

# You Must Not Marry and Have Sons and Daughters in This Place

## Jeremiah's First Symbolic Action

### 16: 1-13

**DIG:** What three activities of normal human life does God forbid Jeremiah? Why? What is his abstinence from these things supposed to convey to the people? How do you suppose Jeremiah coped with the loneliness that came with his particular calling? How does Jeremiah 16:6-7 make you feel about the desolation in store for Judah? In what way will the exiled Judeans serve other gods?

**REFLECT:** When have you had to make sacrifices to serve the LORD? When? How? Are there activities you have given up in order to be more effective in God's service? Why? What happens when you keep turning your back on God (15:6 NASB)? Why doesn't HaShem have pity on the wicked dead? What would it mean for God to withdraw His blessing or consolation from you? Has that ever happened to you? How did you know it was happening at the time? How did you get it back? What did you do?

607 BC during the eleven-year reign of Jehoiakim

The one main point to the first symbolic action (what might be called a parable in action) is that Jeremiah's hardship would be symbolic of that which awaited the nation.

Jeremiah (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) uses Hosea a lot even though they had different messages. God told Hosea that he would marry a woman, but he would not be happily married. This would be a symbolic action to the northern kingdom of Israel. On the other hand, Jeremiah was not to marry. And his not marrying would serve as a symbolic action to the southern kingdom of Judah.

Then the word of ADONAI came to me:

**The first hardship:** You must not marry and have sons or daughters in this place (16:1-2). This is a sign that the covenant relationship was null and void. The LORD gave Yirmeyahu a good reason why he was not to marry. Hard and difficult times were coming, and his family might be killed in the siege of Jerusalem. For this is what the LORD says about the sons and daughters born in this Land and about the women who are their

mothers and the men who are their fathers: they will die of deadly diseases. They will not be mourned or buried but will be like dung lying on the ground. To be denied burial was considered by the Jews to be one of the greatest dishonors that could be inflicted upon a human being. They will perish by sword and famine, and their dead bodies will become food for the birds and wild animals (16:3-4). We can also assume that God did not want to subject a wife and children to the suffering that His prophet would have to undergo.

But all of that must have been of little comfort to Yirmeyahu, because if by nature and temperament anyone ever needed a wife and family it was he. In spite of everything, however, he was forced to go through life alone. His neighbors and relatives turned against him, just at the times when he needed them the most. His true friends could be counted on the fingers of one hand: Ahikam, Ebed-Melek, Baruch. And even from these he was separated for long periods of time by being placed in various prisons and dungeons, although his only crime was that he continually issued warnings about the coming judgment of God. Each successive king after Josiah considered Jeremiah an enemy of the court, although if they had only known the truth, they would have realized that Yirmeyahu was by far the best friend they ever had. But nobody likes a prophet of doom.<sup>159</sup>

**The second hardship:** YHVH tells Jeremiah that he wasn't to take part of the normal joys and sorrows of life, because his life was totally devoted to God. For this is what God says: Do not enter a house where there is a funeral meal; do not go to mourn or have sympathy, because I have withdrawn My peace (Hebrew: *shalom*), My steadfast love (Hebrew: *chesed*) and My mercy (Hebrew: *racham*) from this people, declares the LORD. Both high and low will die in this Land. They will not be buried or mourned. The magnitude of the slaughter will prohibit individual mourning (16:5-6a). This will be shown in three ways.

First, no one will cut themselves (16:6b). This was common among the pagans (First Kings 18:28), but the Torah forbid it (Leviticus 19:28, 21:5; Deuteronomy 14:1), although (surprise, surprise) some Jews did practice it! They were very fond of tattooing. Or, secondly, shave their head for the dead (16:6c) which was common in their culture (Ezra 9:3; Job 1:20; Isaiah 22:12; Amos 8:10; Micah 1:16; Ezekiel 7:18). Thirdly, no one will offer food to comfort those who mourn (Second Samuel 3:35, 12:16-17; Hosea 9:4) for the dead - not even for a father or mother - nor will anyone give them a drink of wine to console them (16:7). It was customary for the friends of mourners to provide them with their first meal after the funeral (Second Samuel 3:35; Ezekiel 24:17; Hosea 9:4). In addition, the mourner drank a special cup of wine, which included a prayer for comfort.

