

THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK

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Jeremiah's America - # 11

SUBJECT: OBEDIENCE TO GOD

TITLE: OBEY HIM OR PAY HIM

TEXT: JEREMIAH 11:1-11

INTRODUCTION. When I was student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, there were a number of very intelligent, gifted professors there. None surpassed president H. Leo Eddleman, and no one there impressed Dr. Eddleman more than Academic Dean J. Hardee Kennedy. I will never forget the time I was asked to lead in prayer during a chapel service. I was sitting on the stage near the pulpit waiting for the time for the prayer when I looked up and saw Dr. Kennedy - and only those who knew why students called him Judge Kennedy could appreciate this - but there was the fleeting thought, "Lord, did you know Dr. Kennedy was going to be here today?"

No one could have been more gracious than "Judge" Kennedy, but he was possibly the greatest perfectionist I have ever known - without making a point of it. Dr. Eddleman told me about the time Dr. Frank Stagg cracked up in a faculty meeting when Dr. Kennedy, toward the end of one of those long sentences for which he was known, used the wrong tense or number when he finally got to the verb. Dr. Stagg, who was quoted by half the professors there at the time, said that he had never heard Dr. Kennedy make such a grammatical error before.

Dr. Eddleman told me he sat down with Dr. Kennedy to ask his recommendation for or against promotions for certain associate professors. Dr. Eddleman asked him if he would recommend a promotion for a certain associate professor. Dr. Eddleman did a pretty good job mimicking Dr. Kennedy - "To recommend a promotion for Dr. "Blank" would be an ENDORSEMENT of MEDIOCRITY." Dr. Kennedy would never have endorsed mediocrity. That is one reason that when I saw his commentary on the Book of Jonah a few years later, I bought it and began reading it as soon as I got home.

As I read his commentary, one statement all but leaped from the page: "Obedience to God is man's most sacred obligation." That put me in mind of something I often heard an Old Testament professor say when he came to the word "hear." If the word was used only in the sense of hearing a sound with the ear he never paused, but there were other times when he would pause and say, "That word means to hear with a mind to obey."

That brought back memories of my father. I was often amused when people began talking about a communication gap in the home. We were told that young people often could not understand their parents. I could never understand a statement like that. Believe me, there was never a communication gap in my home. I understood exactly what my father was saying - and if there was

ever any doubt he would explain it to me! Any time I disobeyed my father I could never claim that I did not understand him. There were times when my father would ask, “Do you hear the tractor?” I knew what he was saying. There were times when he would tell me something he wanted me to do and then he would stop and ask, “Did you hear what I said?” That meant that he intended for me to hear with a mind to obey. If my earthly father expected me to obey him, you can be sure my heavenly Father expects my obedience.

I. GOD REMINDS JUDAH OF THE COST OF DISOBEDIENCE, 11:1-11.

A. This Is the Word of God, Not Jeremiah, 11:1-3a.

“This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: “Listen to the words of this covenant, and tell them to the men of Judah and the residents of Jerusalem. You must tell them: This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says...”

1. “This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord.”

Jeremiah had been called to deliver the word of the Lord. There was no part of this message that was his own. There is no part of this message that he wanted to deliver to his kinsmen. There is no part of this message that brought him any pleasure. As much as any other person who ever lived, the total purpose in his life was to tell people what God told him to say.

2. “Listen to the words of this covenant, and tell them to the men of Judah ...”

God would review the covenant with Jeremiah and then send him out to tell the “men of Judah and the residence of Jerusalem” what God told him to say. There can be no way that these people could plead ignorance. In the first place, God did not tell Jeremiah to tell them what the covenant was to which He referred. They knew. They also knew how God had entered a covenant with Israel, how He had maintained that covenant, and they knew they could take no credit for it.

3. “You must tell them: This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says...”

Let me tell remind you of something - God does not repeat Himself without reason. The Creator does not ramble! Repetition, with God, always demands our careful attention and scrutiny. God wanted them to know that He was the Author of this message. In the first place, it is absolutely amazing that the God of Creation would care enough to try to reach such a wayward and rebellious people. I believe it was William Barclay who, when asked the greatest thought he ever had, thoughtfully replied, “Jesus loves me.” With this in mind - and I do not make this statement lightly - there is no way these people could hear such an introduction as this and disobey it without taking the name of the Lord their God in vain! To deliberately refuse to obey the word of the Lord is a serious matter.

