We are studying the book of the prophet Jeremiah, which is proving to be more ***UP TO DATE*** than tomorrow morning's newspaper, as the word of God always is. It's both ***TIMELY*** and ***TIMELESS***, and for those who are strangers to our order of worship, we ***LISTEN*** to God before we do much talking to him, and then we ***RESPOND*** to him in ***WORSHIP*** after he's spoken to us through his word---which incidentally was the order of worship in the early Christian Church. So, we read today, Jeremiah chapter 27 and chapter 28

*In the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah*---Incidentally, if you've got the Living Bible, cross out the word ***JEHOIAKIM*** there and put in ***ZEDEKIAH***...*In the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord. "Thus the Lord said to me, 'Make yourself thongs and yoke bars and put them on your neck. Send word to the king of Edom, the king of Moab, the king of the sons of Ammon, the king of Tyre and the king of Sidon by the hand of the envoys who have come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah King of Judah. Give them this charge for their masters. "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, this is what you shall say to your masters. 'It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth with the men and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever it seems right to me.*

*'Now I have given all these lands into the hand of* ***NEBUCHADNEZZAR****, the king of Babylon,* ***MY******SERVANT****, and I have given him also the beasts of the field to serve him. All the NATIONS shall serve him and his son and his grandson---until the time of his own land comes. Then many nations and great kings shall make* ***HIM*** *their* ***SLAVE****. But if any nation or kingdom will not serve this* ***NEBUCHADNEZZAR****, king of Babylon and put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, I will punish that nation with the* ***SWORD****, with* ***FAMINE*** *and with* ***PESTILENCE****,' says the Lord, 'until I have consumed it by his hand. So, do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers, or sorcerers who are saying to you, "You shall not serve the king of Babylon." For it is a lie which they are prophesying to you, with the result that you will be* ***REMOVED*** *far from your land, and I will drive you out and you will* ***PERISH****. 'But any nation which brings its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serves him, I will leave on its own land to* ***TILL IT*** *and* ***DWELL*** *there,' says the Lord. 'To Zedekiah, king of Judah, I have spoke in like manner. Bring your necks under the* ***YOKE*** *of the king of* ***BABYLON*** *and serve him and his people, and live. Why will you and your people die by the* ***SWORD*** *and* ***FAMINE*** *and* ***PESTILENCE****, as the Lord has spoken concerning any nation which will not serve the king of Babylon. Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are saying to you, "You shall not serve the king of Babylon." For it is a LIE which they are prophesying to you. I have not sent them,' says the Lord, 'but they are prophesying falsely in my name, with the result that I will* ***DRIVE YOU OUT****, and you will* ***PERISH****---you and the prophets who are prophesying to you.' " ' "*

*Then I spoke to the* ***PRIESTS*** *and to all this* ***PEOPLE*** *saying, "Thus says the Lord,* ***'DO NOT LISTEN*** *to the words of your prophets who are prophesying to you saying, "Behold the vessels of the Lord's house will now shortly be brought back from Babylon." For it is a* ***LIE*** *which they are prophesying to you. Do not listen to them.* ***SERVE THE KING OF BABYLON*** *and* ***LIVE****. Why should this city become a desolation? If they are prophets, and if the word of the Lord is wisdom, then let them* ***INTERCEDE*** *with the Lord of hosts that the vessels which are left in the house of the Lord, and in the house of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem may* ***NOT*** *go to Babylon; for thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the pillars, the sea, the stands and the rest of the vessels which are left in this city, which Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon did not take away when he took into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.*

*'Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel concerning the vessels which are left in the house of the Lord, in the house of king of Judah and in Jerusalem. 'They shall be* ***CARRIED TO BABYLON*** *and remain there until the day when I give attention to them says the Lord. Then I will* ***BRING THEM BACK*** *and restore them to this place.' "*

*In that same year at the beginning of the rain of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fifth month of the fourth year,* ***HANANIAH****, the son of Asio, the prophet from Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of the Lord, in the presence of the priests and all the people saying, "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel. 'I have broken the* ***YOKE*** *of the king of Babylon. Within two years, I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the Lord's house which Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, took away from this place and carried to Babylon. I will also bring back to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah and all the exiles from Judah who went to Babylon,' says the Lord. 'For I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.' "*

*Then the prophet* ***JEREMIAH*** *spoke to Hananiah, the prophet in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord. And the prophet Jeremiah, "Amen. May the Lord* ***DO SO****. May the Lord make the words which you have prophesied come true and bring back to this place from Babylon, the* ***VESSELS*** *of the house of the Lord and all the* ***EXILES****. Yet hear now, this word which I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people, 'The prophets who proceeded you and me from ancient times, prophesied* ***WAR****,* ***FAMINE****, and* ***PESTILENCE*** *against many countries and great kingdoms. As for the prophet who prophesies* ***PEACE****, when the word of that prophet* ***COMES TO PASS****, then it will be known that the Lord has* ***TRULY*** *sent the prophet.' "*

*Then the prophet* ***HANANIAH*** *took the yoke bars from the neck of Jeremiah the prophet, and* ***BROKE*** *them. And Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people saying, "Thus says the Lord, 'Even so, I will* ***BREAK*** *the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, from the neck of all the nations within two years."*

*But Jeremiah the prophet went his way. Sometime after the prophet Hananiah had broken the yoke bars from off the neck of Jeremiah the prophet, the word of the Lord came to* ***JEREMIAH****, "Go. Tell Hananiah, 'Thus says the Lord, "You have broken* ***WOODEN*** *bars, but I will make in their place bars of* ***IRON****." For, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, "I have put upon the neck of all these* ***NATIONS*** *an iron yoke of servitude to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and they shall serve him. For I have given to him even the beasts of the field." ' "*

*And Jeremiah the prophet said to the prophet, Hananiah, "Listen, Hananiah, the Lord has* ***NOT SENT YOU****, and you have made this people trust in a LIE. Therefore, thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will* ***REMOVE YOU*** *from the face of the earth.* ***THIS VERY YEAR*** *you shall* ***DIE****, because you have uttered* ***REBELLION*** *against the Lord." In that* ***SAME YEAR****, in the seventh month, the prophet Hananiah* ***DIED****.*

There's a ***DIRECT CONNECTION*** between the reading we've just had and our Lord Jesus Christ. If you don't see it now, you'll see it by the end of the sermon. Before we have a little prayer, I'm going to ask Wanda Adams, who's sharing in our worship today, to come and sing about 'Jesus, Lover of My Soul'.

***SINGING (3 MINUTES)***

Let us continue in prayer. "Oh, Jesus, we do fly to your bosom this morning. We want your word to take us out of the ***TEMPEST*** into the ***HAVEN***. We realize what a mixed-up world we live in and how the storm is raging, but we thank you for Jesus, waiting to bring ***PEACE***. There are many troubled hearts this morning, Lord. There are many people bewildered and confused---being tossed and battered by life. And they need Jesus so much. Lord, we pray that even from this passage we've read, your Holy Spirit will take us from ***LONG AGO*** right into ***TODAY***, and from ***JEREMIAH*** right to **JESUS**, so that we may be able to walk with him. We ask it for his namesake." Amen.

