

Hanging out With Heros

JEREMIAH

How to Face the End
of the World



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JEREMIAH: HOW TO FACE THE END OF THE WORLD

Introduction

Do thoughts of the mushroom cloud, a real Star Wars disaster, or a worldwide financial crisis frighten you? Do you think you were born in the wrong generation, and thus resent having to think about the world blowing up at any moment? Do you feel uncertain about growing up in a world stockpiled with nuclear weapons, bulging from overpopulation, and

unprecedented pollution – greater problems than those seen by any other generation? You need to meet Jeremiah. He can help you, because he lived through tough times that his parents and grandparents knew nothing about.

Jeremiah was born in a small town north of Jerusalem during the reign of perhaps the most wicked king the country of Judah had ever had. Jeremiah's father was a priest, so Jeremiah also became a priest. But while he was still a young man, Jeremiah was called by God to be a prophet, to warn the people of coming disaster.

Although Jeremiah was shy, self-conscious, and sensitive, God chose him for the most difficult of all jobs. And God knew what He was doing. Jeremiah was the best person to deliver, with love in his voice and compassion in his heart, a very harsh message. Through Jeremiah God could show love, even while giving the sternest warning. And through Jeremiah God could show His power, because people would realize how much a man such as Jeremiah needed to depend on God in order to deliver the message at all.

Even though Jeremiah is called “the weeping prophet,” and even “God's crybaby,” he is best known for courage and faithfulness. No man could have preached for forty years to an unresponsive audience, braved threats on his life, and watched his country fall further into sin, without moments of discouragement, yet Jeremiah did those things and never gave up.

Remarkably, he never ran away or went into permanent hiding. Jeremiah's life was an adventure in obedience.

Losing the Popularity Contest

Jeremiah was not popular. When Jeremiah began his ministry, young King Josiah befriended the prophet – Josiah had tried to bring his nation back to God, so he understood the burden on Jeremiah's heart. After Josiah died, however, none of the succeeding kings appreciated Jeremiah's message. King Jehoiakim hated Jeremiah so much that he took his penknife, hacked up the scroll containing Jeremiah's message, and threw it on the fire. People ridiculed Jeremiah by asking, “What's the sad news from God today?” They ignored his warnings. Yet, because of his faithfulness and love for God, Jeremiah kept right on speaking God's truth. And God protected him from those who wanted to kill him and brought him out of prison. God also gave

him a best friend named Baruch who stuck with him through thick and thin.

When the Word Seems to Be Falling Apart

Jeremiah repeatedly warned the people that if they didn't repent, Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Babylonians. His listeners ignored him. The proud, headstrong people of Judah prepared to fight Babylon and accused Jeremiah of treason. But Jerusalem was destroyed, just as Jeremiah had said. To a Jew, the destruction of Jerusalem was the end of the world.

Jeremiah faced the "end of the world" with God, and that made all the difference. The calamity he had prophesied for so long came to pass, but even in the midst of disaster God protected him. The Babylonians treated Jeremiah kindly and let him choose whether to live in Babylon or stay in Judah. He chose to stay. The Jews who were left in Judah, however, still wouldn't listen to Jeremiah. In rebellion they moved to Egypt and forced Jeremiah and Baruch to go with them. This is the last record of Jeremiah, but you can be sure he continued to preach God's Word until he died.

Although Jeremiah was a failure by the world's standards, he was a tremendous success because he obeyed God. His life has been an inspiration to many. His example is especially significant in this age when the end of the world seems a real possibility. As a "last days Christian," a young person living in these times, you will profit greatly from the study of a great prophet, Jeremiah.

But That's Not the Future I've Planned

"The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.' 'Ah, Sovereign Lord,' I said, 'I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.' But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,' declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 1: 4-8).

You have dreams for your future – a happy marriage, attractive and well-adjusted children, a prestigious and high-paying job, skiing vacations, and

Caribbean cruises. Will they come true? Actually, the realities of the world situation – crumbling economies, the danger of a superpower clash, and increasing terrorism – might create for you a future far different from the one you have been intending.

