

LINEN WAISTBAND

JERE. 13:1-14

Jeremiah Was Commanded by God to Get a Linen Girdle - And to Wear It Without Ever Washing It!

"Thus the LORD said to me, "Go and buy yourself a linen waistband, and put it around your waist, but do not put it in water." (Jeremiah 13:1). Jeremiah was instructed to wear this girdle on the outside of his clothes. Today, he could wear it on any street in almost any American city, and no one would take a second look. But to the Jewish society of his day, he would have stuck out like a sore thumb!

The Jewish masses dressed very much alike, in conformity with the times. And as they caught sight of Jeremiah parading down the streets in a girdle, they certainly would have recognized this as a sign! This is because Jeremiah was well known among the people. They knew that everything he did - including what he wore - had an important prophetic meaning!

A. When Jeremiah first appeared on the streets of Jerusalem wearing the linen girdle, the guessing game began: "What is the meaning of the girdle? What is the prophet trying to say to us?"

The educated priests and rulers prided themselves on interpreting for the people the prophet's message. They probably told them: "It's very obvious. God is saying to us what we all know - that we are His chosen people! We are His girdle worn proudly, His glory and strength, the excellency of the ages, united to Him by covenant. He will never leave us or forsake us. We are bound to Him as surely as that girdle is bound to Jeremiah!"

As the prophet walked by, you could almost hear the people clapping: "Amen, Jeremiah! We get the message. Right on - praise God!"

B. But in a short time those same priests and people were frowning! They watched Jeremiah with a deep puzzlement - because day by day the girdle got dirtier. It was becoming soiled and unclean; spots were beginning to appear. But the prophet kept wearing it!

"Why is he not daily washing it?" they wondered. They all knew the girdle represented them - so why did he allow it to cling to him with filth and stench on it? Soon they were angry, hissing - because to the Jewish mind of that day, cleanliness was a form of godliness. And this soiled, smelly girdle was an offense!

C. They could no longer believe the girdle represented them! They must have run to the priests and said: "That girdle can't mean us! God doesn't allow dirt to cling to Him. We sacrifice, pay tithes and keep the law. We pray every day and fast.

"The girdle must represent the wicked heathen around and among us. If we were that kind of people, God would have cast us aside. He'd never wear a stinking, dirty girdle upon His waist!"

Not so! The dirty girdle was Israel. Yet it also represents every single servant of God who has never been wholly, totally cleansed!

D. Israel called themselves by the name of God. They observed all the religious forms and rituals. And yet God saw something deep in their heart that was going to destroy them - something that had never been dealt with.

All along there had been a flaw, a fly in the ointment - a secret, hidden sin in their hearts: They were idolaters! They lusted after the Midian gods, because of the sensuality and sexuality involved in their

worship. And now Israel had conjured up their own doctrines to suit their life-style. They had secret, deadly lusts that had never been plucked out!

God wanted to show Israel that in spite of ceremonial cleansing they had never been cleansed at heart. He told Jeremiah, "These people have never allowed Me to go deep into their hearts and pluck out their idolatry. No matter how meticulously they pay their tithes or come into My house, there is something inside them that's causing decay and rot!"

**The Girdle Is the Servant of God -
the One Who Is Busy For Jesus,
Convinced He Is Redeemed!**

This servant may be a lover of lost souls who sacrifices his life by praying, fasting and giving. He cleaves to the Lord, enjoying covenant blessings. But deep inside he still holds onto a secret sin, a besetting lust - and he keeps falling back into a temptation that he never overcomes!

He cries out, day after day: "Lord, I'm sorry - forgive me! Don't let me die in my sin. Be merciful to me! You know how weak I am, how easily this lust overcomes me!" He sins and confesses, sins and confesses... but he never goes to the laver - he never allows himself to truly be cleansed! And he becomes blind to his danger!

**Next, Jeremiah Was Commanded to Wear the Dirty Girdle
on a Long, Arduous Journey to the Euphrates River!**

This journey would cover 250 miles. Some biblical scholars, believed this trip was merely a vision: nobody would actually travel that distance on foot to bury a girdle. But I believe the trip was real - because God had a powerful truth He wished to convey!

You see, Jeremiah was well known and respected throughout Israel and Judah. He was admired even among the surrounding nations. Foreign kings acknowledged God was with him.

And now, by his walking the distance to the Euphrates, every village along the way would see the famous girdle. The trip would take weeks - and it would set every town a buzz as Jeremiah passed through. Everyone would want a glimpse of the dirty girdle, to speculate about its message!

Yet what probably was most mystifying to the people was Jeremiah's destination: The Euphrates River. Everyone knew the Hebrew word "Euphrates" meant "river of fruitfulness." They all would have asked themselves, "Why would Jeremiah be taking a dirty, soiled girdle to a place of fruitfulness? It's awful, full of stench! Why doesn't he cast it off and burn it? The unclean cannot be fruitful!"