***The Story of Masada: Human Courage, but Not God's Will***

Those of you who were here when we came back from Israel will remember the picture that we've got up behind me now. It's a picture of a mountain on the edge of the Dead Sea called ***MASADA*** and was one of the most spectacular places we visited in Israel. And all those who've been there were very deeply touched in their heart by the events that took place. It's a diamond shaped mountain with a flat top and sheer sides of 900 feet. Most of us went up by a cable car. At least one of our elders climbed up on his own two feet and arrived somewhat tired at the top. But we just had to go up there and see Masada. It's a legend and a true legend. It began when ***HEROD THE GREAT*** turned it into an impregnable fortress. He was frightened of ***TWO ENEMIES***. Number ***ONE***, the ***JEWS***. And he always thought of the possibility that the Jews would one day turn against him because he was the descendant of Esau. And he built this impregnable fortress as a kind of eagle's nest to which he would retire. It's Herod's equivalent of Berchtesgaden.

He was ***ALSO (#2)*** afraid of ***CLEOPATRA***, queen of Egypt. And he thought he could hold out against her or the Jews---or both---in this incredible ***FORTRESS***: with a ***WALL*** around the circumference of its plateau on the top, with ***CISTERNS*** hollowed out inside to hold one and a half million cubic feet of water, with ***STOREHOUSES*** to hold food enough for five years. And he built it. The only person that Herod was ***NOT*** afraid of was ***GOD***. And that's why he died within a year or two of building this place. And it's a magnificent, three level summer villa climbing down the side of the cliff with the most beautifully decorated rooms and baths---which you can still see today, and where we had our picnic lunch. But it was not for Herod's palace that we went up there. We went up to ***REMEMBER*** the events of the year 73 AD.

In the year 66 AD, the Jews ***REVOLTED*** against Rome and tried to get their freedom. And they made this their headquarters: **MASADA**. For by this time Herod was dead, and they took this fortress from the ***ROMANS*** in 66. And then Titus marched from Rome. The Roman emperor came, and he attacked and totally ***DESTROYED*** Jerusalem in 70 AD. Just under 1000 men, women and children ***ESCAPED*** and ran through the desert ... some priests, some Essenes. And they ran through the desert. And they climbed up the winding snake path, which is the only route to the summit on the eastern side. And they entered Herod's palace. And they said, "Here we're going to stay. And we can hold out against the Romans indefinitely. We've got water and food for five years."

About 18 months later a Roman called ***FLAVIUS*** marched on Masada. He took the famous Tenth legion---the crack troops of the Roman army. He took with him thousands of Jewish slaves. And altogether he surrounded this one rock with less than a thousand people on top (about 967). He surrounded that rock with 12,000 people...eight camps. He built a Roman wall, which was patrolled every few yards so that no one could get down and out. And he settled down for the ***SIEGE***. He realized that it was almost impregnable---that all it needed was a man with heavy stones at the top just to drop them on the heads of any soldier trying to climb up. So, Flavius, with typical Roman thoroughness and ingenuity and practical know-how said, "We are going to build a ***RAMP***, a huge ramp. If it takes us years, we'll build a ramp from where we are below, right up to the top. And then we'll send siege machines up the ramp, and catapults. And we'll invade them through that wall on the west. You can see, on the right-hand side of the big picture, the top of the ramp that he built. Do you see it? Great pile of stones.

And so, the slow work began, and the ramp got higher and higher. And as the people at the top watched, they knew that their days were numbered. They had enough food and water. The reason why they could not drop stones on the people building the ramp was that the Romans forced the ***JEWISH CAPTIVES*** to build the ramp. And so the defenders were faced with the awful situation. Should they save themselves by killing even more than their number of their own countrymen. And they ***COULDN'T*** do it. For 18 months that ramp got higher and higher. Tons and tons and tons of rock and rubble were put on it till finally they knew that within 24 hours, it would be ***COMPLETE***. And then the leader of that company of men and women and children gathered them all together. His name was Eleazar. And he made a speech. And I have the exact speech here, and I want to read it.

***Eleazar's Speech at Masada***

He said, "My loyal followers, long ago we resolved to serve neither the Romans nor anyone else, but only ***GOD***, who alone is the true and righteous Lord of men. Now the time has come that bids us prove our determination by our deeds. At such a time we must not disgrace ourselves. Hitherto, we have never submitted to ***SLAVERY***, even when it brought no danger with it. We must not choose slavery now, and with it penalties that will mean the end of everything if we fall alive into the hands of the Romans. For we were the ***FIRST*** of all to revolt and shall be the ***LAST*** to break off this struggle. And I think it is God who has given us this privilege that we can die nobly and as ***FREE MEN***, unlike others who were unexpectedly defeated. In our case, it is evident that daybreak will end our resistance. But we are ***FREE TO CHOOSE*** an honorable death with our loved ones. This our enemies cannot prevent, however earnestly they may pray to take us alive. Nor can we defeat them in battle. Let our ***WIVES*** die unabused -- our ***CHILDREN*** without knowledge of slavery. After that, let us do ***EACH OTHER*** an ungrudging kindness, preserving our freedom as a glorious winding sheet. But ***FIRST*** let our possessions and the whole fortress go up in ***FLAMES***. It will be a bitter blow to the Romans---that I know---to find our ***PERSONS*** beyond their reach and ***NOTHING LEFT*** for them to loot. One thing only: let us spare our ***STORE OF FOOD***. It will bear witness when we are dead to the fact that we perished, not through want, but because, as we resolved at the beginning, we chose ***DEATH*** rather than ***SLAVERY***. If only we had all died ***BEFORE*** seeing the ***SACRED*** ***CITY*** utterly destroyed by enemy hands and the ***HOLY*** ***SANCTUARY*** so impiously uprooted. But since an honorable ambition deluded us into thinking that perhaps we should succeed in avenging her of her enemies--- and now all hope is fled, abandoning us to our fate---let us at once choose ***DEATH WITH HONOR*** and do the kindest thing we can for ourselves, our wives and children, while it is still possible to show ourselves any kindness. After all, we were ***BORN TO DIE***, we and those we brought into the world. This, even the luckiest must face. But outrage, slavery, and the sight of our wives led away to shame with our children---these are not evils to which man is subject by the laws of nature. Men undergo them through their own ***COWARDICE***, if they have a ***CHANCE*** to forestall them by death and will not take it. We are very proud of our courage. So, we revolted from Rome. Now, in the final stages, they have offered to spare our lives. And we have turned the offer down. Is anyone too blind to see how furious they will be if they take us alive? Pity the ***YOUNG*** bodies---the young whose bodies are strong enough to survive prolonged torture. Pity the ***NOT SO YOUNG*** whose old frames would break under such ill usage. A man will see his ***WIFE*** violently carried off. He will hear the voice of his ***CHILD*** crying, "Daddy," when his own hands are fettered. Come while our ***HANDS*** are free and can hold a ***SWORD***, let them do a noble service. Let us die un-enslaved by our enemies, and leave this world as free men in company with our wives and children.