B. God Confronts Israel With Her History of Disobedience, 11:3b-5.

1. He placed a curse on those who do not obey His covenant, 11:3-4a.

*“You must tell them: This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: **Let a curse be on the man who does not obey the words of this covenant**, which I commanded your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the iron furnace.”*

2. God reminds them of the conditions of the covenant, 4b-5.

*“I declared: ‘**Obey Me**, and do everything that I command you, and you will be My people, and I will be your God,’ in order to establish the oath I swore to your ancestors, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as it is today.’ I answered, ‘Amen, Lord.”*

C. Jeremiah’s Judah Is Ordered to Obey God’s Words and Covenant, 11:6-11.

1. Jeremiah is told to proclaim God’s words in Judah, 11:6.

*“The Lord said to me, “Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: **Obey the words of this covenant and carry them out.**”*

These people were the people of the covenant, just as surely as those wandering Hebrews at Sinai. In fact, Judah was the chosen tribe through which God would carry out the terms of the covenant. What we know today is that the symbol on the banner of Judah was the lion, and Jesus, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah is the heart of the covenant.

2. Their history should have been warning enough for these people, 11:7-8.

*“For I strongly warned your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt until today, warning them time and time again: **Obey My voice. Yet they would not obey or pay attention;** each one followed the stubbornness of his evil heart. So I brought on them all the curses of this covenant, because they had not done what I commanded them to do.”*

3. God accuses Judah and Jerusalem of a conspiracy against Him, 11:9-10.

*“The Lord said to me, “A conspiracy has been discovered among the men of Judah and the residents of Jerusalem. They have returned to the sins of their ancestors **who refused to obey My words** and have followed other gods to worship them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah broke My covenant I made with their ancestors.*

A former Soviet Union leader once declared that they would take the United States without firing a shot, and he added that you can go back and shout it from the roof top and no one will believe it. I feel that I may be in danger of crying wolf so often in this series on Jeremiah's America that you can shout it from the roof top and no one will believe it. Well, let me give you an illustration of just how America has fallen in her tailspin since entering the post-Christian era of her history. This is just in from the Don Wildmon of the American Family Association:

NBC Demeans Christian Faith

Writer for new series is practicing homosexual

“NBC is promoting the network's mid-season replacement series "The Book of Daniel" with language that implies it is a serious drama about Christian people and Christian faith. The main character is Daniel Webster, a drug-addicted Episcopal priest whose wife depends heavily on her mid-day martinis.

“Webster regularly sees and talks with a very unconventional white-robed, bearded Jesus. The Webster family is rounded out by a 23-year-old homosexual Republican son, a 16-year-old daughter who is a drug dealer, and a 16-year-old adopted son who is having sex with the bishop's daughter.

“At the office, his lesbian secretary is sleeping with his sister-in-law.

“Network hype – and the mainstream media – call it "edgy," "challenging" and "courageous." The hour-long limited drama series will debut January 6 with back-to-back episodes and will air on Friday nights. The writer for the series is a practicing homosexual.

“The homosexual son will be network prime-time's only regular male homosexual character in a drama series.

“Those at NBC responsible for this program consider it a good, religiously oriented show typical of Christian families” [AFA Online Newsletter, December 22, 2005].

4. Now they learn the high cost of low living.

*“Therefore, this is what the Lord says: I am about to bring on them disaster that they cannot escape. **They will cry out to Me, but I will not hear them.**”*

If you overlook the “therefores” of the Word of God you are going to be overlooking something very significant. “Therefore holds before us what has been said, and connects it with the consequences of their action or actions. Because they had conspired to disobey God and worship other gods, The Lord God of the Covenant will “bring on them disaster that they cannot escape.”

