachers’ level in Hebrews 5:12. However, James warns that many shouldn’t become teachers in James 3:1. Are we to all eventually become teachers or not?
5. Are we all responsible for what happens to God’s ecclesia or not?
6. As the ecclesia do we need to start focusing on the ‘beam’ in our own eyes before we try to help the world get rid of their ‘specks?’ In other words, do we actually have problems that need to be fixed in our Father’s House? Because if we do, we can’t even attempt to try to fix the world’s problems.
7. Have you witnessed hypocrisy in God’s ecclesia? How was it handled?
8. What are some ways we can clean God’s house? What are some ways you can help with what needs to be done?
9. Like Mr. Dart asked, “How long has it been since you've heard repentance come from your pulpit?”
10. Have we turned towards teachers that ‘tickle’ our ears (1 Timothy 4:3) rather than teachers who teach the written word of God because we do not want to face the truth?