
SOURCES/ABBREVIATIONS

Fienberg	Charles L. Fienberg, <i>Jeremiah, Expositor's Bible Commentary</i> , Zondervan, 1986.
Harrison	R. K. Harrison, <i>Jeremiah & Lamentations</i> , Inter-Varsity Press, 1973.
Kidner	Derek Kidner, <i>The Message of Jeremiah</i> , Inter-Varsity Press, 1987.
KJV	King James Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version
OTS	W. La Sor, D. Hubbard, F. Bush, <i>Old Testament Survey</i> , Eerdmans, 1982.
Peterson	Eugene Peterson, <i>Run With the Horses</i> , Inter-Varsity Press, 1983.
Ryken	Philip Ryken, <i>Jeremiah & Lamentations</i> , Crossway Books, 2001.
Thompson	J. A. Thompson, <i>The Book of Jeremiah</i> , Eerdmans, 1980.
White	R. E. O. White, <i>The Indomitable Prophet</i> , Eerdmans, 1992.

GLOSSARY OF SOME NAMES AND PLACES

Anathoth	Jeremiah's home town, three miles northeast of Jerusalem. A town known for its priests.
Baruch	Jeremiah's disciple, secretary and friend (see 36:1ff.)
Hananiah	A false prophet who antagonized Jeremiah (see 28:3, 17).
Jehoahaz	The son of King Josiah, Jehoahaz came to power when his father was killed in the battle of Carchemish. Jehoahaz was enthroned in preference to his older brother, Jehoiakim, but he only lasted three months. The Egyptian king dethroned Jehoahaz and took him captive to Egypt, placing Jehoiakim on the throne.
Jehoiachin	The son of the wicked Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin reigned in Jerusalem for only three months. The Babylonians hoped this king would be more loyal to their rule. He wasn't, and Nebuchadnezzar again marched on Jerusalem, conquered it and deported all but the poorest peasants of the city. The Babylonian king installed Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, as king over those few remaining, thereby fulfilling the prophecy of 22:30 that no descendent of Jehoiachin would be king of Judah.
Jehoiakim	The brother of Jehoahaz. He reigned 11 years in Jerusalem. Jehoiakim was another of Judah's vile kings. He increased taxes, built lavish palaces with forced labor, and practiced idol worship (22:13-14) and human sacrifice (19:4-5). Jehoiakim persecuted Jeremiah, burned his hand-written prophecies and imprisoned the prophet (36).
Jeremiah	God's prophet from Anathoth.
Josiah	Josiah, son of king Amon (who was the son of Manasseh), became King of Judah at age 8, and reigned 31 years (639-609 BC). Josiah was the great reformer in Judah's later history. He did what was right (2 Kings 22:2).
Manasseh	The most vile of Judah's kings. He reigned 55 years and led Judah to do more evil than the Canaanite nations that lived in the land before the God gave Israel the promised land (2 Kings 21:9).

Nebuchadnezzar	The king of Babylon (605–562 b.c.). Nebuchadnezzar was known for his building activities and his shrewd military advances. See Daniel 1-4.
Pharaoh Neco	The Pharaoh of Egypt that made alliances with Judah.
Shemaiah	False prophet who contradicts Jeremiah's letter to the exiles (29).
Zedekiah	The 20th and last king of Judah. After Jehoiakim and Jehoaichin betrayed their allegiance to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar made Zedekiah take a binding oath to the LORD that he would run his domain in proper submission to Babylon's empire. Zedekiah was far from kind to Jeremiah (see 32:3) and far from wise in his politics. This king inherited a Jerusalem gutted of its resources and people. Nevertheless, Zedekiah rebelled against the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar personally led the siege of Jerusalem which lasted through three summers. Zedekiah escaped by night, was captured and forced to watch the execution of his sons. Then the last king of Judah was blinded and deported to Babylon (see 39).

The Life and Times of Jeremiah

- 640 Josiah begins reign as king of Judah
- 627 Jeremiah begins his ministry
- 622 Josiah initiates religious and political reform
- 609 Josiah shot by an arrow and dies at Megiddo
- 609 Jehoahaz (Shallum) made king; lasts three months
- 609 Jehoiakim installed king of Judah by the Egyptians; lasts 11 years
- 609 Jeremiah delivers his Temple Sermon (Jeremiah 7)
- 605 Battle of Carchemish: Babylonia asserts its power over Egypt, Pharaoh Neco is pushed back but not defeated
- 605 Jeremiah's scroll read before Jehoiakim, burned by Jehoiakim
- 598 Nebuchadnezzar lays siege to Jerusalem; first deportation of refugees to Babylonia
- 598 Jehoiakim dies
- 598 Jehoiachin becomes king and is taken to Babylon after three months
- 598 Zedekiah installed king of Judah by Babylonians; lasts 11 years
- 598 Jeremiah confronts Hananiah who breaks the ox yoke
- 588 Jeremiah imprisoned by Zedekiah
- 587 Destruction of Jerusalem
- 587 Gedaliah appointed governor of Judea
- 582 Gedaliah assassinated by rebels
- 587 Jeremiah travels to Egypt
- 562 Jeremiah dies in Egypt (stoned according to tradition)

Listening to Jeremiah is one . . . way to get your blood going in the morning; it puts caffeine to shame.