Jeremiah also had dreams, but he didn't get to live out the future he had planned. His fellow Israelites' hypocrisy, rebellion, and idol worship were about to bring God's judgment. And God wanted to use Jeremiah as His messenger. His life would not be all that he had expected. But he was comforted by knowing God had figured it all out ahead of time, for before Jeremiah was even born, God had set him apart to be His special prophet.

God had designed Jeremiah to be a “tough times baby” who would grow up to be the man God needed for such a crisis. Yet, when Jeremiah learned God had chosen him to be a prophet, to give God's words to the country of Judah, he was surprised – for several reasons. First, he thought that he was too young. (He was probably a teenager.) Second, he did not know how to speak in public, as prophets had to do. Third, he was very shy and tenderhearted, not a bold Elijah who could easily denounce sin. Jeremiah's personality didn't seem to fit the job description. But God promised to put His words in Jeremiah's mouth, and to put courage and strength in Jeremiah's heart. And that's exactly what He did. Although Jeremiah's message was unpopular, and his life was never easy, his days were filled with excitement and adventure.

Maybe you feel as Jeremiah did, not sure you have what it takes to be a “last days Christian.” You need to realize that God made you exactly for that purpose. That is why you're living now, rather than a hundred years ago. Be assured He will give you what you need to accomplish His purpose. He wants you to depend on Him for strength and wisdom. That's why He gives assignments that seem too hard, work that you can't complete without depending on Him. He wants to make you a person who can cope with tension, danger, and uncertainty, a person who can thrive in challenging and difficult times. This kind of life may have many ups and downs, but it will give you marvelous opportunities to trust God.

Think about it. Do you really want the boring, predictable future you've planned? Who had a richer life – Hudson Taylor, who faced rejection,

hardship, and sorrow in faraway China while helping thousands of Chinese to accept Christ? Or the man who stayed in England, married the girl next door, enjoyed a prosperous job, and retired in style? Wouldn't you rather be a Hudson Taylor?

There is something wonderful about living on the cutting edge, experiencing the agony and the ecstasy of being on the front lines. Maybe that future won't turn out the way you planned, but as a "last days Christian" you can live a thrilling, action-packed life.

"Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you." declares the Lord. Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, 'Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant. Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land – against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,' declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 1: 8-10, 17-19).

1. Make a list of all your fears about the future. Now, reread the above verses, cross out each fear on your list, and replace it with a promise from God.
2. Do you face the future with dread or with anticipation? What can you learn from the above passage that can erase the dread?
3. What are the "kings of Judah" that may fight against you this week? Pray about the situation, asking God for His courage and His protection.

Stamping Out Worldliness, Wickedness and Weeds

"Only acknowledge your guilt – you have rebelled against the Lord your God, you have scattered your favors to foreign gods under every spreading tree, and have not obeyed me," declares the Lord. 'Return, faithless people,' declares the Lord, 'for I am your husband. I will choose one of you from every town and two from every clan and bring you to Zion. If you will return,

O Israel, return to me,' declares the Lord. 'If you put your detestable idols out of my sight and no longer go astray, and if in a truthful, just and righteous way you swear, "As surely as the Lord lives," then the nations will be blessed by him and in him they will glory'" (Jeremiah 3: 13, 14, 4: 1, 2).

Can you imagine a fast-spreading weed that could resist all insecticides and which would fatally infect anyone who touched it? Which would cause slow death to any animal that ate it? Which would contaminate the milk and meat of that animal, thus infecting anyone who drank the milk or ate the meat?

If such a weed existed, would people just shrug their shoulders and concede, "There's nothing we can do"? Would they halfheartedly try to destroy this plant? Of course not. If a chemical for eradicating this weed were discovered, they would pay any amount, and travel anywhere to buy it. They would then search out every plant and systematically destroy it.