When the Romans the next day got to the top and rushed over the ramparts, they found total ***SILENCE*** everywhere. There were families laid side-by-side, their throats slit ... the fortress burned to the ground. They'd seen the smoke the night before and wondered what it was. The soldiers were ***AWED***---nothing to loot, no one to seize. And then they found ***HIDING*** in one little out-building (reports vary: I've heard ***TWO*** mentioned, I've heard ***FIVE*** mentioned. One thing is certain: in a tiny group of people there ***NO MEN***.) There were either one or two ***WOMEN*** and one, two or three ***CHILDREN***. The reports vary. They had ***HIDDEN***. And from them we got that speech. And Josephus, the Roman historian, wrote it down. No wonder that every Israeli soldier joining the Israeli army today is taken to the top of Masada to swear his allegiance to the Israeli army. That happened the very week we visited. We were there half an hour before Dr. Vorster, the South African prime minister, was on the top of that rock. We were there just two days before the Israeli army recruits were brought there to be sworn in. And they swear, ***"MASADA SHALL NOT FALL AGAIN."*** And I believe that today, if the entire world converged on Israel, the battle would ***FINISH*** on this hill in the ***SAME WAY*** as it finished in 73. Such is their determination that Masada shall not fall again.

Alright, that's very stirring. It moved me to read it. I hoped it moved you to hear it. It's a tremendous appeal to ***HUMAN COURAGE***, is it not? The appeal was not cowardice, but ***COURAGE***; not slavery, but ***DEATH***. And you notice that Eleazar said, "***I THINK***...I think that God is with us." The one phrase he could ***NOT*** use was, *"Thus says the Lord."* Because I tell you, the tragedy of Masada is that God was ***NOT*** with them. And those words did ***NOT*** come from God.

They came from the ***FLESH***. They came from ***MAN***. They were a message in the ***FLESH****.* And they appealed to the ***FLESH***. They appealed to the ***COURAGE OF MAN.***

I read just yesterday, Churchill's speech at the beginning of the war. Do you remember when France fell? "We shall fight on the beaches; we shall fight on the streets." You can almost hear the tones! "We shall never surrender!" Remember? Notice those words, "***WE SHALL NEVER SURRENDER!!"*** That was the spirit of ***MASADA***. This island was going to be a fortress. We DIE rather than be in the hands of an invader. Yes, those are ***HUMAN*** words. They appeal to ***HUMAN*** courage. They appeal to the highest.

***The Dilemma: Surrender and Slavery, or Death and Freedom***

And on that day, Eleazar's speech---and that's all it was; it was that long--- persuaded every man to slit his ***CHILDREN'S*** throats first, then his ***WIFE'S***. And then they drew lots to slit ***EACH OTHER'S*** throats. And Masada was lost. Its site was unknown until the 18th century, when it was discovered by two Englishmen. They found on the top, the sandals and the hair of a girl. And they found the very pottery shards with the names on them, which they used to draw lots, as to who would kill the last 10, and then who would finally fall on his own sword. Yes, it appeals deeply to ***HUMAN FLESH*** does this, but it wasn't from ***GOD***. God has ***NEVER*** told anyone to commit suicide. Never. Oh, it may sound heroic. It may sound a great gesture, but God has never told people to do it, because suicide is ***MURDER***. And God has told us in his commandments, *"Thou shall not* ***MURDER****."* He didn't say, "Thou shall not ***murder OTHER PEOPLE***." He said, *"Thou shall not* ***MURDER****,"* and that includes ***YOU***. It is worse than murder; it is sacrilege, because every man and woman--- including yourself---is made in the image of God. And to raise a knife against a man or a woman (even if it be yourself) is to raise a knife to destroy the image of God. And so, God ***NEVER*** told anyone to commit suicide.

***Jeremiah's Counsel: Surrender and Embrace Slavery***

And so, when Eleazar said, "***I THINK*** God is with us, and we must choose death rather than slavery, courage rather than cowardice," he was speaking in ***EXACTLY*** the ***OPPOSITE*** way to the prophets of the Old Testament --- who could ***NOT*** appeal to the ***FLESH*** and could ***NOT*** appeal to men's highest instincts of ***COURAGE***. For Jeremiah's message, in the passage we read, was ***PRECISELY*** ***THE*** ***REVERSE***. *"Choose* ***SLAVERY*** *rather than death. Submit to the yoke of Babylon.*

*Why will you die? Go into slavery."* And so, Jeremiah was thought to be a ***COWARD***, and he was accused of cowardice, not courage. Surely human courage is, "We'll stand and fight to the last ditch!" But God said, *"Thus says the Lord, 'Give in!* ***SURRENDER****! Go into slavery, because you can do nothing about it. And you are better* ***ALIVE*** *as a* ***SLAVE****, than* ***DEAD*** *as a* ***FREE MAN****.' "* So, Jeremiah's message and Eleazar's were totally ***CONTRADICTORY***! And it's Jeremiah's that is the word of ***GOD***. And it was Eleazar's that was the word of ***MAN***. And heroic though their stand was, and though we are deeply stirred by the story---and it has inspired thousands of Israeli soldiers today to go into battle, determined *'to see it through'*--- nevertheless, the fact is that Jeremiah gave the exact ***OPPOSITE*** advice.

***Historical Context: Alliances for Self-Preservation***

Now, I'm afraid I'll have to give you a bit of ***HISTORY***. The year is 593 BC, when chapters 27 and 28 were written.... or spoken first. It's a rapidly changing scene. Let me try and paint it for you. It's a bit of history, and I know history's boring. Imagine I've got a blackboard. ***JUDAH*** is a ***TINY LITTLE NATION*** in the middle of the board---a declining nation that once had almost an empire, but now is just a little nation. And it's even lost parts of itself. It's just a little nation centered around Jerusalem. On the ***EAST*** side is a big superpower, that's getting bigger and bigger and bigger. It's called ***'BABYLON''***. On the ***WEST*** is another big superpower, that's beginning to decline. It's called ***'EGYPT'***. It's almost exactly parallel to our situation today with Russia and America, so you can get the feel of it.

Now north and south of little ***JUDAH*** were some other little nations. ***NORTH*** of them was the nation of ***TYRE***, and the nation of ***SIDON***. You can still see those names on the map. They're on the coast, north of them. ***SOUTH*** of them were three little nations further inland: ***AMMON***, centered on what is now Amman, the capital of Jordan; then a little lower down, ***MOAB***; and then lower still, ***EDOM***, with its capital at the famous ruined city of Petra, down in the Arabah.

Now that's the situation: a string of little nations in the ***MIDDLE***; a great big superpower, whose military strength is growing almost daily and gradually capturing more and more, from the ***EAST***; and another big superpower on the ***WEST***, to which they have looked in the past for help, but which is beginning to pull out of the situation--- there's something very modern about this---and then the string of little nations in the ***MIDDLE***....