Kathleen Norris

Angular People

Abraham Heschel calls the Old Testament prophets *some of the most disturbing people who have ever lived*. . . His comment is true in two senses. When we examine the prophets' lives, indeed, they are disturbing people. They sing songs, write poetry, walk naked in public¹, and preach to people who have no intention of listening. People who live their lives like that are disturbing. On the other hand, prophets make it their ambition to disturb. They specialize in upsetting the status quo. They make it their business to unsettle the comfortable and to comfort the afflicted.

At the heart of the prophetic message is the truth that governs the universe: God rules everyone and everything. As Eugene Peterson puts it,

Prophets insist that God is the sovereign center, not off in the wings awaiting our beck and call. And prophets insist that we deal with God as God reveals himself, not as we imagine him to be.

These men and women woke people up to the sovereign presence of God in their lives. They yelled, they wept, they rebuked, they soothed, they challenged, they comforted. They used words with power and imagination, whether blunt or subtle.²

The prophets see what we do not.

To us the moral state of society, for all its stains and spots, seems fair and trim; to the prophet it is dreadful. . . . To us life is often serene, in the prophet's eye the world reels in confusion. (Heschel, p. 9)

The prophets were angular people. They refuse to fit in. They stir the pot, they stoke the fire, they irritate and agitate. Prophets embarrass; often they are rude.

The ultimate purpose of a prophet is not to be inspired, but to inspire people; not to be filled with a passion, but to impassion the people with understanding for God. (Heschel, p. 115)

¹ Yes, it's true. See Isaiah 20. This prophet's three-year period of nakedness was a sign pointing to Assyria's subjugation of Egypt and Cush.

² From Peterson's introduction to the prophets in *The Message*.

During Bible times, Israel enjoyed but mostly endured the message of her prophets over a time period lasting hundreds of years. Sixteen of these prophets wrote down what they said and we can read their sermons, songs, poetry and prose when we open our Bible.¹ When we read the message of the prophets we find ourselves, often simultaneously, bewildered, amused, affronted, shocked and confused. The Protestant reformer Martin Luther said in the sixteenth century:

The prophets have a queer way of talking, like people who, instead of proceeding in an orderly manner, ramble off from one thing to the next, so that you cannot make head or tail of them or see what they are getting at.

A Man in the Mud

So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchiah, . . . letting Jeremiah down by ropes. And there was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud. (38:6)

Jeremiah could be called the *transparent* prophet, or perhaps, the *emotional* prophet. Jeremiah suffered greatly for his ministry, and he complained. He was familiar with the stockade and the dungeon. He knew what it was like to have the people of his own village plot to take his life. As Eugene Peterson writes, *Everything that could go wrong did go wrong.*² Accordingly, Jeremiah is the preacher who bears his soul to the reader. Indeed, Jeremiah is the *melancholy* prophet.

My joy is gone; grief is upon me; my heart is sick within me. (8:18)

My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh the walls of my heart! (4:19)

Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! (20:14)

Jeremiah was born in Anathoth, a town three miles northeast of Jerusalem. He was born into a priestly family but, as far as we know, he never served as a priest in Jerusalem. We hardly know anything of his early years as a prophet, but we learn a good deal about his later years. Peterson says, *More is known of the life of Jeremiah than of any other prophet, and his life is far more significant than his teaching.* (Peterson, p. 16)

¹ These sixteen *writing prophets* are divided into two groups, *major* and *minor*. The major prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and are so called because of the volume of their writings.

² From his introduction to Jeremiah in *The Message*.

The Political Backdrop

The book of Jeremiah cannot be understood without at least a cursory understanding of the times in which he lived.

Do you remember the checkered history of Israel? After the period of the Judges, Israel had three kings, Saul, David and Solomon. After King Solomon's death, the tiny nation split into two kingdoms after a civil war.

The northern kingdom, called *Israel* lasted through the reigns of 19 kings. Each of them did evil in the eyes of the Lord. As a consequence, Israel was completely destroyed by the Assyrians about 70 years before Jeremiah's birth.

The southern kingdom, called *Judah*,¹ lasted through the reigns of 17 kings. Nine of these kings were wicked and eight walked in the way of the Lord. Judah was on a rollercoaster ride through history. When Jeremiah enters the scene, Judah has been suffering under the reign of the exceedingly wicked king Manasseh.

Manasseh ruled 55 years and was evil to the core. It would be difficult to overestimate his impact on the nation.

. . . Manasseh led [the people] astray to do more evil than the nations had done whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel. . . . Moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides the sin that he made Judah to sin so that they did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. (2 Kings 21:9, 16)²

After Manasseh, Josiah became king and began to reform the nation. Josiah earnestly sought to purge the nation of foreign gods and return the people to the worship of Yahweh, the true God. During this time the Assyrians were losing their political grip on the area which allowed Josiah to extend his influence to the north in the former territory of Israel.³ After going back to Jerusalem, Josiah purified the Temple and the *Book of the Law* was found.⁴ The reading of this long-forgotten book leads the king to renew the nation's covenant with God.

¹ To make things a bit more confusing, *Judah* is also called *Israel*, especially after the fall of the northern kingdom.

² Manasseh even burned his own son as an offering (2 Kings 21:6).