Sin is like that imaginary weed. It contaminates anyone who touches it. Although its effects cannot always be immediately seen, those who persist in sin suffer eternal death. Left unchecked, sin will destroy any person, society, or country.

God, of course, has a cure. He destroyed your sin and self-centeredness when Jesus died on the cross, and now He offers you the cure. But this cure can't be yours without complete repentance. Only repentance enables you to accept God's offer of a new life.

Genuine repentance depends on knowing God's character; His love, justice – and power. Do you know God in that way? Or do you resent His commanding you to obey your parents, or His prohibiting sex before marriage? Until you see God as loving and just, you won't repent; you'll instead defend yourself against an unreasonable God. Therefore, you must study God's character as revealed in the Bible, and let the Holy Spirit reveal to you what God is like.

So how can you apply all this to your life? First, realize that true repentance involves a complete change – turning around and going in the other direction. Second, you must see God as He really is; loving and just.

Finally, you must daily conform your life to these facts. For example, if you

feel sorry for yourself because you're not as smart as your brother and sister, you must hate the sin of self-pity and believe that God is loving and just in making you the way you are. (He didn't want a world full of geniuses – and for good reason.) You also must believe that God is all-powerful and will give you all the brains to do the things He wants you to do. Then thank Him.

You now have turned from self-pity to thanking God for making you just the way you are; you have performed a 180-degree reversal – that's repentance. This initial repentance, giving your whole life to Jesus, puts you on a new road. Now you must keep walking down the highway.

Maybe you already know that the breaking up world around you is infected by sin – which is the root cause of the whole mess. But you maybe don't know that you can be a Jeremiah, offering people a way out. Although the Israelites ignored Jeremiah, at other times in history entire regions, even countries, accepted the call to repent, and became islands of peace in a disintegrating world.

Every Christian, including you, is appointed to give people in his neighborhood the chance to repent and live a new life. You are to become an eradicator of weeds – stamping out worldliness and wickedness, offering hope even as the end of the world breathes down your neck. But if you don't practice repentance, you'll be part of the problem instead of part of the solution.

“... God's kindness leads you toward repentance” (Romans 2: 4).

“The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1: 15).

“... unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13: 3).

“I (Paul) preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds” (Acts 26: 20).

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28: 19, 20).

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray

and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7: 14).

1. Why does the kindness – love – of God lead people to repentance?
2. Why must you repent to receive salvation?
3. Why must your initial repentance be followed by a daily walking in that repentance?
4. Why is your repentance, and your teaching it to others, important to your community and your country?

A Bright Future and the End of the World

“Have you not brought this on yourselves by forsaking the Lord your God when he led you in the way? Now why go to Egypt to drink water from the Shihor? And why go to Assyria to drink water from the River? Your wickedness will punish you; your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the Lord your God and have no awe of me,’ declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty” (Jeremiah 2: 17, 19).

You can see it on the screen – cities enveloped in flames, a world staggering with radioactivity, slow death, and suffering; life reduced to a daily struggle against a hostile environment. You can hear it in church – a stirring sermon proving you are living in the last days. You can read it in the newspaper – street violence, guerilla warfare, and terrorism. Everything seems to scream; “The end of all things is near” (1 Peter 4: 7)! How can you, a teenager who has every right to look forward to a bright future, face such a world?

Jeremiah experienced the “end of the world” as he knew it. The Babylonians’ knocking down the gates of Jerusalem frightened him as much as thoughts of a glowing mushroom cloud terrify you. Death from famine, disease, and sword seemed no more pleasant to him than death from fire and radioactivity seems to you. Life as a captive in a foreign land appeared just as hopeless to him as life without electricity, safe food, and automobiles appears to you. Either way, life would never be the same again. The experiences of Jeremiah,

who lived in times as tough as today, are recorded in the Bible as a guide for “last days Christians.”

You must understand, as Jeremiah did, that the evil in the world is a result of sin, and also the most effective way to show people they must change their ways. Each sin has a consequence – for example, greed causes war, dishonesty ruins economies of nations, and selfish actions create chaos. God uses these consequences to make people realize that there must be a higher way of life, that they should give their lives to God. Sometimes, only sin and its consequences exposed in the most extreme form will open people’s spiritual eyes.

