

# Judah to Serve Nebuchadnezzar

## Jeremiah's Sixth Symbolic Action

### 27: 1-22

**DIG:** What does Jeremiah's hand-made yoke mean (Leviticus 26:13)? How might he feel wearing this throughout Jerusalem? Whose neck was the yoke meant for? Babylon controlled Palestine and had just deported King Jehoiachin. Why, then, do the small nations meet in Yerushalayim and consult mediums? What does God think of their consultation (Deuteronomy 18:10-11)? What does Jeremiah advise? Why does he give the same message to Zedekiah? Are court prophets different than pagan mediums? Why or why not? What does that tell you about the false hope of those prophets and the people who listen to them? What hope did Yirmeyahu hold out for them instead? What sacrilegious use would Nebuchadnezzar and his heirs have for the Temple gold (Second Kings 24:12-13; Dani'el 5:1-4)? Why does Jeremiah recommend surrender to a pagan king? Why shouldn't Zedekiah and the other king's band together against him?

**REFLECT:** Ancient cultures thought of the world as run by many gods, each exercising power over a certain territory. In your world, how is ADONAI's sphere of influence limited? Do you look to the LORD to reign over certain areas of yours but not others? When have you experienced the flight-or-fight dilemma faced by Judah in this chapter? When do you know when to fight and surrender? Do you think nations today can avoid war by obeying YHVH? Why or why not? What kind of national behavior leads God to blessing? When has Ha'Shem had to take your stuff to get your attention?

**594 BC early in the reign of Zedekiah**

**The one main point to the sixth symbolic action (what might be called a parable in action) is Jeremiah's yoke and straps would be symbolic of Judah's bondage to Babylon.**

We now turn to the cluster of events in **Jeremiah's** ministry that took place in 594 BC. The prelude to these events took place in **Babylon** in December 595 or January 594 BC. At the time there was an attempted uprising against **Nebuchadnezzar** by some the **Babylonian** military units. **Nebuchadnezzar** got word of it and put it down brutally. **He** boasted that he executed the ringleader with his own hands. But in the next few months a report of the attempt must have gotten back to **Jerusalem**, raising the hope that if the little states there in the west could combine forces, they might be able to throw off the domination of **Nebuchadnezzar**. They may also have hope for help from Egypt because a new pharaoh, Psammetichus II, had just come to the throne.<sup>271</sup> Therefore, there was a brazen attempt by **Zedekiah** to conspire with the countries around **him** and refuse to pay tribute to **Babylon**.

**The message to submit to Babylon:** Early in the reign of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, this is a technical term meaning from the beginning of the actual reign. This, then, took place sometime between the king's accession to the throne and his regnal year. In Judah regnal years were counted from the month of Nisan of the first full year of a king's reign. After Zedekiah began to sit on Jerusalem's throne . . . then the word came to Jeremiah from the LORD (27:1).

This is what ADONAI said to me: **Make a yoke out of a crossbar and straps and put it on your neck as a symbolic action for himself and other kings surrounding Judah (27:2).** King Zedekiah had called envoys from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon to a "summit conference" in Yerushalayim. The purpose was to plan a revolt against Babylon. Therefore, this message was sent to those kings who were in the same subservient position to Babylon as was Y'hudah.

To Jeremiah, their plan was all foolishness. He was convinced that from the moment YHVH had given Nebuchadnezzar dominion over the whole world, human beings and the animals as well, that Judah was doomed. To resist was futile. In acting his sixth symbolic action, God's prophet followed a divine command to **make a yoke of a crossbar and straps.** Palestinian yokes of the time consisted of a crossbar that lay across the shoulders of the oxen, with pairs of pegs jutting down from the beam that fitted on either side of the neck of each ox and were tied by straps under the neck.<sup>272</sup>

Yirmeyahu made a yoke of pegs and straps to demonstrate that he, at least, was ready for the Babylonian king's yoke. Then God's prophet walked right into the summit meeting to give identical yokes to each of the envoys telling them, "This what ADONAI-Tzva'ot, the God of Isra'el says: Tell this to your masters, "With My great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I gave it to anyone I please. This language is reminiscent of the exodus, speaking of God's sovereign, unquestioned, incomparable power. All are from YHVH. All belong to YHVH. All are accountable to YHVH. In His sovereignty, God declared: **Now I will hand all your countries over to My servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon (5:15); I will make even the wild animals subject to him (27:3-6).** This is one of the most astonishing claims in Jeremiah!