³ Josiah's influence extended as far as Naphtali (Gentile territory). 2 Chronicles 34:7 reads, *he broke down the altars and beat the Asherim and the images into powder and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem.*

⁴ 2 Chronicles 34:15.

It was during the 13th year of Josiah's reign (626 B.C.) that Jeremiah was called to be a prophet. For the next 40 years or so, right up to the time that Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians (586 B.C.), Jeremiah preached to people who refused to listen to his message. We know little of the first 23 years of Jeremiah's ministry (25:3-5). But we do know that during these years Jeremiah was protected by King Josiah. But after Josiah's death, his son Jehoiakim sits on the throne and does evil *in the sight of the Lord*. Jeremiah's life is in peril. The book of Jeremiah focuses primarily on the prophet's ministry during the reigns of King Jehoiakim, Jeconiah and Zedekiah. Each of these kings is obstinate in unbelief and persistent in rebellion. Judah's path toward self-destruction is set.

The Divine Dramatist

A. B. Davidson writes, *The book of Jeremiah does not so much teach religious truths as present a religious personality. Prophecy had already taught its truths, its last effort was to reveal itself in a life.*¹

We could probably say Jeremiah's life was, by temperament, retiring. He doesn't embrace his call to be a prophet. He is afraid of public speaking and, at times, seems embarrassed by his own prophecies (see 1:6-7; 9:2). Yet, Jeremiah was very dramatic in his prophetic activity. His actions both anticipated and interpreted his words.

- Jeremiah remained unmarried as a way of foretelling God's judgment on Judah. Parents and children will perish (16:1-4).
- Jeremiah didn't go to funerals, foretelling that when God's judgment comes on Judah, mourning rituals will be impossible (16:5-7).
- Jeremiah didn't go to parties because in the future there would be no parties (16:8-9).
- Jeremiah broke a potter's jar to symbolize God's coming judgment (19:1-11).
- Jeremiah walks around Jerusalem with a yoke on his neck to say to Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Sidon and Judah, that these nations must be subservient to Babylon if they wished to survive (27:1-15).
- Jeremiah buys a field in Anathoth, upon which the Babylonian armies are standing, to predict the eventual return of the Jews from exile (32).

¹ Cited in Peterson, p. 205.

- Jeremiah offers wine to a nomadic tribe called the Rechabites. Their refusal to drink the wine is used as an object lesson against the disobedience of Judah (35).
- Jeremiah predicts the downfall of Babylon by sending a scroll to be sunk in the Euphrates River. The scroll contained a prediction of the decline and fall of Babylon (51:59-64).
- Jeremiah buries some stones in front of Pharaoh's palace in Egypt to predict that one day the Babylonians would rule over the Egyptians (43:8-13).

How to read Jeremiah

The background material for Jeremiah's life and times is found in 2 Kings 22-25, and again in 2 Chronicles 34-36. When we read either collection of chapters we will be able to make better sense of Jeremiah.

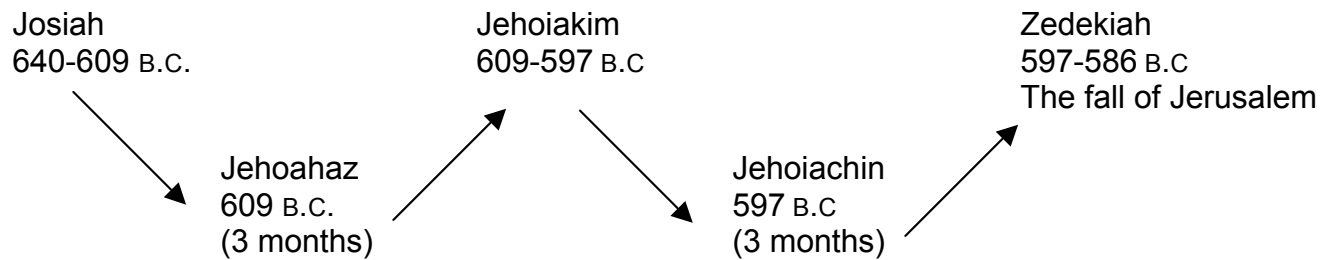
Jeremiah, like other prophetic books in the Bible, is not properly a *book*. It doesn't have a beginning, middle and end as though the book were telling a story. Instead, the book we call *Jeremiah* is really a collection of sermons, prophetic oracles, historical narratives and poetry that have been compiled for the reader. The book of Jeremiah is roughly 2,600 years old. It contains 1,379 verses, a third of which tell us about the life and times of the prophet. The other two-thirds give us the words of Jeremiah himself.

No Old Testament prophet used a wider variety of literary forms, or showed more artistic skill than Jeremiah. (OTS, p. 418)

If we read Jeremiah from beginning to end we are likely to end up in a confused state of mind.

Consider the order of the chapters of Jeremiah in light of the chronological order of the kings under which the prophet ministered. Jeremiah was called to be a prophet in the 13th year of Josiah and served under five kings¹.

¹ Just to keep us thinking, Jeremiah sometimes calls Jehoahaz by the name Shallum, sometimes calls Jehoiachin by the name Coniah or Jeconiah. There is more. Jehoiakim's boyhood name was Eliakim and Zedekiah's boyhood name was Mattaniah. Why the change? Foreign powers would appoint kings and change their names to emphasize their status as vassal kings.