Today, as in Jeremiah’s time, God gives prophecies (special messages) to His people, so they can know what to expect and how to prepare for what’s coming. God not only used Jeremiah to prophesy impending doom – the fall of Jerusalem and the need to repent, but also to explain His total plan. God would use the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity in Babylon to cure the survivors of idol worship, so they would return to their land. Then He would send them a Savior (Jesus) and bring them to a time when “I (God) will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people ...they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” (Jeremiah 31: 33, 34). In the midst of despair, God was giving them hope!

We are living in difficult times. And that’s what Jesus predicted over 2000 years ago; “you will hear of wars and rumors of wars but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.” But there’s hope, a bright future; “... he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24: 6, 7, 13). The New Testament tells clearly that Christ will return, and that true Christians will enjoy everlasting life in heaven!

God has everything planned. He has a pattern and purpose, even in this falling-apart world. And if you’ve given Jesus your life, the future couldn’t be brighter, because it will be forever spent with Him.

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3: 9-13).

1. What is God's purpose in all that happens? (See verse 9.)
2. What is going to happen in the future?
3. How should your knowledge of the future affect the way you live now?
4. Those who have given their lives to Jesus look forward to a great hope. What is that hope?

“Stop the World, I Want to Get Off”

“The Lord said, ‘It is because they have forsaken my law, which I set before them; they have not obeyed me or followed my law. Instead, they have followed the stubbornness of their hearts; they have followed the Baals, as their fathers taught them.’ Therefore, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says; ‘See, I will make this people eat bitter food and drink poisoned water.’ This is what the Lord says; ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this; that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 9: 13-15, 23, 24).

Life seems overwhelming. School is a parade of locker-room jokes, swearing “seminars,” anti-Bible opinions, wholesale cheating, and harassment of

honest people; home is a hotbed of bickering and selfishness; and work is a snake-pit of dishonesty and favoritism. Trying to stay clean and live for Jesus can, at times, seem impossible. If life were a bus, you'd probably ask the driver to let you off.

Jesus understands! He told His disciples before He left for heaven, "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Matthew 24: 13, 13). You can be one of those who stand firm to the end.

"Wait a minute," you're saying. "That's easier said than done."

But it can be done – Jeremiah proved it. He not only stayed close to God, he kept giving God's Word to a disrespectful, potentially dangerous audience. Often Baruch, his secretary, was the only one who stood with him. Wickedness was increasing rapidly, false religion was flourishing, and the international situation was dreadful. Does this sound just like today? It was. And the God of Jeremiah hasn't changed either. So, if you want to know how God can make you strong and keep you close to Him, keep reading.

Jeremiah realized that knowing the God of kindness, justice, and righteousness was more important than doing anything else, and he lived that way, in complete dependence on God. He couldn't count on his family or the people he preached to for comfort, so he got it directly from God. He didn't try to become a member of the ungodly "in group." He followed God – virtually alone. He never used the "everybody-else-is-doing-it" excuse. God's opinion was all that mattered to him. He told God, "When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty" (Jeremiah 15: 16). God's presence and words were the joy of his life.

Such a life wasn't always easy. Jeremiah was often lonely and even heartbroken – some call him "the weeping prophet." He cared so much for his people that he could deliver even the harshest message with love. He didn't allow himself to become calloused or hardboiled. Neither did he run away or try to hide.

What was his secret? A deep love relationship with God that went far beyond

simple knowledge. Jesus said the real test of love is obedience, and Jeremiah's obedience proved he loved God more than anyone or anything.

If you truly love someone, you'll suffer anything for him. You'll let the rest of the world think you're a fool, because you're satisfied that you've given happiness to the person you love. That is the kind of love you must give Jesus. He loves you so much He went to the cross. He loves you so much that even though He knows everything about you, He still wants you in His family. His love will never end.

