

# Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;  
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;  
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;  
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;  
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;  
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.  
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;  
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.  
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.  
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.  
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

**The Linen Sash**  
**July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012**  
**Jeremiah 13:1-11**  
**Rev. Paul Carter**

## **Introduction:**

Open your Bibles this morning to Jeremiah 13:1-11. My favourite thing about this WTTB journey is how it encourages us to deal with passages of the Bible that are off the beaten track, shall we say. We've all heard multiple sermons on Jesus and the Woman at the Well; we've all heard countless sermons on the 10 commandments; we've heard sermons on "Judge not lest ye be judged" and we've heard sermons on "go into all the world and make disciples" but I'm guessing that no one here, including me, has heard a sermon on the symbol of the linen sash. We are way off the beaten track this morning and I am excited because we are going to discover treasures old and new today by God's grace. Let me provide just a little bit of background and orientation for you before we begin.

Jeremiah is one of the most important prophets in the Old Testament. He is the author of this book bearing his name and also of the book of Lamentations; many scholars believe he was also the author of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings. That means that by word count he wrote more of the Old Testament than perhaps even Moses. He is a major character and you need to know a little bit about him. He was both a prophet and priest and he may have been the cousin to Ezekiel. He

ministered during the latter years of the Southern Kingdom of Judah in the times leading up to the Babylonian exile. The Northern Kingdom had been exiled by the Assyrians a hundred years prior and now Jeremiah begins to announce that the same fate awaits the Southern Kingdom if they do not repent. Jeremiah was only 19 when he began to minister. He was not very popular. His home town rejected him and even some of his own family members turned against him and several attempts were made against his life. God forbade him to marry as a sign to the nation that doom was approaching and that this was no time for the normal activities of life. He was lonely and isolated and he is known to history as the weeping prophet. He saw what no one else saw or cared to see. He saw the end of God's favour and the approach of God's wrath and nobody wanted to hear about it. When the Babylonians finally did come to destroy the city and send the people into exile, so famous was this prophet that King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon dispatched a special envoy to capture Jeremiah and preserve him alive from the fury of the Jews. He spent his latter years being treated as something of a talisman or good luck charm and was eventually kidnapped by a bunch of Jewish rebels who attempted to overthrow the Babylonians unsuccessfully and who then fled to Egypt with Jeremiah in tow. He is said to have died there in exile. This is the man through whom God spoke these words and told this story:

<sup>1</sup>Thus the LORD said to me: "Go and get yourself a linen sash, and put it around your waist, but do not put it in water."

This is less bizarre than perhaps you might think. The Hebrew prophets were often to be found acting out visual prophecies. Ezekiel for example sat in front of his house cooking on dung fires and chopping up his own hair with a sword in order to make various prophetic predictions; Isaiah walked around town naked for three years and Hosea married a known prostitute – they did these things at the command of the Lord as a way of prophesying. These were public figures and this was in the time before TV. People would say to one another: "Hey Bob, on the way home from work tonight let's swing by Ezekiel's house to see what he's doing today. Maybe he's naked on top of a dung bar-b-q making a quilt out of his own hair – wouldn't that be cool? Let's go check it out!" Well, Jeremiah did this sort of thing too. Here he is sent by God into the market to buy a new linen sash or short kilt. It was made of linen which was the fabric of the priesthood. It was a holy garment. Jeremiah was a prophet and prophets in those days seem to have had a uniform of tight fitting, coarse woven cloth and so Jeremiah would have worn this priestly kilt over his prophetic uniform. It would be the equivalent today of wearing a Scottish kilt to work over top of your blue pin stripe suit. People would know that something was up.

<sup>2</sup>So I got a sash according to the word of the LORD, and put *it* around my waist.

<sup>3</sup>And the word of the LORD came to me the second time, saying, <sup>4</sup>“Take the sash that you acquired, which *is* around your waist, and arise, go to the Euphrates, and hide it there in a hole in the rock.”<sup>5</sup>So I went and hid it by the Euphrates, as the LORD commanded me.