If we consider chapters 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 32, and 35 we see that the book of Jeremiah bounces around chronologically.

[T]heir opening words flit from the time of Zedekiah to the beginning of the first exile, back to the reign of Jehoiakim, then to a period earlier in his reign, then again to Zedekiah, then to the time after the first exiles reached Babylon, then to the tenth year of Zedekiah, and again back to Jehoiakim.¹ (White, p. 27)

It is best therefore, to read Jeremiah as an anthology.

The book of Jeremiah is in fact a collection, an anthology, of memories, utterances, and events, gathered in stages from different periods in Jeremiah's long ministry and afterward, and arranged, so far as it is arranged at all, with more regard to themes and literary connections than to historical order. That simple insight into how the book came into being yields surprising help toward understanding it. (White, p. 29)

A broad outline of the book of Jeremiah is as follows:

1. Chapters 1-20 = Jeremiah's ministry under King Josiah.
2. Chapters 21-45 = Jeremiah's ministry under the last four kings of Judah.
3. Chapters 46-52 = Jeremiah's prophecies concerning the nations.

¹ Fienberg suggests the following arrangement of Jeremiah's material (Fienberg, p. 367):

Reign of Josiah	chapters 1-6
Reign of Jehoahaz	none (see 22:10-12)
Reign of Jehoiakim	7:1-13:17; 13:20-20:18; 25-26; 35-36; 45:1-46:12; 47; 48 (?); 49
Reign of Jehoiachin	13:18-19; chs. 22-23 (?)
Reign of Zedekiah	chapters 21; 24; 27-34; 46:13-28; 50-52 (?)

Study One

Jeremiah's First Complaint

1:4-19

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, by J. R. R. Tolkien, a hobbit named Frodo receives a call to go on a long quest in order to destroy a ring possessing dark powers.

I am not made for perilous quest, cried Frodo. I wish I had never seen the Ring! Why did it come to me? Why was I chosen?

The complaint of the hobbit, and the answer he is given sounds very much like our passage in Jeremiah.

Such questions cannot be answered. . . . You may be sure that it was not for any merit that others do not possess; not for power or wisdom, at any rate. But you have been chosen and you must therefore use such strength and heart and wits as you have.



Before going on in this study, please read the introduction to this study guide. Plan to refer to this introduction throughout our study of Jeremiah. It should help you get your bearings in this book which is often confusing when read without context.

In Jeremiah 1 we have a very brief introduction to the book (1:1-3), a description of the call of the prophet (1:4-10) and God's assurance of both judgment and protection (1:11-19). Read these verses. What initial thoughts and impressions do you have from reading Jeremiah chapter 1? What questions does this chapter provoke?

1:5 Read this verse carefully. Make a list of the various truths that are contained in this verse about both God and people.

Eugene Peterson notices the God-centered nature of Jeremiah's call. God knows us long before we ask questions about knowing Him. Respond to the following:

This realization has a practical result: no longer do we run here and there, panicked and anxious, searching for the answers to life. Our lives are not puzzles to be figured out. Rather, we come to God, who knows us and reveals to us the truth of our lives. The fundamental mistake is to begin with ourselves and not God. God is the center from which all life develops. If we use our ego as the center from which to plot the geometry of our lives, we will live eccentrically. (Peterson, p. 38)

God knew Jeremiah and He knows you. God knows everything about you. How does God's understanding and knowledge of you shape your life?

Jeremiah had a very clear sense of what God was calling him to. Do you have a sense of God's call on your life? What is this call (generally and specifically)? How has God made this call known to you? Consider Psalm 139:13-16 to help formulate your answer.

Jeremiah, as with other prophets (Moses, Isaiah) feels unqualified for the task to which God has called him. Do you feel qualified for your calling?

Respond to the following:

The proper question was not, 'Who am I to do this?' but 'what are my instructions? Where am I posted? And will God be with me?' (Kidner, p. 26)

1:10 Find in this verse what one commentator calls four verbs of *demolition* and two verbs of *construction*.

Demolition	Construction
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	
4.	

Notice how these verbs predict Jeremiah's long ministry.

He would stand on the brink of the Exile, that great divide of Israel's history, and would call the nations to accept the yoke of Babylon (chs 27-29). But in God's name, too, he would announce the shortness of the years allotted to that empire, and the mercy in store for Israel and for the teachable among the nations. (Kidner, p. 27)

The two-to-one lopsided balance (demolition verbs, construction verbs) is indicative of the times in which Jeremiah lived. The days are evil and God's judgment is coming.

Two Object Lessons:

1:11-12 The Almond Branch

The immediate significance of a budding almond branch may be lost on us. In Judah the almond tree was the first to bud. It's white blooms, sometimes appearing as early as January, promised the end of winter and the beginning of spring.

There is a deliberate play on words here. The Hebrew word for *almond* (*shaqed*) sounds almost identical to the word for *watching* (*shoqed*).

With these two pieces of background information, what do you think God is telling Jeremiah in this object lesson? How does this object lesson speak to you?

1:13-17 The Boiling Pot

The second object lesson is the sight of a normal pot of boiling water. It seems to be tipped from the north to the south so that when the water boils, it spills into the hot fire and the flames create hissing and steam.

This second object lesson predicts the downfall of Jerusalem. The City of David, which was to be the throne of God (3:17), will have foreign kings sitting on mock thrones at the gates of the city (1:15).