Respond to that love. Don't let your love for Jesus grow cold. Be willing even to suffer for Him in a sick, sad and sinful world, and be ready to receive from Him all you need to live above the mess.

"This is what the Lord says; 'Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit'" (Jeremiah 17: 5-8).

"(Jesus said,) O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Matthew 23: 37).

"This is what the Lord says; ' ... I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness'" (Jeremiah 31: 2, 3).

1. If you're concerned about what other people think, why will you lose the battle before it even starts?
2. Have you told God that you want to be a tree with roots in the river of His love and truth, rather than be a scrubby bush that gets

love and opinions from those around you?

3. Can you recall times when you refused the love and guidance God wanted to give you?
4. How can God's great love help you face a sick and sinful world?

“I’d Like a Religion That Believes Selfishness Is a Virtue”

“Among my people are wicked men who lie in wait like men who snare birds and like those who set traps to catch men and have grown fat and sleek. Their evil deeds have no limit; they do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it, they do not defend the rights of the poor. A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land; The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way. But what will you do in the end?” (Jeremiah 5: 26, 28, 30, 31).

“But I said, ‘Ah, Sovereign Lord, the prophets keep telling them, “You will not see the sword or suffer famine. Indeed, I will give you lasting peace in this place.” ‘Then the Lord said to me, ‘The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds’” (Jeremiah 14: 13, 14).

Have you noticed how often people change their beliefs in order to avoid guilt? Ginny worships “love” because, she says, “Love will solve all the world’s problems”; it also allows her to sleep with her boyfriend. Paul is “finding himself” through the martial arts; he’d rather practice karate than attend church, anyway. Jennifer thinks Eastern thought has the answer; at least it doesn’t tell her she’s a sinner. Dave doesn’t advertise it, but he’d like to join any cult that teaches that selfishness is a virtue.

Believing in the true God requires accepting what He says and conforming your life to it, not making up a religion and a god that allow you to do as you please. There is only one way. With so many philosophies floating around, however, you may sometimes wonder if you're on the right track – as Jeremiah did. So how do you make sure that you're staying on course? By understanding the basic reasons for false religions and thus discovering some

ways to guard against error.

False religions appeal to two kinds of people. They appeal to people who wish to cover their sinful actions with outward piety – church attendance and well-publicized good deeds. They are attractive also to people who try to relieve their guilt by finding a religion that condones their actions. Such people hate to admit their sins and repent – even though they'll receive the forgiveness Jesus accomplished when He died on the cross. They believe it's more comfortable to “pay” their own way by performing prescribed rituals and doing good works.

People who haven't received God's forgiveness continually try to fill a big vacuum inside themselves. Therefore they easily fall for anything that sounds promising. Here is how Jeremiah described such people; “My people have committed two sins; they have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, (water-tight pits for storing rainwater) broken cisterns that cannot hold water” (Jeremiah 2: 13).

On the other hand, those who sincerely desire God act differently. They are sensitive to what is true and what is false. Here is how Jesus described them; “He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God” (John 8: 47).

Even Christians must realize that if they ever turn away from God, they, too, will be building broken cisterns. It might be well to check yourself, to see if you're digging any cistern pits. So ask yourself these questions: Do I ever act religious or do good things to cover up a sin I should confess and forsake? Am I ever unwilling to admit I'm wrong? Am I too lazy to thoroughly study what the Bible says on a topic, and thus prone to accept what somebody else says? Am I unwilling to obey Jesus on every issue? If you answered yes to any of these questions, you've got trouble.

Hypocrisy, pride, ignorance and disobedience to truth breed false religions. If you decide you can't live without your boyfriend – no matter what God's thinks – you'll open yourself to all kinds of deception and wrong doctrine. If you insist on deciding what is “true for you”, you'll make up your own religion. And you'll undoubtedly find people who will tell you selfishness is okay. But whenever you run to be first in the dessert line so you'll get the

biggest piece of pie, you'll still feel guilty; God's truth is built into the universe, and you can't avoid it.