**The third hardship:** And do not enter a house where there is feasting and sit down to eat and drink (16:8). Why? God was removing the sounds of joy and gladness. For this is what ADONAI of heaven's angelic armies, the God of Isra'el, says: Before your eyes and in your days, **in your lifetime**, I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and groom in this place (16:9). Marriages in the Near East are celebrated by processions of friends, who throng the streets and give noisy demonstrations of their joy.<sup>160</sup> Imagine the scandal this abstention would have caused.

The abstention from **marriage**, however, was an even greater scandal. There is no parallel for such a call in the rest of the TaNaKh; no one else undertook such a gesture. We in our time are accustomed to the existence of celibate priests and to lay men and women who abstain from marriage, but there was no such notion in Isra'el.<sup>161</sup>

**Having dealt with the three areas of hardship in Jeremiah's life, God now applies this to the nation.** In the course of time people will begin to recognize Jeremiah's three areas of hardship and **they** will begin to ask questions because those hardships would so strongly go against the Jewish culture of the day. **When you tell these people all this and they ask you, "Why has the LORD decreed such a great disaster against us? What wrong have we done? What sin have we committed against ADONAI our God? At that point, Yirmeyahu was to give them an answer. Then say to them, "It is because your ancestors forsook Me," declares the LORD, "and followed other gods and served and worshiped them."** They forsook the One True God and did not keep His Torah. But you have behaved more wickedly than your ancestors. See how all of you are following the stubbornness of your evil hearts instead of obeying Me (16:10-12). What seemed perfectly obvious to God and His prophet escaped the obvious conclusion that the Israelites had brought this on themselves. They had not listened and relied on themselves. Now judgment was at the door.

**So I will throw you out of this Land into a land neither you nor your ancestors have known (although Babylon is not mentioned yet), and there you will serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor (16:13). How ironic! Banished from the Holy Land to a country where idolatry was the norm, they would have greater opportunity to indulge in their partiality for pagan worship.**

In the initial decades of the Babylonian Captivity Dani'el and his three Hebrew friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were pointed out as the exception for *not* worshipping other idols. The fact that **they** were brought up as the exception demonstrates that idol worship was the rule, rather than the exception. Therefore, God would show the Israelites no favor during that time.

Nevertheless, everyone must have companionship. Without a friend, any of us would dry up inside. At best we would become eccentric, at worst insane. **Yirmeyahu** knew this, and so **he** built up extensive spiritual reserves that served **him** well when **he** was isolated. **He** knew **ADONAI** was a friend who would never fail **him**, because at the very beginning of **his** ministry **YHVH** had said to **him**, “**I am with you and will rescue you**” (1:8 and 19).

In his *NIV Application commentary on Jeremiah*, Andrew Dearman recounts the costs of discipleship. In certain circles of believers the family has taken on nearly idolatrous status. The good news is that believers are rightfully concerned about the breakup of the primary social unit in society . . . the family, but marriage and family are not the ultimate destination in the life of faith. **ADONAI** uses those who are widowed or never married, or even those who are married and without children, in special ministries. **God's** Kingdom is full of servants, whose celibacy and/or childlessness have become more than a social stigma, they have become the means of **God's** Kingdom to grow.

One of the most distinguished evangelical spokesmen in the twentieth century, John Stott, never married. His personal view on the goodness of marriage and family are well known. The fruit of his rich ministry, including valuable publications and a long series of public travels for preaching and lectures, is a testimony to the use of the time he had as a single person. There are many others too numerous to count.

John Calvin's prayer at the end of **Jeremiah 16** is worth quoting and pondering:

All-powerful **God**, **You** are not content to give only one small corner of the earth to **Your** servants, **You** are pleased to extend **Your** Kingdom to the ends of the earth and make **Your** home with us through **Your** only **Son** in whatever place we are. Give us the grace that we may offer ourselves to **You** in sacrifice. Give us the grace to arrange our life in obedience to **Your** Word, that **Your** name be glorified in us and by us, finally we are made participants in the eternal glory acquired through **Your Son**, our **Lord, Jesus Christ**.<sup>162</sup>