Notice verses 14-16. Who, specifically, will do the judging of Jerusalem? Is it *the kingdoms of the north*, or God Himself?

What does this teach us about global politics? About the rise and fall of nations and kingdoms?

1:16 What are the two specific sins of the people of Judah?

How do we as a people, and as a culture, commit these same sins?

1:17-19 God has just finished foretelling Jeremiah of His coming judgment. Then God says, essentially, *Okay, get going. . . It's time to get to work.*

- What promises does God make to Jeremiah in these verses? Make a list and share it with your homegroup.
- In verse 18, God uses three images of strength to promise Jeremiah protection. What does each of these connote?
- If you have experienced God's protection in this way, share this with your homegroup.
- How do these verses speak to you? Do you have a sense of your invincibility as you fulfill the calling God has on your life (see the Calvin quote below)?

Respond to John Calvin's comment on this passage.

This passage contains a useful doctrine, from which we learn that strength shall never be wanting to God's servants, while they derive courage from the conviction that God himself is the author of their calling. . . for God will then supply them with strength and courage invincible, so as to render them formidable to the whole world: but if they be unhinged and timid, and turn here and there, and be influenced by the fear of men, God will render them base and contemptible, and make them to tremble at the least breath of air, and they shall be wholly broken down.¹

¹ Cited in Ryken, p. 34.

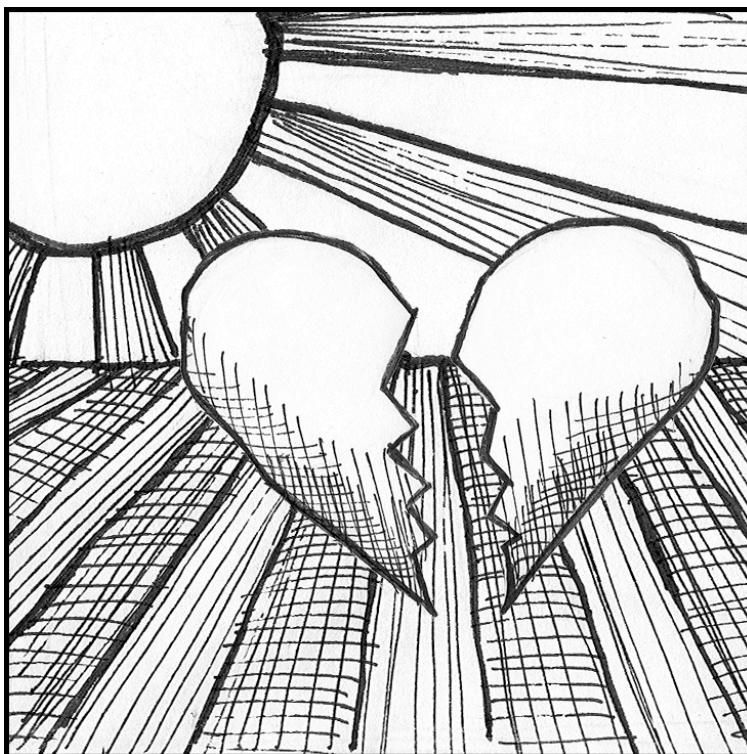
Pray for one another in your homegroup with regard to God's calling on your lives. Pray that each member of your group will both know and fulfill God's calling on his or her life.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Two

God Files For Divorce

Jeremiah 2:1-37



We love the idea of love. The basic plot of a romance story is quite predictable, and yet never boring. People love weddings because they allow us to witness both the culmination and the real beginning of a romance. Two people stand before their friends and family and promise to *go the distance*, that is, to love one another for the duration of their lives. Sheldon Vanauken captures the romance of romance when he writes of his nascent love for the woman who would become his wife.

To hold her in my arms against the twilight and be her comrade for ever—this was all I wanted so long as my life should last. . . . And this, I told myself with a kind of wonder, this was what love was: this consecration, this curious uplifting, this sudden inexplicable joy, and this intolerable pain.¹

Jeremiah 2 contains God's disappointment as Israel's husband. Yahweh had redeemed Israel from slavery, brought her across an interminable desert and given her a land flowing with milk and honey, only to have the people He redeemed abandon Him for other lovers! Some of the language and some of the imagery of this chapter is nothing less than shocking. God compares his people to a donkey in heat looking for a jack.

Before going any further in this study, read Jeremiah 2 with the following outline in mind. Try reading this chapter aloud if possible. Make your own notes as you read.

¹ Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy*, 1977, p. 29.

2:1-3a The Romance of Israel

2:3b-8 The Unfaithful Bride

2:10-32 Seven Specific Complaints

1. Israel swapped gods (2:10-11)
2. Israel forsook the living water (2:12-19)
3. Israel broke free of her yoke (2:20a)
4. Israel played the role of prostitute (2:20b)
5. Israel became a wild vine (2:21)
6. Israel behaved like an animal in heat (2:23-25)
7. Israel forgot her husband (2:32)

2:33-37 A Promise of Judgment

2:1-3a The Romance of Israel

What does God say about the early days of His relationship with Israel? What can be said about Israel as a young bride?

Compare Deuteronomy 8:2-4. What can we say about how Yahweh fulfilled His role as husband to his bride?

