

Witnessing in the Last Days

By Nathan Warner

When we think of witnessing, we generally think of Believers reaching out to people who don't know the Gospel. When we think of examples, we think of the Apostles in the book of Acts, don't we? And when we think of persecution resulting from our witnessing, we think of the unbeliever rejecting the Gospel. While there certainly are many circumstances in our lives today that may echo the work of the Apostles, the work before many of us today is actually more akin to the work of the Prophets.

The task before the Apostles was to share a new revelation from God with people everywhere around the world. No one in the world had heard the Gospel, except for them. Today, nearly the entire world has heard the Gospel. They may not have a perfect understanding of it, but most people "know" about Jesus and His claims in one way or another, and they have "made up their minds" on the subject. Many people around the world today claim to be Christians (nearly 1/3 of the world population), yet many of them live lives that oppose the Gospel. Many more people claim to think Jesus was a good man and they approve of His words about the poor and downtrodden, while they may not agree with His claims to be God's Son. And many more people have walked away from the faith of their parents and grandparents but hold to some forms of tradition. Does that sound familiar? If you have read the Prophets, you know that they were God's witnesses sent to a people called by His name – Israel and Judah. Unfortunately these people, like many "Christians" today, brought sinful pollutions into His house and taught the people a different message than the one He spoke—out of the very words He had given them! They spoke lies in His name, saying, "Thus says the Lord!" and "Hear the Word of the Lord!" Do you not see a parallel in the Church today?

Like the Prophets, many Believers today are tasked with calling people to remembrance of the very Truth that they claim to live by and to heed God's warning of judgment for unrepentant sin. Like them, we often must witness to a people who call themselves by God's name and "know" about Him. In the last days, true Believers who preach the Gospel of repentance will be despised and hated by "Christians" and "churches" just as the Prophets were hated by priests and religious leaders of their day, even though they were preaching the exact law that the prophets and priests were tasked with protecting and teaching to the people! You see, to many people today, churches stand as monuments to "their father's religion." It is the "old way" that didn't work so well for their parents. For many people, churches are seen as nothing more than a cultural tradition. Many more attach themselves to flashy ministries and "relevant" churches that preach a different Gospel in God's name. Many more still call themselves "Christians," but they are becoming some of the greatest enemies of true Believers *"having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power"* (2 Timothy 3:5).

In these last days, God might just as easily address "Christians" as He did the Jews at the time of Jeremiah: *"They have turned to Me their back and not their face. And though I have taught them persistently, they have not listened to receive instruction. They set up their abominations in the house that is called by My name, to defile it"* (Jeremiah 32:33-34).

Through the Prophets, God continually characterized the people of Israel as His wife. While speaking specifically to Israel and not to the Church, there are still many things we can draw from this parallel. God describes Jerusalem in Isaiah as the faithless City who was once *"full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross, your best wine mixed with water. Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves*

a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not bring justice to the fatherless, and the widow's cause does not come to them” (Isaiah 1:21b-23). “I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown...What wrong did your fathers find in Me that they went far from Me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless?...I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in, you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination. The priests did not say, ‘Where is the LORD?’ Those who handle the law did not know Me; the shepherds transgressed against Me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit” (Jeremiah 2:2b, 5, 7-8). “Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her. Though they say, ‘As the LORD lives,’ yet they swear falsely. O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish; You have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent” (Jeremiah 5:1-3).

How was Jeremiah’s witness received? Did “many believe”? Jeremiah described himself as *“a man of strife and a man of contention to all the land! I have not lent, nor have men lent money to me, yet everyone curses me”* (Jeremiah 15:10b). *“I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, ‘Violence and destruction!’ For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long”* (Jeremiah 20:7b-8). Aren’t we described this way today, especially by other “Christians”? We cause “strife” and “contention” by preaching the Word of God, by witnessing repentance of sin to a people who know their sin and love it. When we share the Word of the Lord, we are laughed at and mocked for our “obsolete” interpretation of it. When we speak God’s Word, the “church” tries to reign us in, telling us Jesus taught “acceptance” and “love.” They spout Scriptures out of context, sandwiched between man’s thinking, fearing people will leave their assembly if repentance and judgment are preached. The pastors and teachers of the “church” preach out of the Bible a different gospel entirely – a word of acceptance, tolerance, union with sin, no judgment, no responsibility, no discernment, and self-indulgence, for “God wants you to do what makes you happy.” These false teachers then point at Believers and call them teachers of “hate,” narrow-minded, and spiteful, desiring cruel and terrible things to happen to “good people.” Because of this powerful opposition and the “tickling” delusions they teach, few will be the people who turn to the truth, as Isaiah cried, *“Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”* (Isaiah 53:1) No one wants to hear that they must repent, though they know they must if they are to live. In the end they find a teacher or a religious authority who teaches in God’s name what they want to hear. This gives them cover for their sin, and this is why they hate the witness of Truth, because it threatens the justification they live by.

Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and all the other Prophets weren’t witnessing to heathens who had no knowledge of God. They were witnessing to a people who identified on some level with God and His Word, yet they were opposed by the vast ranks of the religious leaders and priests who had become false teachers. Jeremiah was physically sickened by the wickedness being taught in God’s name. *“As for the prophets: my heart is broken within me, all my bones tremble; I have become like a drunken man, even like a man overcome with wine, because of the LORD and because of His holy words. For the land is full of adulterers; for the land mourns because of the curse. The pastures of the wilderness have dried up. Their course also is evil and their might is not right. For both prophet and priest are polluted; even in My house I have found their*

wickedness,' declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 23:9-11). *"I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, then they would have proclaimed My words to My people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds. Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD. I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, who think to make My people forget My name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot My name for Baal?...Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who steal My words from one another. Behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who use their tongues and declare, 'declares the LORD.' Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, declares the LORD, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them. So they do not profit this people at all, declares the LORD. When one of this people, or a prophet or a priest asks you, 'What is the burden of the LORD?' you shall say to them, 'You are the burden, and I will cast you off, declares the LORD'" (Jeremiah 23:21-27, 32-33).*

In these dark days, we should draw from the example of the Prophets in our witnessing to our friends, families, acquaintances, churches, pastors, and teachers who call themselves "Christians." But while we witness the one true Gospel, sharing the Word of the Lord, we should not look for converts and friends to come from our work. We face a tough situation today, not unlike Isaiah's commission when God told him his task was to preach to the people for decades with very few people turning to the Truth: *"Go, and say to this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed"* (Isaiah 6:9-10), for the Day of God's Wrath has arrived.

The Prophets suffered rejection by their own people for their witness: *"Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through His own blood. Therefore let us go to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach He endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name"* (Hebrews 13:12-15). We need to take comfort in the fact that we are in God's will, and the persecution we face is a testament of our identity in Him. So *"lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner; but My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will never be dismayed. Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is My law; fear not the reproach of man, nor be dismayed at their revilings. For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool; but My righteousness will be forever, and My salvation to all generations"* (Isaiah 51:6-8). Amen.