That sounds like a small thing but it was a really big thing for two reasons. First of all, the Euphrates River was 700 miles away from where Jeremiah lived. That’s a long walk. That’s a longer walk than from this sanctuary to the White House in Washington D.C. The other reason this is a big deal is because the Euphrates River was the birthplace of both Assyria and Babylon and it is associated with all the Eastern influences that were corrupting the people of God. All of the idolatry that Jeremiah is condemning has its roots in the Euphrates region. Do you remember when Jesus said: “You cannot serve both God and mammon”? “Mammon” was the Babylonian god of money. Even in Jesus’ day which was about 600 years later, Babylon was still the symbolic abode of idolatry.

Let me put this in contemporary terms. Imagine if one week I showed up in the old fashion Geneva Robe that Baptist pastors used to preach in. The long black choir gowns that were still in use just 20 years ago in Baptist churches – I actually have one, my first church used them on communion Sundays when I started out way back in the day. So imagine I showed up and wore that robe 10 Sundays in a row. And then I walked in that robe to Las Vegas Nevada and stripped down to my civvies and buried that robe in the front yard of Caesar’s Palace Casino and then walked home in my underwear. You would understand that I am making some sort of statement. You may not know what it is, but you would know something was up. That’s what is going on here.

<sup>6</sup>Now it came to pass after many days that the LORD said to me, “Arise, go to the Euphrates, and take from there the sash which I commanded you to hide there.”<sup>7</sup>Then I went to the Euphrates and dug, and I took the sash from the place where I had hidden it; and there was the sash, ruined. It was profitable for nothing.

<sup>8</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, <sup>9</sup>“Thus says the LORD: ‘In this manner I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup>This evil people, who refuse to hear My words, who follow the dictates of their hearts, and walk after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be just like this sash which is profitable for nothing. <sup>11</sup>For as the sash clings to the waist of a man, so I have caused the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to cling to Me,’ says the LORD, ‘that they may become My people, for renown, for praise, and for glory; but they would not hear.’ (Jeremiah 13:1-11. NKJV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Generally speaking, when working with a prophetic symbol you are suppose to identify one or two MAIN points. We are not supposed to OVER SYMBOLIZE – we are not to think that everything means something. Generally speaking, in a prophetic symbol God is driving one or two or maybe even three MAIN IDEAS home to the watching people. Let’s begin by identifying those main ideas:

### The Main Points In The Symbol:

#### 1. God elects and saves a people FOR his own glory

This prophetic symbol begins and ends with a prophetic reminder that the whole reason for the nation of Israel is the glory of God. God saved them FOR HIMSELF. That is why Jeremiah is sent to the market for a linen sash. Linen was the fabric of the priesthood. For example we see in Leviticus 16 speaking of how Aaron and the priests would dress:

<sup>4</sup>He shall put the holy linen tunic and the linen trousers on his body; he shall be girded with a linen sash, and with the linen turban he shall be attired. These are holy garments. (Leviticus 16:4. NKJV)

Jeremiah is reminding the people that they were chosen by God to be a HOLY PEOPLE and a ROYAL PRIESTHOOD reflecting the glory of God to the nations. That was their calling. In Exodus 19 after God had saved them from bondage in Egypt he tells them WHY HE HAS SAVED THEM:

<sup>4</sup>You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. <sup>5</sup>Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. <sup>6</sup>And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ (Exodus 19:4-6. NKJV)

God saves a people FOR A PURPOSE and that purpose is actually very similar to the purpose of the moon. The moon reflects the glory of the sun to a world that is wrapped in darkness. That is the same purpose given to God’s people: To reflect the glory of the Son to a world in darkness. This is the reason given for the existence of God’s people in the New Testament as well:

<sup>3</sup>Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, <sup>4</sup>just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, <sup>5</sup>having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself,

according to the good pleasure of His will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved . (Ephesians 1:3-6. NKJV)

God saved you UNTO HOLINESS TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY. That was a truth in need of recovery in Jeremiah's day, and I suggest that it is in need of recovery in our day.