First, did they actually conspire to rebel against God. Absolutely! How do I know that? Because God says so! That's how I know. Now, let me tell you what I have concluded about the conspiracy charge. They were guilty, from top to bottom, from King, to priest, to prophet, to wealthy merchants, to poor shepherds, to beggars on the street. They were all guilty of rejecting God's covenant and embracing false gods. Earlier, God had demanded to know, "For My people have committed a double evil: They have abandoned Me, the fountain of living water, and dug cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that cannot hold water" (Jer 2:13). They were guilty of two sins. First, they rejected God. Second, they deliberately turned to false gods.

II. NOW LET US SUMMARIZE ISRAEL'S HISTORY OF DISOBEDIENCE.

A. The Patriarchs Were Blessed When They Obeyed God.

1. Abraham was blessed when he obeyed God.
2. Isaac was blessed when he obeyed God.
3. Jacob was blessed when he obeyed God.

Abraham was called to leave the land of his forefathers and go to a land God promised him. Paul writes that Abraham believes God and it was accounted unto him as righteousness. In New Testament terms, he was redeemed by grace, through faith. Wherever Abraham went he built an altar and called on the name of the Lord. God blessed him with honor, wealth, power, the privilege of fellowship with the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer, and the joy of a promised son. However, when Abraham sinned, he was not blessed until he repented.

Isaac was blessed when he honored God. He was blessed with twin sons. Now we know how Jacob stole Esau's birthright and his blessing, and we may feel that Isaac was the victim here. Let me remind you, however, that Isaac brought some of this on himself. You see, the Bible tells us that Isaac loved Esau and Rebecca loved Jacob. The seeds of favoritism in their home yielded a horrible harvest. God blessed Isaac beyond anything he deserved when he followed Him.

Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, recounted the blessings of God. He stressed that God had blessed him after his flight from the wrath of Esau. He was repeatedly deceived by Laban, his father-in-law, but God blessed him in all he did. Jeremiah's Judah knew this.

B. The Chosen People Became the People of the Covenant at Siani.

Let me just give you a brief Bible lesson that will illustrate the significance of this covenant. When Jesus was tempted by the Devil, at one time He said, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matt. 4:7). He was quoting a very familiar passage from Deuteronomy 6:16, "You shall not tempt the LORD your God as you tempted Him in Massah" NKJV). Jesus did not quote the entire verse, did

He? The command in Deuteronomy raises another question. What did Massah have to do with anything? I knew you were going to ask that! Now, let us turn back to Exodus 17:2-3: “Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, “Give us water, that we may drink.” So Moses said to them, “Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the LORD?”

The people complained and put God to the test at Massah. God granted their request and did not condemn them for putting Him to the test. Moses rebuked them for it, but God did not condemn them. What had happened since Massah that God would command them never to do it again? They had entered into a covenant relationship with Almighty God. He might have tolerated their putting Him to the test at Massah, but after Sinai, He says, Don’t you ever do that again. God made a covenant with Israel. He had kept it. They had broken it repeatedly.

C. They Violated the Covenant in the Wilderness.

They would never have been wilderness wanderers if they had obeyed God. They would have been in the Land flowing with milk and honey instead of eating manna morning and evening for some 38 years. Rather than living a fruitful life in the land God had given to Abraham, they spend all those years griping and complaining - and dying. All those who were twenty years of age and older died in the wilderness.

D. They Continual Disobeyed God During the Period of the Judges.

There was a perpetual cycle of disobedience throughout this period. This was a five point cycle that they repeated over and over again. (1) They rebelled against God and followed false gods. (2) God sent an oppressor to overrun them and place them under subjection. (3) They confessed their sin and called on the Lord to deliver them. (4) God sent a judge to deliver them (Samson, Gideon, Deborah). (5) They lived in peace and prosperity as long as that judge lived. When that judge died they started another cycle of rebellion.

E. The Period of the Kingdoms Was a Period of Disobedience.

Samuel was the final judge, and one of the most important people in the history of God’s dealing with Israel. The people demanded a king like the Philistines who would fight their wars for them. In a theocracy, God is the King and if they want God’s protection they must obey Him. They rejected Him as their King and He gave them Saul. Saul sinned and God told Samuel to anoint David king over Israel. David established Israel as a nation. His son Solomon built the glorious temple that was always identified with his name. Under his son Rehoboam, the kingdom split, with Jeroboam I leading the northern ten tribes in establishing the nation of Israel. That left Judah and Benjamin to form the southern kingdom of Judah. Israel’s entire history is a history of sin, idolatry, rebellion, and the consequences of their rebellion. Though God sent Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and Hosea, they refused to turn from their rebellion. They would not obey Him.