Already in 597 BC---four years before these events---***BABYLON*** has already invaded Judah and taken away the elite, the nobles, the skilled craftsmen, the artisans --- taken them away. They have lost many thousands of their population, all the ***UPPER (CLASS)*** people. They have been left with ***UNSKILLED*** people, and they have been left with a weak puppet king called ***'ZEDEKIAH'***. And Zedekiah is a ***POLITICIAN***. He is a man with no principle. He is a man of expediency. And Zedekiah, full of nationalist spirit, is saying, *"How can we get out of this situation? How can we stop the threat of this Eastern power engulfing us?"* And he puts his **TRUST in *TWO* *THINGS***. He says, *"(1) Let's make an* ***ALLIANCE****---all the little nations in the MIDDLE.”* Let's try and build up a kind of United States of Europe in the middle. Let's try and make a strong group of nations in the middle. *“And (2) let's hope that the* ***WEST POWER****---as it has done previously---will* ***COME TO OUR AID*** *when the east attacks."* That's the two things that Zedekiah decided to try. So, he sent for ambassadors from Sidon, Tyre, Ammon, Edom, Moab. And they all came to Jerusalem. And they held a six-nation conference with a view to an East Mediterranean ***ALLIANCE***, and to forming a power block in the middle, to resist and to defend each other --- with that backward glance at ***EGYPT***, from which to get their military ***ARMS*** and their ***MONEY***.

You can see the situation. It's as up to date as today. And it's been happening since history began. And it was into that situation that God said, *"Jeremiah, you've got to go and* ***SPEAK*** *to them. You've got to go and* ***SPEAK****. If they pursue this political policy, it is a* ***DISASTER****... a disaster. The nation will disappear altogether; and I have a future for this people. And you've somehow got to persuade them to accept the* ***INEVITABLE****--- that this* ***EASTERN*** *power* ***IS*** *going to come, and country after country* ***IS*** *going to* ***FALL*** *to the eastern power. And you must accept this and live, believing that one day... one day...****GOD will give you back your FREEDOM****."*

Now that's a very big step of ***FAITH***. ***HUMAN NATURE*** says, "No, we are going to fight on the beaches. Or, if they get past the beaches, we'll make the north downs the line of defense," as Churchill decided in the war. This center would have been right on the line of defense in the second world war, if the enemy had come on our shores. And you can see the pill boxes as you go down the slopes to Chilworth, where the line of defense was.

***Jeremiah Uses a Gimmick to Bring Home His Message***

They said, *"Let's fight to the last ditch. We'll fight on the beaches. We'll fight in the streets. We'll have* ***ALLIANCES*** *with one another. We've got* ***EGYPT*** *at the back of us; surely she'll come to our aid. We can hold off this threat."* And Jeremiah said, *"No you can't, because GOD is behind the threat."* Now, how is he going to get this message across? It called for pretty drastic teaching, because you see, Jeremiah had been ***TEACHING*** now for 32 years, and still he couldn't get them to ***LISTEN***. How do you get people to listen after 32 years, if they haven't listened all that time? How do you get the ***LESSON*** across to them? How do you bring it home to them? The answer is you use a ***GIMMICK***.

Now those who criticize gimmicks are criticizing ***GOD***, because ***GOD IS A GOD OF GIMMICKS***, as I read the Bible. And God is not above using something pretty ***SPECTACULAR***---out of the ordinary---to get attention. ***ISAIAH*** was the first recorded ***STREAKER***. And he streaked through Jerusalem. Why? He said, *"Because only in this way can I bring to your attention, that you're going to be* ***STRIPPED*** *of everything if you don't get back to God."* Now you dismiss that as a gimmick if you wish, but God used it. When the situation is ***DESPERATE***, you've got to use ***DESPERATE*** ***METHODS*** to get your message across. And it was ***GOD*** who led Isaiah to do that, just as God told ***JEREMIAH*** here, to use a ***GIMMICK***---to use something that would really make them sit up and take ***NOTICE***. Okay, they may say, "He's an ***ECCENTRIC***." They may even say, "He was a ***MANIAC***," but he was going to try it.

Do you know, in my youth, there was a man who used to go around English towns dressed as a clown, with a great big (you know) round, white nose, and red triangles here, and a clown's hat, and costume. And he had a notice on the front of his chest, "I am a fool for Christ's sake." And he would dance up the high streets of town with this placard, "I'm a fool for Christ's sake." And people laughed at him as a religious maniac, until he got past them. And then they saw a notice on his back, which said, "Who's fool are you?" You know, that man got a message through to a lot of people. When Arthur Blessitt said, "How am I going to get a message through to Sunset Strip? How am I going to get the gospel through to people right outside the church?" He got a large wooden cross, fixed a pram wheel on the end, and walked around the states with it. And God used that. He honored that.

Alright, let those who cry, "***GIMMICK***," be doing something themselves. As D. L. Moody used to say, "I prefer my way of doing it to your way of not doing it." And we can only accuse somebody of being eccentric, if we are as keen as they are to get the gospel across, and to get the message through. So, "*Jeremiah, you've got to use a* ***VISUAL AID****. You've got to look pretty startling."* So, I'll tell you what he did. He got a ***YOKE***.

***Jeremiah's Yoke***

And there it is, there's a typical ***YOKE***. This one actually is 250 years old. It was used in a monastery not far from here, 250 years ago. And Jeremiah put that on, and he walked around the streets of Jerusalem. He said, *"****NOW*** *will you listen?"* He said, *"I'm telling you, God is putting the* ***YOKE OF BABYLON*** *on you, and there's nothing you can do about it. And the policy for you is to* ***SURRENDER AND GO INTO SLAVERY*** *and live, and* ***BELIEVE THAT GOD WILL ONE DAY GET YOU OUT****."* He said, *"It'll be a long time; it won't happen in your lifetime."* He said, *"It'll be 70 years, so* ***YOU*** *won't see it, but* ***YOUR CHILDREN******WILL****. And for the sake of your kids, put that* ***YOKE****, bend your neck."*

Have you ever studied the Bible teaching on ***NECKS***? How often God said, *"You are a* ***STIFF-NECKED PEOPLE****."* What did he mean? He said, *"You won't* ***BEND****, you won't let me put this on. You've got to* ***BEND*** *to get this on."* If you are one of these people, you can't carry a yoke. You've got to ***BOW*** and then you can cope...you can carry a load. And a yoke is not meant for a picnic, it's meant for WORK. And it's so that you can carry ***HEAVY THINGS*** and carry much ***MORE*** than otherwise you could---a ***YOKE***. And it was a symbol of ***SLAVERY***.

I'm not gonna preach the whole time with that one on. Maybe I'll put it on again at the end. Jeremiah ***KEPT IT ON***. And to every group he met in that city, he gave the ***SAME MESSAGE***, *"You are believing a lie!"* Because, you see, not only were the ***POLITICAL AUTHORITIES*** saying, *"This is the way out of our trouble: we* ***NEGOTIATE****, we get into an* ***ALLIANCE****, we have the other big* ***SUPERPOWER*** *to supply arms and money; and we're home and dry--- we've got our national independence."* Not only were the politicians saying this, the tragedy is that the ***RELIGIOUS LEADERS*** of the nation were backing up the politicians and saying, *"This is the way to go."* That's the ***TRAGEDY***.