## **2. Alien entanglements defile us and make us unsuitable for God's purposes**

The linen sash in this symbol represents the people of God and the purpose for which they were elected and redeemed. God tells Jeremiah to take that linen sash and walk it to the Euphrates and bury it in the mud of the river. He comes home and he walks around town without his sash and people wonder where the sash went. Is Jeremiah saying that he has renounced the priesthood? Is he saying that he is only a prophet now? Did he just finally realize that wearing a priestly kilt over your prophetic robe looks ridiculous? What is going on? Then a long time later he goes on another long journey. He digs up the sash, rotting and stinking of Babylonian mud and he walks back into town with this filthy, mud stained, rotted sash about his waist. What is he trying to say? He is trying to say that when the people of God who were called to holiness and to the reflection of God's glory bury themselves in the filth of the world, they become a disgrace to the name and the fame of their Holy God.

When the people that God saved out of bondage and death go and prostitute themselves before idols that cannot save and they neglect the God who alone can save and who alone can give life and when they live just like the people God sent them to as a witness, they become utterly USELESS to God and judgement and punishment becomes necessary and inevitable. Alien entanglements make us unsuited for the good purposes of God.

## **3. Sometimes sin is the punishment for sin**

It seems that God is also saying that sometimes he will give us over into sin as punishment for our sins. Look at verse 9:

<sup>9c</sup>Thus says the LORD: 'In this manner I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. (Jeremiah 13:9. NKJV)

Here it seems like God is using this symbol in a slightly different way. He seems to be saying that in addition to the mud of the River representing idolatry and cultural compromise, it also represents the coming punishment. He says: “I will bury you in the gods you prostituted yourself with. I will make you drunk on their non-sense and drown you in the filth of that which you have yearned for. It is the only way to cure you of your evil lusts.”

Sometimes God cures us of our sins by giving us over to our sins. Sometimes God lets us learn for ourselves how empty and how bankrupt are the ways of the world. Do you lust after money? Then God says, go. Leave your family, abandon your wife, sacrifice your children on the altar of Mammon and go get your money. I will give you so much of it that you will choke to death on it and sitting in your piles of cash in your latter days, all alone, with your children hating you and your fifth wife divorcing you and your coke addiction killing you, perhaps we will have a good, long chat about how the ways of the world lead to DEATH AND RUIN. I shall humble you by burying you in the mud that you so love. God’s ways are hard, but they are just and they are for our good.

That is what the story means but how does the story end? As Paul Harvey was inclined to ask, “What is the rest of the story”?

## **The Rest Of The Story:**

### **1. Exile and partial healing**

The rest of the story is that the people didn’t listen. They became increasingly annoyed by Jeremiah and they tried to make him shut up. The other prophets and priests preached against him. They said that everything was fine and that God would never send his people into exile. They said that God was too gracious and kind for all that. They said that Jeremiah was a fanatic and was over stating the case of the people’s sinfulness. God listens to these spiritual leaders and he rejects them utterly:

For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly,  
Saying, ‘Peace, peace!’  
When *there is* no peace. (Jeremiah 8:11. NKJV)

“For both prophet and priest are profane;  
Yes, in My house I have found their wickedness,” says the LORD. (Jeremiah 23:11. NKJV)

<sup>15</sup>“Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets:  
‘Behold, I will feed them with wormwood,  
And make them drink the water of gall;  
For from the prophets of Jerusalem  
Profaneness has gone out into all the land.’” (Jeremiah 23:15. NKJV)

God says to the people: “If you love the soft whisper of these lying prophets than I will leave you to them. They can tickle your ears and tell you lies all the way down the road to hell.