The people of Judah knew of the destruction of Israel in 722 B.C., but refused to obey God, or listen

to Isaiah or Micah. Now, He has sent Jeremiah and they absolutely refuse to give up their false gods and obey the God of the covenant. At this time, they were about to pay a high price for low living. Within a short time God would send them into captivity in Babylon for seventy years. He would bring back only a remnant through whom He would carry out the terms of His covenant. We must never take God's covenant lightly. He doesn't. We enter a covenant relationship with God when we receive Jesus Christ as Savior. There is a lot of low living going on among many who claim to be children of God today. The price is going to be very high!

III. GOD DEMANDS OBEDIENCE OF ALL WHO PROFESS HIM AS LORD.

A. Samuel Made That Clear to Saul, 1 Samuel 15:19-23.

God sent Saul to destroy the Amalekites, who had plagued Israel since the days when they were wandering in the wilderness. Saul was supposed to destroy everything, but he brought back their king and the spoils of war. God sent Samuel to confront him with his sins. I don't think Saul could resist the temptation to gloat over the defeat of Amalek and the capture of their king, any more than he could resist the spoils of war. Let me read this passage - and if this does not emphasize the value God places on obedience I don't know what will.

“So **why didn't you obey the Lord?** Why did you rush on the plunder and do what was evil in the Lord's sight?” **‘But I did obey the Lord!’** Saul answered. ‘I went on the mission the Lord gave me: I brought back Agag, king of Amalek, and I completely destroyed the Amalekites.’”

NOTE 1 - Saul denied disobedience to the Lord, insisting on his obedience. Saul was king, surely God must have been mistaken!

“The troops took sheep and cattle from the plunder—the best of what was set apart for destruction—to sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal.”

NOTE 2 - I didn't do it, they did it. Sounds a lot like my brother James when we were growing up: “I didn't do it, Johnny did it.” Oh yes, he could get away with that! One, Mother always believed James. Two, I probably was the guilty party. Not that my mother did not think I would tell the truth. I overheard her tell someone that when I was punished for something and promised never to do it again, I didn't do it again. She added, “He always finds something worse to do.”

“Then Samuel said: **Does the Lord take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord?** Look: **to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams.** For **rebellion is like the sin of divination,** and **defiance is like wickedness and idolatry.** Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as king.”

NOTE 3 - This was not new to these people - or it should not have been new to them. If they had given any attention to the Word of God they would have known this.

B. One Theme of The Book of Jonah Is Obedience to God.

God's compassion for pagan people cannot be missed in this book, but the central figure in the book is Jonah, who was called to declare God's judgment to Nineveh. Instead, he fled. God, however did not let him off the hook (excuse the fishy humor) so easily. Remember this four point outline of the Book of Jonah (I will give the late Dr. J. Hardee Kennedy credit for this):

1. Running from God.
2. Running to God.
3. Running with God
4. Running ahead of God.

C. Jesus Commands Us to Keep His Commandments.

1. Jesus clearly demands obedience.

“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).

“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:9-10).

Jesus sent out the disciples with clear instructions and expected them to obey Him. When they returned to Him they have a report. Jesus gave us His Great Commission. Then, before His ascension, He announced that He would send the Holy Spirit to empower believers to carry out the Great Commission.

2. The early disciples understood that He expected them to obey Him.

The eleven apostles obeyed Jesus up to and including the death of a martyr. It is believed that every single one of them obeyed Him unto death. James was the first apostle to lay down his life for the Lord, in A. D. 44. Paul has often been called the greatest of all Christians - whatever that might mean. Paul did not think of himself that way. There are many other examples of believers who were obedient to the Lord: From Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, and Titus, to Dorcas and Priscilla.

What many may not know is that early believers paid a price for their obedience to the Lord. They were slaughtered by gladiators, devoured by half-starved lions, and hanged on crosses for their faithfulness to Jesus Christ. The VOICE OF THE MARTYRS magazine chronicles the price countless thousands are paying for their loyalty to Jesus in our day.