Because people don't want to acknowledge God's truth, false religions will flourish in these last days, as the Bible says they will. Countries will disintegrate, empires will fall, and people will be nervous wrecks – because they disobey God. Hundreds of religious philosophies will claim truth, but, as always, “this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17: 3).

“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1: 21).

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4: 12).

“Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written; ‘So that you may be proved right in your words and prevail in your judging’” (Romans 3: 4).

“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men – the testimony given in its proper time” (1 Timothy 2: 5).

1. How would you answer this question: “Why are there so many religions if there's only one God?”
2. What's the answer to this question: “How can you be confident there's only one way to God?”
3. Are you going to follow your own logic and convenience, or God's truth as found in the Bible? Ask God to show you if you've gotten off the track. Then do what you must to get right with Him.

“But Lord, I Want to Get Married”

“Then the word of the Lord came to me; ‘You must not marry and have sons or daughters in this place.’ 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 refuse lying on the ground. They will perish by sword and famine, and their dead bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth’” (Jeremiah 16: 1-4).

Are you already planning your wedding? If you're a girl, do you dream of a perfect June day, an elegant eggshell gown, four bridesmaids in lavender, and Mr. Wonderful waiting for you at the end of the aisle? If you're a guy, do you dream of marrying a breathtaking blonde who will make all the guys jealous of you? After all, you couldn't bear the thought of being an “old maid” or ending up as the guy that nobody would marry.

But before you get trapped into the “I'd-better-get-married-while-I-have-the-chance” syndrome, consider three important thoughts.

First, God intended that you get your fulfillment from Him, not from anyone else. In heaven, where every person will be completely fulfilled, there is no marriage, because Jesus will be the bridegroom, and His church will be the bride. God wants you to be able to say, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And being with you, I desire nothing on earth” (Psalm 73: 25). When God becomes that important to you, you'll be able to give to others what God has given to you – unconditional love. You won't be a leech trying to get from another person what Christ alone can give you. Only then will you know how to treat a roommate, a boyfriend, a girlfriend, or even a husband or wife.

Second, life's priority is following Jesus and building His kingdom, not getting married or having dates. This attitude takes the pressure off you. If you're taken up with obeying Jesus, and He does not give the go-ahead to pursue a relationship, you'll be single (or dateless), not because you're ugly and undesirable, but because Jesus has given you an important work which you can accomplish better single than married. Of course, the person who constantly bemoans being single will never discover that special assignment. This is not a copout for being antisocial and slovenly, or avoiding contact

with those of the opposite sex. Nonetheless, you will have clear priorities; if God calls you to be single, He has something special for you to do.

On the other hand, if Jesus tells you to marry, He knows you can serve Him better with a partner. Because your marriage “orders” came from God, however, you'll have no reason to feel superior and look down on unmarried people. As a bonus, if you marry in obedience to God, you'll have a solid base from which to solve any marital problems that may crop up.

Third, God can better see the future, and therefore knows best how to protect you and enable you to work for Him. A book about Christians in Communist Bulgaria describes a man who endured terrible imprisonment, including brainwashing and torture. In spite of his suffering he did not break down. This man had a couple of advantages; he was physically strong and he was single. Why did singleness help him? The authorities could not break him by threatening his wife and children.

This is why God forbade Jeremiah to marry. When the prophet preached against the sins of Israel, no one could threaten his wife and children. When Jerusalem was destroyed, he would not be burdened by worry for a family. In the tough days ahead, God may need other single “Jeremiahs” to do His work.

God knows if ten years from now your being single will allow you the time or money or freedom to do something for His kingdom that no married person could accomplish. And you won't be miserable without marriage. God will provide all the emotional fulfillment and companionship you need. He gave Jeremiah a loyal and faithful companion, Baruch, who stuck with him all his life. Best of all, God will free you from anxiety about the future. Let Him change your prayer from “Lord, I want to get married,” to, “Lord, I want to do your will.”