And so, Jeremiah had to fight on ***TWO FRONTS***. In chapter 27, he's fighting on the ***POLITICAL*** front against the political leaders. In chapter 28 he has a fight with one of the ***RELIGIOUS*** ***LEADERS*** who was encouraging this wrong policy. And he said, *"It's a* ***LIE****, it's a lie!!!"* Jeremiah knew perfectly well that if they followed this policy through, the same thing that happened in Hungary (Was it 1956? No. When? It was '56.) Do you remember in Hungary some people said, *"Let's throw off this yoke."* And there was an uprising in Hungary and it was put down in a bloody way by the Russians. You remember it....And Jeremiah knew that's what would happen if they tried it, for ***GOD HAD TOLD HIM***.

***Jeremiah Addresses Three Groups***

So, he spoke to ***THREE*** groups. He spoke ***FIRST*** to the ***AMBASSADORS*** from the other five nations and he said, *"Now you go back and tell your masters that this is a non-starter. God has given your lands---not just ours, but yours---to Babylon. He's given them."* And when ***GOD*** gives land there's nothing you can do about it. Why? Here's the ***KEY VERSE*** for this morning. It's verse five in chapter twenty-seven. *"It is I,"* says God*, "who by* ***MY*** *great power and* ***MY*** *outstretched arm have* ***MADE*** *the earth, with the men and the animals that are on the earth. And* ***I GIVE IT*** *to whomever it seems right to* ***ME****."* In other words, God ***MADE*** the earth, God ***MANNED*** the earth, and God ***MAPS*** it.

Do you know, I've got an old atlas at home on my bookshelf, and I had it when I was in my last year at school. It's a sobering book to take out and look at. In 1946, when I was sixteen---my last year at school---the map of the world was covered with red splotches, the great British empire. The map now, just 30 years later, is covered with red splotches, only they are a ***DIFFERENT*** variety of red. All in thirty years since I left school. And my atlas is totally out of date. My school atlas...I can't use it now. Who has ***REDRAWN*** it? Man? No, ***GOD*** has redrawn it. That is the viewpoint of the Bible. That is the ***CHRISTIAN*** understanding of ***HISTORY***. When Paul preached in Athens, the very center of what had once been a gigantic empire under Alexander the ***GREAT***---how many people then called themselves the ***'GREAT'***: Herod the ***GREAT*** Alexander the ***GREAT***---they all wanted to be the ***GREATEST***...nothing new under the sun. Muhammad Ali wasn't the first to think of this! And he (Paul) spoke in this city (Athens), which was the hub of this vast Greek empire. And He said this, *"God has made from* ***ONE*** *(man) every nation to dwell on the face of the earth. And He has appointed their allotted* ***SPANS*** *(in time, that is) and the* ***BOUNDARIES*** *(in space, that is) of their habitation".* ***GOD DRAWS THE MAP***, and we only make copies of it. Or, as we were studying in Psalm 24, just before Easter, "*The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."* And He gives it to whomever He decides. And if God has decided that western Europe is to be given to communist Russia, it will be given. And if that happens, we've got to seek the Lord and find out God's will. And it could very easily happen. ***FRANCE*** has a strong communist party. ***PORTUGAL*** nearly went communist a year ago. ***ITALY*** is on the verge. This is ***WESTERN*** Europe, not Eastern. And I don't think it's beyond the bounds of possibility that Britain, through its industrial strife and its economic problems, could lay itself wide open to a communist takeover. The influence is already very strong in trade unions and in student circles. And already---and I know this from direct knowledge this week---they are planting agents within British Missionary Society headquarters. This has been discovered very recently. So, it could happen here. It's very important to find out what ***GOD'S WILL*** is in this situation. You can't fight against God if ***GOD*** is ***REDRAWING*** the boundaries.

Notice that He says, *"Look, Nebuchadnezzar will have your lands, but* ***HE*** *will come to an end too. There's a time when I'll deal with Nebuchadnezzar."* I believe that God ***ALLOWED*** Hitler to have as much as he did, but no further. There came a time when God said to Hitler, "Now it's ***YOUR*** turn. I've used you to chastise a western civilization. It was falling apart, but now it's ***YOUR*** turn." And Nebuchadnezzar was used. God says, *"Nebuchadnezzar..."* pagan, though he was...though he was to throw Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego into a fiery furnace...though he was to erect a gigantic golden image of himself in the plane of China....though he was to build fabulous Babylon and say, *"Is not this great Babylon,* ***MY*** *kingdom,* ***MY*** *power,* ***MY*** *glory*." ***HIS DAY*** would come, and it did. And he went ***MAD***, and his ***NAILS*** grew long and his ***HAIR*** grew long; and they turned them out and he ***GRAZED GRASS*** in a field like a wild animal. And for months he behaved like a ***BEAST***, until his sanity returned. And he said, *"Now I know who's* ***IN CHARGE OF HISTORY****. Now I know that it's the* ***GOD MOST HIGH*** *who orders.”*

I'm talking about ***BIG THINGS*** this morning. We're getting a big view of God. *"I am the God who by my* ***POWER*** *and my* ***OUTSTRETCHED ARM*** *made the earth, put men and animals in it. And* ***I GIVE IT*** *to whomever* ***I CHOOSE****. And I have given it to* ***NEBUCHADNEZZAR****. Put that yoke on. There's no use fighting against it. Put it on. Go back to those countries of yours and stop thinking of an alliance. It's useless.... never work."*

And then ***(SECOND)*** Jeremiah turned from those nations, and he turned to the ***KING OF HIS*** die ***OWN NATION*** and the nobles, and he said the same thing to them, *"You're believing a* ***LIE****. Why will you...why will you die? Why throw your life away? Listen! While there's* ***LIFE*** *there's* ***HOPE****."* In other words, he was pleading for an ***HONOURABLE SURRENDER***.

Then ***(THIRD)*** he went to the ***PRIESTS*** and the ***PEOPLE*** in the temple, and he said the same thing to them *"It's a* ***LIE****".* And in fact this phrase, *"It's a* ***LIE****,"* occurs four times: ***"'A LIE'...'A LIE'...'A LIE'...'A LIE'***. *Don't believe it!!"*

Now I find the ***LAST PART*** of chapter 27, a very ***SAD*** part, because he says to the PRIESTS*, "You know that four years ago Nebuchadnezzar took your* ***VESSELS*** *away to Babylon."* And the temple had some beautiful chalices, and cups, and things of gold and silver---Nebuchadnezzar took them all away. And you know the tragedy to me is that the priests were more worried about the loss of the ***VESSELS*** than the loss of their ***CONGREGATION***. That's what comes out here. Do you notice it? And Jeremiah says, *"You're sad because the vessels have been taken away, and you're listening to this* ***FALSE PROPHECY*** *that they'll come back within two years. Don't you believe it! Even the* ***PILLARS*** *of this house will go unless you* ***ACCEPT*** *the* ***YOKE*** *of Nebuchadnezzar."* And do you know that that came ***TRUE*** just six years after Jeremiah said it? There were two huge bronze pillars at the entrance to the holy place. Two huge bronze pillars about the height of this building. And those were pulled down and they were carted off to Babylon just ***SIX YEARS LATER***. And Jeremiah said, *"Far from getting your* ***VESSELS*** *back, within two years even the* ***PILLARS*** *are gonna go."* And until Gods is ready, they will stay over there.