For how long will Babylon have God's sovereign authority? Three generations. All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes. This prophecy is not permanent. It has a limit. Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's grandson will be the last king of Babylon as we read in Dani'el 5:1-31. Then, in 536 BC, several nations and great kings (Cyrus the Persian and Darius the Mede) will subjugate him (27:7).

Even with this dire warning, however, those five kings would conspire to revolt against King Nebuchadnezzar and mighty Babylon in 594 BC (see Eq - [Isra'el Will Never Cease Being a Nation Before Me, declares the LORD](#)). If, however, any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon or bow its neck under his yoke, I will punish that nation with the sword, famine and plague, declares the LORD, until I destroy it by his hand (27:8). The choice was simple, submit or die.

So do not listen to your false prophets, your diviners, your interpreters of dreams, your mediums or your sorcerers who tell you that you will not serve the king of Babylon. This was the exact opposite of what would prove to be true. They prophesy lies to you, and if you believe them that will only serve to remove you far from your lands; I will banish you and you will perish. But if any nation obeys and will bow its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let that Gentile nation remain in its own land to till it and to live there, declares ADONAI' (27:9-11). Therefore, the nation that does not submit to Babylon would be devastated by invasion and occupation.

**The message to Zedekiah:** Jeremiah had a similar message for the host, King Zedekiah. Any prophets who tell you that you do not have to submit are lying. Submit! Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon; serve him and his people, and you will live. Why will you and your people die by the sword, famine and plague? What God threatened the Gentile nations with, He now threatens Judah with, if she fails to serve the king of Babylon. Zedekiah was also not to listen to the words of the prophets who say to him that he would not serve the king of Babylon, for they were prophesying lies. "I have not sent them," declares the LORD. Judah should not resist Babylon, because God does not will such resistance. Such a fantasy will lead inevitably to disaster. "They are prophesying lies in My name. If you listen to them Zedekiah, I will banish you and you will perish, both you and the prophets who prophesy to you" (27:12-15).

**The message to the priests and the people:** In order for them to understand the seriousness of their actions, to warn them, Jeremiah twice prophesies about the complete removal of all the Temple furnishings to Babylon. Then I said to the priests and all these people, "This is what ADONAI says: Do not listen to the false prophets who say, 'Very soon now the articles from the LORD's house will be brought back from Babylon.' In fact, just the opposite would happen. They are prophesying lies to you. Do not listen to them. Serve the king of Babylon, and you will live. Why should this City become a ruin? If they are true prophets, which they are not, and have the word of the LORD, let them plead with ADONAI-Tzva'ot that the furnishings remaining in the Temple and in the palace of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem will not be taken to Babylon" (27:16-18).

However, that was not to be the case. When **Nebuchadnezzar** sacked **Yerushalayim** a few years later, **he broke up the furnishings for their metal; transporting them as trophies, an enormous task (Jeremiah 52:17; Second Kings 25:13).**

While **the people** were commanded to listen, this word seems particularly addressed to **the priests**, for it concerns **Temple furnishings**. **Jeremiah** would give his own **near historical prophecy**: **For this is what ADONAI-Tzva'ot says about the two [bronze] pillars called Jachin and Boaz (First Kings 7:15-22), the [bronze] Sea, used as a priestly wash basin which was also located at the Temple entrance (First Kings 7:23-26; Second Chronicles 4:6), the moveable bronze stands on which the ten wash basins were mounted (First Kings 7:27-39) and the other furnishings that are left in this City, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon did not take away when he carried Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon in the second deportation (see Du - Jehoiachin Ruled For 3 Months in 598 BC), along with all the nobles of Judah and Yerushalayim. Yes, this is what ADONAI-Tzva'ot, the God of Isra'el says about the things that are left in the Temple and in the palace of the king of Judah and in Zion.**

These **furnishings** would remain until the fall of the **City of David** and the **third deportation** when **Nebuchadnezzar** would destroy the **Temple** (see Gc - **The Destruction of Solomon's Temple on Tisha B'Av in 586 BC**). Then they will be taken to **Babylon** and there they will remain until the day **I** come for them, declares the **LORD** (27:19-22a). The fulfillment of this prophecy can be seen in **Ezra Chapters 1-8**.

Then **I** will bring them back (**shuwb**) and restore them to this place (27:22b). **Cyrus** the **Great** would eventually allow the **Jews** to return to **Tziyon** after he defeated **Babylon** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Ia - The Deliverance by Cyrus the Great**, and the commentary on **Ezra-Nehemiah Ah - Cyrus Helps the Exiles Return**). But it would only be after **ADONAI's** judgment was completed that **He** would bring a **remnant back to the Land**.