

CHURCH SCHEDULE

Sunday School & Bible Study:
9:45 a.m.

Sunday Service: 11:00 a.m.

Wednesday Bible Study:
7:00 p.m.

SPEAKERS

February 2: Ivan Niemela,
Holy Communion

February 9: Ivan Niemela

February 16: Charles
Korhonen

February 23: Ivan Niemela,
*Potluck meal following the
service*

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Be Not Afraid of Their Faces

Jeremiah 1:8

Jeremiah, a major prophet of the Old Testament, played a critical role during the latter days of Judah, the southern kingdom. He preached for 40 years, mostly during the reign of its last five kings (Jer. 1:2-3), urging the people to repent of their sins (Jer. 3:13) or face God's judgment at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. When God first called him to speak to the nations, Jeremiah was reluctant, citing his youth, lack of experience, and fear of what others might think of him. This underscored both Jeremiah's humility and the intimidating nature of the mission he was called to undertake.

As humans, we can relate to Jeremiah's apprehension about preaching to people, especially to those who know us. The fear of receiving unfavorable criticism is something we all share. However, scripture tells us that all those who truly believe in Jesus will face such tribulation, especially when both repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus are shared with others. God's response to Jeremiah's fears was reassuring. He promised to be with Jeremiah and to give him the words to speak: *"I have put my words in thy mouth"* (Jer 1:9).

The major fear of the Israelites was Babylon's threat of war (Jer 42:11). They would sooner relinquish some of their freedoms at home rather than submit to a foreign power. Jeremiah, on the other hand, faced rejection, false accusation, physical abuse, loneliness, and emotional and spiritual struggle from his own people because his religious beliefs did not align with theirs. His main concern was the salvation of the unbeliever. However, God forewarned Jeremiah of upcoming challenges and prepared him to face them, assuring him that his efforts would not be in vain. God offers that same assurance to all believers today.

The preceding passages highlight that God chooses the right person to carry out His work, equipping him with the necessary tools to succeed rather than shielding him from danger. This 'choosing' is not influenced by one's motivation or by the opinions of others. Jesus expressed this by saying, *"Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest"* (Matthew 9:38). This suggests that God not only decides who will preach His word, but also that the 'harvest' represents those whom He has prepared to hear and believe the gospel.

If Jeremiah were to give in even slightly to his fears and alter the word of God to be more appealing to his detractors, God said that He would confuse his sermons, rendering them spiritually worthless (Jer. 1:17). God wanted Jeremiah to speak only the words He gave to Him daily: *"Therefore, I am against the prophets... that steal my words... from his neighbour"* (Jer. 23:30). Furthermore, God is against those who purport to speak in His name (Jer. 23:31) without ever receiving words from Him (Jer. 23:21). Despite these fears and challenges, Jeremiah remained steadfast in preaching repentance and the forgiveness of sins to the people (Jer. 3:12-13).

Jeremiah, despite his reluctance, was chosen by God to be a prophet even before he was born: *"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee: and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations"* (Jer. 1:5). Jeremiah's resulting prophecies warned of impending judgment but also offered hope of reconciliation with God. Throughout his life, Jeremiah faced numerous attempts on his life: his family plotted to kill him (Jer. 11:21-23), so did a mob of people (Jer. 26:8-24), and government officials threw him into a muddy cistern and left him there to die (Jer. 38:6-13), all because they did not like his preaching.

So, why did the Israelites reject Jeremiah's preaching? Firstly, they were greatly distracted by Babylon's aggressive advances. Secondly, many false prophets contradicted Jeremiah's words, assuring the people that all was fine and that God would protect them from Babylon. At the same time, their current religion would lead them to heaven is what they were told. Thus, the false prophets delivered comforting messages, aligning with the people's worldly desires, but contrasting with Jeremiah's constant warnings to repent. Moreover, these false prophets claimed to have received their messages from God, when in reality, they were products of their own imaginations (Jer. 23:16, 25-27), and the people did not recognize this.

The Judaeans had turned their backs on God and refused to repent and seek forgiveness for their sins, despite Jeremiah's counsel. They were more concerned with outward threats to their way of life than with the eternal salvation of their souls. And Jeremiah pointed this out, saying, "*Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not*" (Jer, 5:21). As Christians, we face similar situations where the troubling events of our time are unfolding right before our eyes and ears. And like the Judaeans, these events can become a major distraction to cause many to disregard the need to confess their sins to another brother or sister in faith (James 5:16), believing that all is well with their soul. Dear fellow traveler on the road of life, ask God to give you grace to repent of the sin that troubles your conscience while it is yet called today.

God's Peace,
Charles Korhonen