But I take it to myself that those of us who are called to lead the people in worship and religion can so easily get tied up with ***THINGS*** rather than ***PEOPLE***. And I know there are ministers who'd rather be without a congregation than without their ***ALTAR*** and their ***ROBES*** and the ***PARAPHENALIA***. Look, the Lord isn't interest in paraphernalia. He's interested in ***PEOPLE***. And priests who are all worried about their paraphernalia, Jeremiah's likely to say to them, *"No use hoping you'll get it back."* They should have been worried about the ***PEOPLE*** who had been taken away, not the ***VESSELS***. But even so, Jeremiah told them, *"It's no use."* And so, six years later, even the ***PILLARS*** went.

Now in all this, I'm simply talking about what the New Testament refers to as ***'DISCERNING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES'***...discerning the signs of the times. It's a job we've got to do in our day. We've got to read the newspapers and ***DISCERN*** the signs of the times, got to read the magazines and watch the television news. And we've gotta ***DISCERN*** the signs of the times because God is working out ***HIS*** ***PURPOSE***. And sad are you, if you read your morning newspaper on the train to London and ***MISS*** the signs of the times. For the events---the signs---they point to what God is doing and what is happening. Jesus once said this, he said, *"You know, you Pharisees, you're so religious, you're even good at weather forecasting."* He said, *"When the sky's red at night, you say it's gonna be* ***FAIR****. And when it's red in the morning you say it's gonna be* ***STORMY****."* He said, "You can tell the weather...." Did you know by the way that's where we got it from---from Jesus? We got it from the Bible that saying: 'Red sky at night, shepherd's delight: red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning’. But he was quoting something that was known before. But he said, *"You can, you can forecast the* ***WEATHER,*** *but you can't see what's happening* ***IN FRONT OF YOUR NOSE.*** *You can only see the news; you can't see what's*

*happening. You can't discern the signs of the times."* But Jeremiah ***COULD***. He was an accurate predictor. He was a reliable political forecaster.

And I come now to something very big. I'm stretching your minds this morning, but I don't apologize for that. God told you to love him with ***ALL*** your mind.

***Getting the Right Relationship Between Religion and Politics***

What is really happening in all this is this: getting the right relationship between ***RELIGION*** and ***POLITICS***. The ***PROBLEM*** is that there are some people who keep the two ***SO FAR APART*** that they never interact. And that's not unknown among Christians. “***POLITICS*** is a dirty business. Leave it to worldlings, we'll stick with ***RELIGION***." But you know, if you study the Old and the New Testament, they're full of political statements...full of them. And the ***PROPHETS*** didn't see ***RELIGION*** and ***POLITICS***, as ***SEPARATE***. Jeremiah was here making ***POLITICAL*** predictions...giving ***POLITICAL*** advice to the government of his day. And he was giving ***GOOD*** advice, because he, unlike them, had ***ALL*** the factors in mind. And we need to say this to ***OUR*** government, ***OUR*** MPs, "You are not considering all the factors, because the ***BIGGEST*** factor in the situation is: ***WHAT IS GOD DOING***? And if you don't consider that factor, you're going to come unstuck on your legislation, because he's a factor in the situation." And ***RELIGION*** has something to say about ***POLITICS***. I am not therefore going to drop into the trap of saying religion is identified with one party in politics. I'm saying religion is ***RELATED*** to politics and will have to make ***POLITICAL STATEMENTS*** that will criticize maybe both sides of the house...but will make political statements.

So, Jeremiah wouldn't separate these two things into watertight compartments. He took heaven's eye view of the political situation and he spoke to it. I came across this definition just yesterday. A Dr. Gonzalez---whoever he was, I've never heard of him before---said this: "***STATESMANSHIP*** is the art of finding out in what ***DIRECTION*** almighty God is going, and in getting things out of his way." Now that's a tremendous definition; and if Mr. Callahan replies to my letter of this week, I'm going to reply and send him that back because I didn't find it in time for last week. But what a ***MAGNIFICENT STATEMENT***. "Statesmanship is the art of finding out in what direction almighty God is going and in getting things out of his way." Hallelujah. Isn't that great? And how FEW statesmen we have...how few. The art of finding out ***WHERE GOD IS GOING***.

Now on the other hand...and we now turn to chapter 28. By way of introduction, let me say that just as some Christians keep religion and politics ***TOO FAR APART***, some Christians get them ***TOO CLOSE TOGETHER***, and religion gets identified with ***POLITICAL NATIONALISM***. And that's when you land in serious trouble the ***OTHER*** way. Some Christians keep right ***OUT*** of politics, and some go ***INTO*** it and identify Christianity---their faith in God---with one particular national aspiration. History is just littered with examples of this. I believe that one of the greatest disasters that ever occurred to the Christian Church was when the Roman Emperor ***CONSTANTINE*** was converted, because the first thing he did was to make Christianity official and the ***ESTABLISHED RELIGION***. And he ***IDENTIFIED*** religion and politics---and you couldn't be a ***POLITICIAN*** without being a ***CHRISTIAN*** in his court from then on. And it was a disaster. ***RELIGION*** and ***POLITICS*** got so ***CLOSE*** that people began to talk about ***'CHRISTENDOM'*** and the ***'HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE'***, and all the abuses of the Middle Ages grew out of this ***FATAL*** identification between church and state. At a later stage, the ***REFORMATION*** made the same mistake. ***MARTIN LUTHER*** identified church and state in ***GERMANY***, only he put the ***STATE*** on ***TOP*** of the ***CHURCH***. ***JOHN CALVIN*** made the same mistake in ***GENEVA***, only he put the ***CHURCH*** on ***TOP*** of the ***STATE***. But in both cases, they identified, are not out of any feeling of denominational pride or anything else. The people who stood out at the time of the reformation for a ***FREE* CHURCH** in a ***FREE STATE*** were the ***BAPTISTS***, and therefore they were ***PERSECUTED*** because, in every other case, church and state were so intimately bound that people couldn't see a free church in a free state.

I go further, ***HENRY VIII*** dabbled in religion. You probably know he wrote theological books. He wrote a book ***ATTACKING*** Martin Luther and ***ATTACKING*** Protestantism. So, the Pope gave him a title 'Defender of the Faith', which he's passed on to every subsequent sovereign, which our queen still enjoys. But it's a title given by the ***POPE*** for defending the faith against ***PROTETANTISM***, which is one of the ***ANOMALIES*** of English history. When Henry VIII couldn't get his divorce, he promptly said, "I am going to be the head of the church in England; it'll now be PROTESTANT." And it was. And he sat on the lawn of the garden next door to this center, just next to our car park.... he sat on that lawn and signed away and dissolved the Monasteries of Surrey. And Henry VIII said, "England shall be Protestant." But then as soon as he went, somebody else said, "It shall be Roman Catholic again." And then it went on and on until Elizabeth, the first said, "I'll settle it. We will have a settlement. England will be ***ANGLICAN***."