And that’s what happened. The people decided that they liked the happy preaching of the false prophets better than the doom and gloom and the “repent and be holy” message of Jeremiah. So they threw Jeremiah down a well and they filled the pews of the happy preachers who were promising them health, wealth and happiness. Sound familiar?

Well the outcome was fairly predictable. The wrath of God fell. The Babylonians descended on the people and defeated them in a great and terrible slaughter. The city of Jerusalem was burned and destroyed. The temple was looted, defiled and laid low. The people were scattered and Israel as a nation ceased to exist. They had failed in their calling. They had polluted themselves to the point where they no longer reflected anything of God’s glory to the nations and so God buried them in the mud of Babylon.

The Book of Jeremiah is not a super cheery book but it is not uniformly pessimistic. There is a thin wedge of good news. Jeremiah looks past the exile and he sees a restoration and a partial healing. The people of God do eventually come back into the land and the exile is partially effective in healing them. It heals them of their lust for Babylonian gods at least. Israel after the exile has many problems but lusting after the idols of the Euphrates does not seem to be one of them. But their hearts are still hard, their necks are still stiff and their souls are still lost.

In Jeremiah 30-33 he looks further into the future and he sees real hope. He sees the promise of God to send a Saviour and to give His Holy Spirit.

## **2. The promise of a Saviour and the Spirit**

<sup>31</sup>“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah ... this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (Jeremiah 31:31-33. NKJV)

<sup>15</sup>In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ... And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’ (Jeremiah 33:15-16. ESV)

Ezekiel prophesying at the same time says it this way:

<sup>25</sup>Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup>I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (Ezekiel 36:25-27. NKJV)

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel see that there is no hope for Israel according to the flesh. There is no hope that even a punishment as severe as the exile will heal her of her sinful nature and enable her to serve the Lord according to her calling. She needs a Saviour! She needs God to do it. She needs God to become her righteousness. She needs the Spirit of God to fill her heart. The prophets are saying that wrath and chastisement and punishment are not enough – the people need to be saved again only this time, they don’t need just a physical salvation, they need a total all encompassing salvation. This time they need to be set free not just from Egypt, they need to be set free from themselves, from their sins and from their own evil lusts. This time they need the law written not just on tablets of stone, they need the law written on their hearts and engraved upon their minds. They need a Saviour and they need the Holy Spirit. And God promises that they shall have them. God himself will come and save them and fill them and he himself will BE THEIR RIGHTEOUSNESS and by his grace they will finally throw off sin and move forwards into holiness, reflecting the glory of the Lord as though in a mirror. But in Jeremiah’s day, this was a distant, hopeful vision. In our day it is the precious possession and eternal inheritance of all who are in Christ Jesus. So why do we read this story? Why did we devote a whole sermon to it? If the story of the linen sash is a story about the problem of original sin and the incapacity of God’s people to follow him faithfully and the solution to that is ours now in Christ, why do we bother to read this old story?

## **Reading This Story On The Other Side Of The Cross And Pentecost:**

### **1. The story of the linen sash reminds us that we are a people set free**

We are supposed to read this story and be reminded that there but for the grace of God in Jesus Christ go I! We are supposed to be reminded that we are no better than they. If not for the forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ, if not for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit we would be as they were! We would be captive to the petty idols of money and greed and lust and superstition and foolishness. We would never hear or understand the truth when it is preached. We would only listen to soothing, tickling liars just as they did and we would be destined for eternal exile from the goodness and the kindness of the Lord. We are no better. Apart from Christ and without the Holy Spirit we are worse. Without the Lord I would be face down in the mud right now, I know that beyond a shadow of a doubt.