**God Was Giving His People a Picture of His Patience Toward Those
Who Cling to Him While Still Holding Onto a Secret Sin!**

Indeed, it is possible to cling to a secret sin in your life and to go on with Jesus. You can still sense His presence and be in covenant with Him. Everything may seem fine. In fact, it might seem you're right on the brink of the greatest blessing ever - fruitfulness like you've never known, a whole new realm of usefulness opening up before you.

Yet it doesn't matter who you are - evangelist, street worker, choir member or member: If you have hidden, habitual sin, you're on a death march! You're headed for a black hole - for darkness like you've never known. You can harbor sin and appear to be getting away with it - yet not be aware that a patient Lord is waiting for full repentance before He leaves you to your sin and gives you over to ruin and decay!

God had endured such sin in Israel for years before He brought them to ruin. In fact, the prophet's journey was a perfect illustration of this. The Euphrates was far out of the way - and Jeremiah's journey showed how far out of His way God goes in being patient with His servants who are trapped by a besetting sin. He's a loving Father - and He continues in longsuffering for years.

But the time comes when you are given a final call - and your day of conviction passes! God then knows you refuse to part with your sin: *"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11)*

God commanded Jeremiah: *"Go to Euphrates, and hide it there in a hole" (Jeremiah 13:4)*. The girdle arrived at the place of fruitfulness only to be cast aside - not simply shelved, but buried and abandoned. Jeremiah stood at the edge of the river, and off came the girdle: he dropped it into a hole, covered it with dirt, put up a marker - and walked away!

This is a picture of God "taking off" the cleaving evangelist, Christian worker or so-called believer. What a frightful thought! The days of cleaving are over - God's patience has gone. And now He says, "You are finished - I am giving you over to your filth. You are of no more use to Me!"

Fruitfulness will be just before you - and yet suddenly you will be isolated, cast off and abandoned by the Lord! You will be buried in a cleft in the rock by the river, stripped of everything - your good name, your reputation, your ministry, your whole future. You will be buried in a desolate hole of shame and despair to rot and decay, completely ruined!

Not Only Was the Girdle Hidden, to Rot and Ruin - But It Was Dug Up and Brought Back As an Example!

After a time, God commanded Jeremiah to go and dig up the girdle. So the prophet brought it up out of the hole: *"And, behold, the girdle was marred, it was profitable for nothing" (Jeremiah 13:7)*. It was ruined, useless - good for nothing! Why did God tell Jeremiah to dig it up? Why didn't He just leave it buried, to show that this was the end result of sin? Most of Israel had forgotten all about it. Some probably thought, "At least he finally cast it off and buried it - whoever it was he was preaching about!"

But here came Jeremiah again, parading through the streets with that same girdle - now tattered, filthy and in total ruin. It was absolutely worthless - it couldn't even be worn! He preached:

"This ruined girdle is Israel! It represents you - good for nothing! You were cleaving to God, but He is going to cast you off. You have become a stench - you are useless to Him!

God was saying, "You have been My girdle - I caused you to cling to Me. But you have refused to hear and obey Me! Instead, you walk after your idolatries and cling to the evil in your hearts. Now I will not only cast you off - I will also bring you to ruin and hold you up to the world as a warning! You will be an example of those who won't rid their soul of sin!"

**God Had a Very Good Reason For Giving This Illustrated Message -
Both to Israel and To Us At This Very Hour!**

God was on the brink of pouring out His wrath upon Israel - and He had no time for a dirty, useless girdle. God needed pure, holy vessels for the work He was about to do. And that is exactly where America and the world are right now! God is on the brink of pouring out His wrath like wine - and He is placing the bottle on the lips of the people!

Jeremiah prophesied: *"Every bottle shall be filled with wine" (verse 12)*. Yet this didn't make sense to Israel. To them he was merely stating the obvious - like saying, "Hats are for covering the head. Clothes are for keeping you warm. Shoes are for walking." The people cried, "What kind of riddle is this? Of course, bottles are made for wine! What's the point?"

Jeremiah answered, "You are the bottle - and God is going to fill you with the wine of His wrath! Just as bottles are filled with wine, so you will be filled with drunkenness. You will become drunk with madness!"

"I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together" (verse 14). To "dash" means to smash suddenly and violently. God was saying, "I'm going to dash these drunken people against one another until they destroy each other!"

This dashing speaks of calamities, disasters and a human madness that robs men of their right mind. And the Lord is pouring it all out right now - on nations, on sinning Christians and on all wickedness! You see it everywhere you look - disastrous hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, tidal waves; families inflicting wounds on each other, being brought down by divorce, drugs, adultery, shame and violence.