IV. AMERICA IS A NATION IN REBELLION AGAINST GOD TODAY.

A. America Was Founded On a Christian Foundation.

You may have heard the old expression, there is none so blind as those who will not see. There are millions of people today who know nothing of the Founding Fathers or their writings. Our history books have been re-written to leave God out. I will guarantee you there are school teachers who will deny this vehemently, but it is a fact. America's heroes today are not George Washington and James Madison, and John Witherspoon, but rock stars, actors, and dissenters of every stripe.

Have you ever heard about the case in which a man was taken to court for using the "D" word? After deliberating, for some time the decision was read. This is what the court said: Only God can damn anyone, and when you use that word, you are calling on God to damn someone. That is taking God's name in vain.

How many of you have ever held a copy of THE NEW ENGLAND PRIMER, printed in Boston in 1777? Let me tell you how children learned the alphabet:

- A - In Adam's fall, we sinned all.
- B - Heaven to find, the Bible Mind.
- C - Christ crucified, for sinners dy'd.
- D - The Deluge drowned the earth around.
- E - Elijah hid, by ravens fed.
- F - The judgment made, Felix afraid...

- L - Lot fled to Zoar, saw fiery shower on Sodom pour.
- N - Noah did view, the old world and new.
- R - Young pious Ruth, left all for truth.

If I asked questions from that book we might all be embarrassed today, yet they were asked of young children.

I believe something like 125 of the first 126 colleges were established as Christian colleges, and a primary concern was to train young men to preach the Word of God. Modern historians tell us that Signers of the Constitution, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin were not Christians, they were deists. What they absolutely refuse to tell our young people today is that all but two or three of the Signers of the Constitution were committed Christians. They are going to answer for the deception - because they set themselves in opposition to God.

The history books delete any reference to God and faith in George Washington's farewell address. The father of this country was perhaps the greatest American. Period. He was a man of faith and character. He was also a man of wisdom, courage, and humility.

B. America Is Also in Rebellion Against God.

1. The ACLU is waging an unholy war against the Ten Commandments.
2. Liberal politicians are waging a war against Christ in public places in America.
3. Vile entertainers openly mock godly morality.
4. Like Judah, America has rejected the fountains of living waters.
5. Like Judah, America hewn for herself broken cisterns that can hold no water.
6. The media glorifies Islam and oppresses Christianity.
7. Even liberal churches condemn those who take the Bible literally.

C. America Is Paying a Price For Disobedience to God.

1. Crime rate is a serious problem.
2. Theft is a way of life to many.
3. There is a subculture out there that preys on the rest of us.
4. We have become a profane, obscene, and pornographic society.
5. Many church members have fallen into the moral relativism trap.
6. The marriage vow is all but meaningless to many people
7. Alcoholism and drug addiction are exacting a horrifying toll.
8. Homosexuality is gaining support every day.
9. Abortion has claimed almost 45 million innocent lives.
10. Activist judges actually protect the most vile behavior imaginable.

D. The Price of Disobedience Is Still Very High.

God punished disobedient Israel. He punished disobedient Judah. He will punish disobedient America, and America is sinning against a far greater light than either Israel or Judah. Church membership will not take the place of obedience. Giving our tithes and offerings will not exonerate those who disobey Him. Folks, we are already paying a high price for low living. I will never forget hearing Dr. R. G. Lee quote the following poem in his great sermon, Pay Day Some Day:

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A SINNER
(Not Title)

This is the price I pay,
Just for one riotous day;
Years of regret and grief
And sorrows without relief.

Suffer it I will, my friend.
Suffer it to the end,
Until the grave shall give relief.

Small was the thing I bought,
Small was the thing at best,
Small was the debt, I thought,
But, Oh God, the interest.

By Paul Lawrence Dunbar

CONCLUSION. You either obey Him or you pay Him. That may seem like a serious overstatement, but I can assure you it is the Gospel. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” Reject Him and He will give you an opportunity to stand before the judgment bar of God and try your logic out on Him. Reject Him and He will deny you before His Father in heaven. Trust Him and obey Him and you will hear Him welcome you into the presence of His Father in heaven.