2:3b-8 The Unfaithful Bride

This whole section is bracketed by the words, *went after* (ESV) or *followed* (NIV). In the beginning Israel *went after* Yahweh (2:2). Look at verses 5 and 8. Who did Israel end up following?

What are the dynamics of verse 5? The Hebrew word translated *worthless* is the famous word from Ecclesiastes 1 rendered *vanity* or *vapor*. What is this verse teaching us?

What are specific examples in your life where *idols* have proved themselves to be worthless?

Respond to the following comment by Walter Brueggemann:

We become like the god we serve. Pursue a bubble and become a bubble. The object of love determines the quality of love. (Brueggemann, p. 34)

2:6-7 How many times do you find the word *land* in these verses? What do you think is Jeremiah's point?

Notice the sin of forgetfulness. Israel sinned against God by not saying,

Where is the LORD who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits. . . ? (2:6)

Ryken writes,

This is a reminder to Christians to thank God daily for salvation in Jesus Christ. Recount and recite the saving acts of God in history. Remember what God has done in your life. The road to spiritual adultery begins when you stop reveling in the love of God. Few Christians plan to fall into

grievous sin. It is only after falling that they realize they have drifted away from the God of love. (Ryken, p. 40)

- List those times and places where God has exhibited saving grace in your life.
- What are the ways you remember and thank God for these acts of grace?
- What changes would you like to make to keep yourself from forgetfulness?

2:10-32 Seven Specific Complaints

Shock is the dominant ingredient of Yahweh's complaints against his people. God is incredulous with regard to Israel's unfaithfulness. Has anything like this ever happened among the nations?

Verse 10 says, essentially, go and look. Go west to Cyprus and East to the tribe of Kedar. You'll never find such spiritual infidelity.

*Has a nation changed its gods,
even though they are no gods?
But my people have changed their glory
for that which does not profit. (2:11)*

This dark exchange is phrased in a similar way by the apostle Paul in Romans 1. There Paul points out that sinful people *exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles* (Romans 1:23).

Notice what Jeremiah says later in this chapter. See 2:27.

When we abandon God we don't worship nothing. We worship, it turns out, almost anything. Where do you see this dark exchange in our society? Who or what do we worship in place of worshipping God?

Which of the idols of our time are you most inclined to worship?

What can you do to protect yourself from idol worship?

Indeed, Israel had gods in every city and village (2:28). She played the role of a *restless wife to whom the bonds and burdens of true love were slavery, and the lure of the forbidden irresistible*. (Kidner, p. 33) She sounded like a child of the sexual revolution of the 1960s celebrating *Free Love*. Yahweh was dismayed.

And you, O generation, behold the word of the LORD. Have I been a wilderness to Israel, or a land of thick darkness? Why then do my people say, 'We are free, we will come no more to you'? (2:31)

Ryken explains how unusual is the sin of Israel is.

By partner swapping, Israel bartered away the living God. This was a religious crime without precedent in the ancient world. The pagans never abandoned their dead gods, but God's people abandoned the living God. The members of the jury, namely, the "heavens," ought to be so appalled at what they hear that they "shudder with great horror" (v. 12). (Ryken, p. 41)

2:13 What are the *two evils* committed by Israel? How might we commit these sins in the church? What are the *broken cisterns* from which we might be tempted to drink?

2:20 Throughout her history, the constant temptation of Israel was to worship the gods of Canaan as opposed to worshipping the one true God. The forms of worshipping the Baal gods would be, to say the least, quite shocking to us. Behind verse 20 is a description of pagan worship. In Baalism worshippers would have sex on hilltops hoping to attract the attention of the gods. It was all

about fertility. Copulation makes babies. Perhaps this pagan sacrament will bring a good season of crops next year. Jeremiah 3:6 should be read literally.

The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: "Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the whore?"

Andrew Comisky explains.

Their worship digressed to highly charged eroticism. Somehow an offering was made to these fertility gods through illicit orgasm. But Baal and Ashteroth weren't real gods at all. Both were satanic counterfeits that snatched away the sexuality given by the Creator, reduced it to eroticism, and propped up that eroticism as an object of worship. Submission to these gods meant bowing the knee to the demonic principalities of sexual perversion. In effect, idealized, eroticized images of the creature were being worshiped, and worship degenerated into nothing more than orgies. The collision of body parts between faceless, nameless people marked the depths of Israel's idolatry.¹

The overriding issue in this chapter is Israel's refusal to worship Yahweh as God. Respond to the following.

A regular churchgoer who does not worship God from the heart is more wicked than an unbeliever who has never heard the gospel. (Ryken, p. 44)

How is it with your heart with respect to worship? What is the role of the spiritual disciplines in your worship?

2:33-37 A Promise of Judgment

Specifically, what does God say will happen because of Israel's unfaithfulness?

¹ Andrew Comiskey, *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness: How Jesus Heals the Homosexual*, 1989, p. 100.