And again, all through that period and for many, many years after that, the people who fought for a ***FREE*** church in a ***FREE*** state were ***PERSECUTED***. Members of our church in Charlton St. Peter, in the early church minute books, there are records of the members whose furniture was sold and who were then taken off to prison. Why? Because they fought for a ***FREE*** church in a ***FREE*** state. And I believe that the Bible does not want religion and politics so tied up that a secular head of state is the head of the church. Because what happens then is this: that ***NATIONALISM*** and ***RELIGION*** gets so ***CLOSELY*** ***IDENTIFIED*** that you get into an impossible situation. The ***PROPHET*** cannot ***SPEAK***!

***Out of Balance: The Example of Northern Ireland***

May I come right up to date? What is the trouble with Northern Ireland today? Shall I tell you? ***RELIGION*** and ***POLITICS*** have got too close. It's precisely this problem.

And that on the one side ***PROTESTANT*** preachers are saying the only thing a Christian can do is to fight to keep Northern Ireland, Protestant. And on the other side you've got the same ***CATHOLIC*** extremists. And so, we have the name of Christ bandied about the world, "Look at these Christians fighting one another, bombing each other in Northern Ireland," because ***POLITICS*** and ***RELIGION*** got too identified and too close together. I know what I would say to ***NORTHERN*** Ireland, I would say, "Give in to ***SOUTHERN*** Ireland as quickly as possible; accept the ***YOKE*** and live." Because I believe that is bound to come and that would be a bold and an unpopular word to say in Northern Ireland. I'll probably get into trouble for saying it here.

Well now back to Jeremiah. Sorry, let's go way back. The ***FALSE PROPHETS*** you see were supporting ***NATIONALISM*** and saying, *"God is behind you in your struggle for independence."* And they were giving people ***GOOD*** news. Now which are you more likely to believe? The ***GOOD*** news or the ***BAD*** news? The answers very simple. Good news is popular, bad news is not. Time Magazine a fortnight ago, did you see it: *'Is There Any Future in Futurism'*?

Herman Kahn, ebullient director of the foresighted Hudson Institute, has just looked at the next 200 years. His book offers a plausible scenario of declining population growth, rising levels of affluence, and---given the right socioeconomic conditions---virtually eternal energies and sources and food for everyone. That's one futurist. The Club of Rome in 1972 warned that the world was consuming and polluting itself to death. And so, the article says, "Are the ***DOOMSDAY*** ***SEERS*** correct in their ***DESPAIR*** or the ***TECHNOLOGUES*** who detect ***ABUNDANCE*** just around the corner. Karooming between ***GLOOM*** and ***EUPHORIA***. The reader of such conflicting reports can hardly be blamed for a queasy feeling of futurist shock. For prophecy is no longer confined to science fiction or Jeanne Dixon. It is in the laboratories, think tanks, universities everywhere." Now what are ***YOU*** going to believe? People who say, "Look, this is just a phase and by 2000 we will all be enjoying enough food and enough energy and everything's going to be fine." Or those who say, "It's very doubtful If we'll survive to the year 2000." We are getting ***BOTH*** from the think tanks. You see, when you get a choice of ***GOOD*** or ***BAD*** news, which do you want to ***BELIEVE***?

And when the ***FALSE PROPHET*** was saying, "***Peace***," and ***JEREMIAH*** was saying, "***War***,"... when the ***FALSE PROPHET*** says, "***NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE,"*** and ***JEREMIAH*** said, ***"SURRENDER*** *to the enemy,****"*** who's going to be ***BELIEVED***? So, he had to change from the ***POLITICAL*** people to the ***RELIGIOUS*** boys. And in fact, instead of tackling the whole lot, God brought him face to face with just one man---a test case---and his name was ***HANANIAH***. And Hananiah got up and ***PREACHED***. He came from the same area as Jeremiah---probably jealous of him. They were both lads together--- one in Gibeon, one in Anathoth, which were just north of Jerusalem.

***Hananiah's False Prophecy***

And this Hananiah came to Jerusalem, and he said, *"It's gonna be* ***ALRIGHT****. I predict that within two years, the exiles will be back from Babylon and Babylon will be finished."* Now that was a pretty risky thing to say. It meant he could only keep his reputation for two years. If you're gonna make predictions, I would suggest you make them for at least 20 years ahead, and then you're safe for 20 years. To say, *"Two years,"* boy, you are really putting your neck in a noose. And Hananiah said, *"Two years it'll be back."* He said, *"I do not believe that the* ***YOKE****,".*..and that was a sarcastic reference to Jeremiah's activities*)..."I do not believe that the yoke of Babylon will last more than another two years."* Straight ***CONTRADICTION***.

Jeremiah's reaction when he met Hananiah was to say this: He said, *"I wish you were right. I really do. I'm not gonna be sarcastic. I'm SYMPATHETIC. Amen! If the Lord would do that, I'd say amen to it.... if only that were the truth."* He said, *"I could wish for nothing more for our nation. I'm not wanting to see war. I don't want to see them destroyed."* He said, *"Amen, if the Lord would do that."* But he said, *"I can't help making an observation. And that is: Have you ever noticed that all the prophets that were before you and me, Hananiah,* ***EVERY ONE OF THEM prophesied DOOM****, and you are the* ***FIRST*** *to bring* ***GOOD*** *news? And that makes me stop and think,"* said ***Jeremiah***. He said, *"This isn't* ***DIVINE REVELATION****, it's* ***HUMAN REACTION****."* He said, *"I just can't get it."* He said, *"Why is it that every prophet up to now has been sent to* ***WARN*** *people of* ***DANGER****, and you are apparently the* ***FIRST*** *to be sent to tell them* ***IT'S ALRIGHT****? God doesn't usually send prophets when things are alright. I don't figure it out at all."*

And so, since he was still wearing the yoke, Hananiah got that ***WOODEN YOKE,*** and he just ***SMASHED*** it. He must have been so incensed by what Jeremiah had pointed out---that he (Hananiah) didn't fit the pattern of prophets---he smashed the wooden yoke. And I take my hat off to Jeremiah. Jeremiah quietly ***WALKED AWAY***. And he walked away to talk to the Lord about it. Now, if somebody attacks you and really goes for you, best thing you can do is to go and have a little talk with the Lord about it ***BEFORE*** you open your mouth any further.