“I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs – how he can please the Lord. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs; Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit” (1 Corinthians 7: 23-24).

“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ... ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5: 22, 25, 31, 32).

1. What should be a person’s main purpose, whether he is married or single?
2. What is wrong with saying, “I want to be single because I want freedom and fun”? or, “I want to get married so I’ll be important to someone”?
3. Why can worrying about getting married keep you from serving Jesus right now?
4. Do you think of marriage as an opportunity to demonstrate the relationship that Christ has with His church and to show Jesus to the world? Or is your idea of marriage status, sexual satisfaction, and security?

Where Does Courage Come From?

“I will make you a wall to this people, a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue and save you,” declares the Lord. ‘I will save you from the hands of the wicked and redeem you from the grasp of the cruel’” (Jeremiah 15: 20, 21).

As you read in the papers about brainwashing, genetic engineering, heads of state encouraging “holy” war, and the possible death of our solar system, you may shudder a little with fear – realizing that if the world doesn’t end soon, it may not be fit to live in. But fear can hit much closer to home – such as when you walk a few blocks alone at night, or when you meet a certain gang in the halls at school, or when you hear a teenaged girl was murdered three blocks from your house. At those times you may wonder, “Where does courage

come from?” Again, you can learn from Jeremiah, who was called by God to a dangerous, unpopular job.

Pretend, for a moment, that Jeremiah’s Israel is today’s United States; In fear of a Soviet invasion, the federal government has suspended all constitutional rights, allowing traitors to be immediately shot – so God commands you to announce the US is losing the war with Russia because of people’s sin and their and their unwillingness to repent. And the solution He offers is that the US should surrender and allow the Russians to punish the United States for God. If that isn’t bad enough, God tells you to make your pronouncements out in front of the White House! Now you know how Jeremiah felt when he told Israel to repent, and when he predicted the fall of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah was in constant danger. People from his hometown wanted to kill him. Even his family turned against him. The government and religious leaders, and false prophets wanted him executed for treason. He endured verbal attack, house arrest, and even imprisonment in the mucky bottom of a cistern. Through all this Jeremiah displayed remarkable courage. What was his secret?

Jeremiah’s secret was *faith*. God had promised to protect him, and Jeremiah believed Him. He realized confidence in God’s promises was better than any sword, or bodyguard, or karate lesson. When the powerful, influential men of Judah wanted to kill him, he told them bluntly that God had sent him to give a message, so if they killed him they would be responsible to God – then he kept right on preaching. God kept His promise to protect Jeremiah.

God also provided people to help and protect Jeremiah. He used Baruch, an ever-loyal companion, to faithfully transcribe Jeremiah’s sermons. He used Ebed-melech, an African servant in the palace (from modern-day Sudan), to convince the king that Jeremiah should be lifted out of the cistern where he was imprisoned; Ebed-melech risked his career to save Jeremiah (Jeremiah 38). God also used the Babylonian captain in charge of Jewish prisoners to give Jeremiah not only freedom, but food and a gift (Jeremiah 40).

God gave Jeremiah a super-hazardous job and perfect protection, so if He asks you to take a big risk, be assured God will take care of you. He knows you live in a dangerous world, and He may ask you to take a dangerous

assignment. But you can have courage by placing complete confidence in God and His promises of protection – and there’s a bunch. Study those promises. Memorize them. Make them part of you. Allow the God of promises to be your God, your friend, and your protector.

“Peter and the other apostles replied; ‘We must obey God rather than men!’” (Acts 5: 29).

“The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion” (Proverbs 28: 1).

“I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears” (Psalm 34: 4).

“The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song” (Psalm 28: 7).

1. God promises to protect you if He sends you on a dangerous assignment. Can you expect God to protect you when you do something dangerous, just to show off? Why is there a difference?
2. Do you pray in faith, asking God for courage? What fears do you have that God would have you conquer?
3. Have you memorized any of God's promises to help you overcome fear? If you haven’t, start now.