Study Three

Deceptive Words

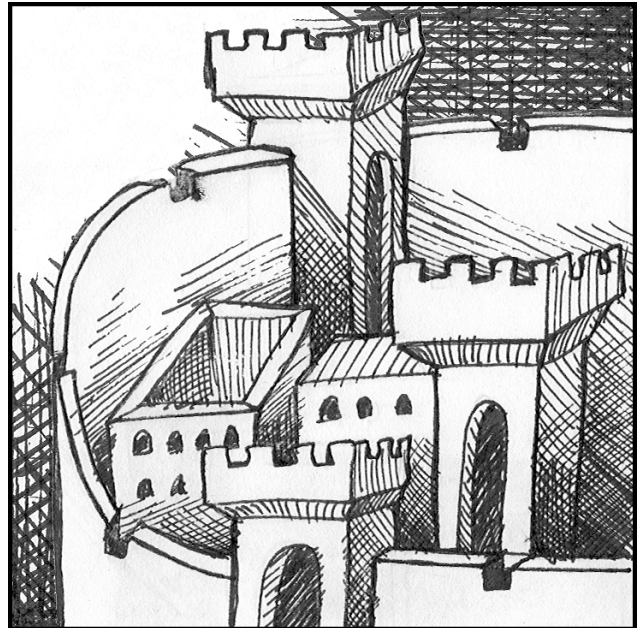
Jeremiah 7:1-15

Safe. It is the word the listener loves to hear spoken by a favored prophet. *Safe* was the message of the false prophets of Jeremiah's time. After all, Jerusalem was the place where God chose to live!

*For the LORD has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his dwelling place:
"This is my resting place forever;
here I will dwell, for I have desired it.
I will abundantly bless her provisions
I will satisfy her poor with bread."
Psalm 132:13-15*

Furthermore, God had promised that the dynasty of David would last forever!

*When your days are fulfilled
and you lie down with your
fathers, I will raise up your
offspring after you, who shall
come from your body, and I will
establish his kingdom. He
shall build a house for my
name, and I will establish the
throne of his kingdom forever.
2 Samuel 7:12-13*



So, of course the people were safe in Jerusalem. Surely God would protect his dwelling place and his people in time of need. Certainly Yahweh would never allow the Egyptians, the Assyrians or the Babylonians to take *this* city! With this attitude permeating Jerusalem, public worship became little more than an insurance payment to God. *We go to the temple, Yahweh protects us.*

Jeremiah springs into action. Before going on in this study read Jeremiah 7:1—8:3 (our text for this week and next).

- Where is Jeremiah's sermon preached?

- How many specific charges does Jeremiah bring against the people in these verses? (Hint: the charges are not all contained in verse 9.)
- What is confusing in this chapter?

7:1-15 Jeremiah's Temple Sermon

Jeremiah 7 is *vintage* Jeremiah. This is the prophet's famous Temple Sermon. While the address is not dated, we can make an educated guess that it took place around 608 BC. Jerusalem is in turmoil. The great king Josiah has died in battle and the reign of his successor, Jehoahaz, lasted only three months until he was deported to Egypt. Jehoiakim has become king and the reform of king Josiah is wearing thin. The people are again playing around with pagan rituals and practices. And they are trampling the commandments of Yahweh. The significance of the people's disobedience to Yahweh was not lost on Jeremiah.

A people's lives are only as good as their worship. The temple in Jerusalem was the architectural evidence of the importance of God in the life of the people. All the lines of life crisscrossed in the temple. Meaning was established there. Values were created there. Worship defines life. If worship is corrupt, life will be corrupt. (Peterson, p. 61)

Look over these verses again.

- How would you summarize Jeremiah's message?
- Which specific commandments of God are the people violating?

Think through these verses with the following outline in mind:

1. 7:1-7 The Misplaced Confidence of the People

Eugene Peterson comments:

[Jeremiah] finds the people stupidly pleased with themselves and repeating the reform slogan “temple of the LORD, temple of the LORD, temple of the LORD.” Jeremiah is irate.

Places are important—immensely important. Sites and buildings are places where we gather ourselves for fresh action and assemble ourselves for new endeavor. But standing in a church singing a hymn doesn’t make us holy any more than standing in a barn and neighing makes us a horse. (Peterson, pp. 64-65)

How could *going to church* be similar to the misplaced confidence of the people of Jeremiah’s time? Have you ever experienced this misplaced confidence?

Respond to one more comment by Peterson.

The church is never in so much danger as when it is popular and millions of people are saying “I’m born again, born again, born again.” (Peterson, p. 65)

What are the dangers of the successful American church? How can Santa Barbara Community Church guard herself from these dangers?

2. 7:8-11 The Passive Indifference of the People

The people have come to view Jerusalem and the temple as a safe house for people who sin. Like robbers who hide out to rest between crimes, the people of Judah think they can find refuge in the temple between sins. They are quite comfortable being disobedient to God because *they go to church*.

The piercing, biting question of Jer. 7:11 does not suggest that temple disobedience is the problem. Rather, the temple has become a place of refuge, hiding, and safety for those who violate [the law] through their life in the world. The torah [law] violators attempt to hide in the sanctity of the ritual. The temple becomes a means of cover-up for the destructive way life is lived in the real world. (Brueggemann, pp. 79-80)

Notice verse 11. God says he is *watching* (NIV). What does God see as he watches our church? What does God see as he watches your life? How does the awareness of God's watchful presence motivate you in your Christian life?

Notice what Jesus does with this verse in his teaching. How should this serve as a warning to the church in general? To Santa Barbara Community Church?