***Jeremiah's Bold Prophecy to Hananiah***

And Jeremiah just walked right away, and he said, *"Lord, what do we do about this guy?”* And the Lord says, *"You go right back to him, and you tell him this: that you will make a prediction of 12 months---not 2 years---of 12 months! You'll stake your* ***REPUTATION*** *on a prediction that is* ***MONTHS****, not years. And you will tell that man that the WOODEN yoke will be replaced by an IRON one (that he can't break) because you will not be able to break Babylon. And... I want you to tell him, that within the next 12 months, he will* ***DIE****...he will die."* And Jeremiah came back. It doesn't say that he was wearing an ***IRON YOKE.*** He just came to ***TALK ABOUT*** an iron yoke. And he told Hananiah, and he said, *"God is gonna* ***REMOVE YOU*** *from the face of the earth. And I stake my reputation on him doing it* ***WITHIN A YEAR****."* And you know, it wasn't even a year...it was only two months later, Hananiah died. Two months! (in the SEVENTH month of the same year). And it was in the ***FIFTH*** month that Jeremiah said it. ***TWO MONTHS***...and that man was under the sod. I guess he died of a ***HEART*** attack, because in his ***HEART*** he must have known that he'd ***NOT*** got his message from God. And in his ***HEART***, he must have known that God was giving His word to Jeremiah; but he died. Jeremiah was gloriously ***VINDICATED*** because the book of Deuteronomy says this, *"There is one simple* ***TEST*** *of a prophet and that is; 'If what he predicts comes TRUE, he's a good prophet. And if it* ***DOESN'T****, he's not.' "*

***Two Great Truths In This Passage***

Let me finish then this rather lengthy study by pointing out the ***TWO GREAT TRUTHS*** in this passage. Truth number ***ONE***: His ***SOVEREIGNTY***...His sovereignty. It is ***GOD*** who settles the fate of nations... of individuals. It is ***GOD*** who decides how long you live. It is ***GOD*** who decides where you go when you die. It is ***GOD*** who decides whether Britain has an empire or loses it. It is ***GOD*** who draws the map. It is ***GOD*** who has the final word over human affairs. HE IS ***IN SOVEREIGN CONTROL***. And to hope that our ***ALLIANCES*** with our neighbors, (which are getting a bit shaky--- particularly in the northerly direction)...to hope that these are gonna hold a threat back, or to hope that a great ***WESTERN POWER*** will come to our aid as she did in the past, I believe. is ***NOT ENOUGH*** for our situation. Jeremiah says, "Do you hope in God? Are you seeing in ***WHAT DIRECTION HE"S GOING*** and getting things out of His way?" That's ***STATESMANSHIP***. And I believe that some Christians in this land are better statesmen than those who are professional politicians here. They're getting a God's-eye view of the situation. They're seeking HIS WILL and HIS WORD. That's the first truth: His sovereignty.

The ***SECOND*** truth is this: our ***SUBMISSION***...our submission. For Jeremiah's ***YOKE*** had a ***DOUBLE*** meaning when he put it on. Let me put it on again (a yoke) just to tell you this ***DOUBLE*** meaning. When he put it on, he said to others, "The meaning of this yoke is that it's a ***VISUAL*** ***AID*** for you." "One in the ***EYE*** is worth two in the ***EAR***," as I've said many times. And he said, "It's an object lesson. It stands (1) for the YOKE OF BABYLON on you, which you cannot break. So, ***ACCEPT IT*** and bend your neck humbly to it.... and live." But it stood for one other thing. It stood (2) for the fact that ***JEREMIAH*** had ***ACCEPTED*** the yoke of the Lord, did it not... because who told him to put it on ***(THE LORD DID)??*** And in fact, Jeremiah said, *"I'm* ***WILLING*** *to be under* ***YOUR YOKE***, *Lord. If You tell me to wear it, I'll wear it*!" Do you see?

***The Application to Us***

Now what has that got to say to me? Well, we've got right to Jesus. ***WHY*** was Jeremiah wearing the yoke and talking about Babylon? I'll tell you why. He was saying to his nation, *"If you will not accept the* ***YOKE OF THE LORD****, then you must accept the* ***YOKE OF BABYLON****."* And the simple and hard truth is this: Everybody has to wear a yoke of some kind. And if you ***REFUSE*** the yoke of the ***LORD***, you've got to wear ***SOMEONE ELSE'S*.**That's the truth. There is no such thing as absolute freedom. ***ALL PEOPLE*** are made to be ***YOKED***....so that they may carry their ***BURDENS***, and ***WORK*** as they should. So, you are made for a yoke. ***IF YOU DON'T ACCEPT THE YOKE OF THE LORD****,* then you'll become ***YOKED TO SOMEBODY ELSE***. Tragedy for you if you get yoked to somebody who doesn't belong to the Lord. You'll find it a very ***UNEQUAL*** yoke.

But now listen to Jesus. Jesus said to ***CAPERNAUM***, ***CHORAZIN***, ***BETHSAIDA***...He said, *"Woe to you, Chorazin; Woe to you, Bethsaida; Woe to you Capernaum! For if the mighty works that have been done in you, had been done in Sodom and Gomorrah, they would've repented!! As it is in the day of judgment, it will be* ***HARDER FOR YOU*** *than for Sodom and Gomorrah."*

And you know, when we were in Israel, all you can find of ***CHORAZIN*** and ***BETHSAIDA*** and ***CAPERNAUM*** are some heaps of black basalt rocks. They've ***GONE***! Do you know what Jesus said? (He was a ***TRUE*** prophet because He was a prophet of ***DOOM***. He was a prophet who told these cities they were to be ***DESTROYED***. Don't you tell me that doom is only in the Old Testament. It's right through the teaching of Jesus.) But you know what He said after He'd condemned those three cities in which He had preached? After He'd condemned them to oblivion (and that's where they are today), He said, *"Come unto Me."* Straightaway, He said, *"Come unto Me, all you who are* ***HEAVY LADEN****; learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly. Take My* ***YOKE*** *upon you. Learn of Me."* Why? *"Because* ***My YOKE*** *is* ***EASY*** *and* ***My BURDEN is LIGHT****."*

Now, have you got the ***MESSAGE***? You can't be without a yoke. You're gonna have to carry a ***YOKE***. You're going to have to carry a ***BURDEN***. Everybody does. Everybody has burdens. But you either have the yoke of ***SOMEONE ELSE***---which is irritating, chafing, uncomfortable---or you listen to a ***CARPENTER*** who was always making things like this...and He made them to fit not to rub. He made them ***EASY***, so that people could ***COPE*** and *CARRY* their burdens. And He said, *"Learn of Me. Take* ***MY******YOKE****."* You won't find rest for your ***BODIES***. No Christian finds that. You won't find rest for your ***MINDS***. You've got to use your mind an awful lot when you're a Christian. But He did say, *"And you'll find rest for your* ***SOULS****."* Let's bow our heads in prayer.

***SINGING (1:30)***

I don't know what burden you brought to this service and what is heavy on your hearts this morning, but I invite you to come to Jesus with that burden and take HIS YOKE upon you. It'll not remove the burden, but it will make it light. So just come to Him and ask Him to make ***YOU*** his slave. Paul was proud to call himself a bond slave of Jesus because he knew that his service is perfect freedom. For His namesake, Amen.