## **2. The story of the linen sash reminds us that we are saved FOR GOD’S GLORY!**

One of the most common causes of spiritual error and powerlessness in the church today is the widespread tendency to consider our salvation PRIMARILY in self-centred terms. We assume God saved us for us. So that we can be free. So that we can live better lives. So that we can be healed of our diseases. So that we can be happy. So that we can be more effective in business. So that our families can be better run than the families of the pagans. So that our marriages can be more fulfilling. In short, we believe that God saved us SO THAT WE CAN LIVE OUR BEST LIVES NOW. But that is HERETICAL because it falls so tragically short of the truth. Oh that we had remembered what our great grandparents had drilled into them every night at family altar. What is the chief end of man? To GLORIFY GOD AND TO ENJOY HIM FOREVER. In the catechism that Liz made for our children the question is asked this way: “Why did God make us and all things?” FOR HIS OWN GLORY. You were made to study God’s face as the moon points itself at the surface of the sun. You were made to love what you see and then to reflect that to a world wrapped in darkness. God chose you from before the foundation of the world TO BE HOLY for the praise of his glory among the nations. You were not saved SO THAT you could have your best life now. You were saved and you are being sanctified through many trials, tribulations and snares SO THAT YOU MAY COME TO REFLECT THE GREATNESS, THE HOLINESS, THE RIGHTEOUSNESS of ALMIGHTY GOD! That is your purpose friend. That is your reason for drawing breath. Do you want to know what you should do with your life? THAT! Glorify God! Turn your face to the brilliance of his majesty and REFLECT THAT IN YOUR SPEECH, in your MANNER, in your CONDUCT before the watching world so that

people will cover their mouths and bow their knees and declare “Surely there is a God in the heavens and his ways are right!” Make that your purpose because it IS YOUR PURPOSE.

### **3. The story of the linen sash reminds us to beware of foreign entanglements**

It is true that because of Christ we are forgiven and we are forever righteous in terms of our standing before God in eternity; it is true that because of the Holy Spirit we are able to serve God faithfully and fruitfully but that does not mean that we should lower our guard in terms of foreign influences. On the contrary the Apostle Paul says to a young man who has embraced his reason for existing:

<sup>11</sup>But thou, O man of God, **flee these things**; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. <sup>12</sup>Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. (1 Timothy 6:11-12. KJV)

Regardless of what side of the PROMISE you live on, those who would glorify God with their lives must purify themselves from the mud of Babylon.

#### **Conclusion:**

So how does this story end? All of these wonderful threads that run throughout the Bible all tend to crash and bleed into the vibrant, colourful pictures in the Book of Revelation. The theme of Babylon and idolatry among the people of God is among those many themes that find their conclusion in this book. The people of God were defeated by the seductions of Babylon in the Old Testament. They were helpless before their enticements and became hopelessly ensnared. In the New Testament we who are in Christ and full of the Holy Spirit are now more than conquerors – though we still do battle with the seductions of the flesh that come to us through the whore of Babylon. But one day, even the battle itself will cease. The seductions of Babylon will be no more. There is a picture of that day in the Book of Revelation.

I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast *which was* full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. <sup>4</sup>The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. <sup>5</sup>And on her forehead a name *was* written:

MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

<sup>6</sup>I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement. (Revelation 17:3-6. NKJV)

There she is; that ancient enemy of the people of God! She is the spirit of idolatry and whoredom who has gone by many names over thousands of years and yet she is one. What is her end, the prophet wonders?

“Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! <sup>3</sup>For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.”...

<sup>8</sup>Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong *is* the Lord God who judges her. (Revelation 18:2-8. NKJV)

You see my friends, in the end, Babylon is hell. She is cast down and all who have been seduced by her go down in flames just as she. God alone is God and strong is the Lord God who judges her. In the end, Babylon is cast out and God’s people alone remain before him.

<sup>14</sup>Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. <sup>15</sup>But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. (Revelation 22:14-15. NKJV)

In the end God’s people obey him perfectly forever. They serve before Him in holiness. They enter through the gates of the city and they behold the face of God. Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers and sexually immoral and the murderers and the idolaters. Outside is Babylon. She is very far away. Further even than 700 miles. As far as the east is from the west. And she will be remembered no more. The Righteousness of God has triumphed in the people he has chosen and redeemed. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.