- Matthew 21:13
- Matthew 23:38
- Matthew 24:2

3. 7:12-15 The History Lesson for the People

Jeremiah uses a haunting lesson from history to warn the people. *Go to Shiloh and see what it looks like.*

Shiloh, the geographic center of Israel, was the place where the Ark of Moses rested after the conquest of the Promise Land. The tabernacle was set up there and stayed there during the time of the judges. It was during time that Israel lapsed into idolatry (1 Samuel 4:1-11). Shiloh was destroyed. By the time of Jeremiah it is nothing more than a heap of rubble.

Can you think of a *Shiloh* in your experience? A ministry or a church which was once thriving and is now non-existent? What happened to bring about this transition?

Read Jeremiah 26:1-15. Most scholars believe this chapter refers to the same event. Jeremiah 7 emphasizes the content of the sermon while Jeremiah 26

emphasizes the reaction to the sermon. Read these verses. Look for the following:

26:1-6 Jeremiah's Sermon Summarized

26:7-9 Jeremiah's Arrest

26:10-11 Jeremiah's Charge

26:12-15 Jeremiah's Defense

How do the people respond to Jeremiah's message?

What parallels do you see in the way the message of the gospel is received today?

What (if any) experience have you had that parallels Jeremiah?

How does Jeremiah defend himself before his accusers? What is the lesson for us in his defense?

From Jeremiah 7:1-15 how would you summarize the *value* and the *danger* of religion?

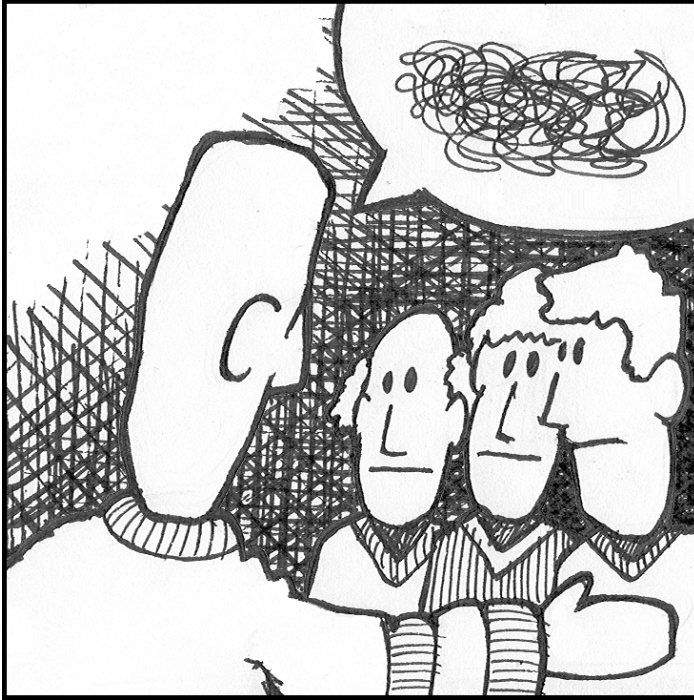
Spend a few moments praying through this passage. Pray for those in your group and for Santa Barbara Community Church. Pray that we would walk before God with integrity. Pray that we would practice un-deceptive religion.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Four

Darkness

Jeremiah 7:16—8:3



There comes a time when the deeds of a people have become so dark, so despicable that God says, in effect, *Too late. My wrath is coming. I will not turn away.*

If we look back on the history of the land of Canaan we find this principle. God didn't give the land of Canaan to the Jews in a vacuum. The Israelites were used as instruments of God's wrath on a deeply immoral people. The people of Canaan had fallen into such deep depravity that God says the land *vomited them out*.

Yahweh also warned the people to walk in obedience lest the land vomit them out as well (see Leviticus 18:25-28). Jeremiah is the prophet who announces that that time has come.

Jeremiah 7 contains the prophet's famous temple sermon. As we noted in our last study, this chapter is *classic* Jeremiah. In this address, the prophet challenges the empty religious practices of a people who have ceased to trust in Yahweh. The consequences, as we shall see, are severe.

Before going on in this study, re-read Jeremiah 7:1—8:3. Keep the following outline in mind as you read.

1. Jeremiah's Temple Sermon: Law Breaking (7:1-15)
2. Yahweh's Oracle to Jeremiah: Don't Bother Praying (7:16-20)
3. Jeremiah's Temple Sermon: Refusing to Hear (7:21-26)
4. Yahweh's Second Oracle to Jeremiah: Speak to the People (7:27—8:3)

- What are the most shocking parts of this section of Scripture?
- Make a list of the sins with which God charges the people.
- What questions does the second half of this chapter bring to your mind?

Now, let's pick up our chapter where we left off last week.

Yahweh's Oracle to Jeremiah: Don't Bother Praying 7:16-20

God says, essentially, *It's too late. Don't bother praying for this people. . . my wrath is coming.*

7:18 Notice the reason for this harsh instruction. The people are worshipping pagan gods. The goddess they are worshipping was most likely the Assyrian / Babylonian goddess Ishtar, the goddess of love and fertility. This goddess was associated with the planet Venus. The picture is quite dark.

Such worship was probably initiated by Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1-9) and reintroduced into Judah by Jehoiakim. This obscene idolatry was practiced not only privately but also by whole families, including the children. The "cakes" have been described as round and flat, resembling the moon.¹ (Fienberg, p. 430)

7:19 Scholars point out the worshipping the Queen of Heaven was widely practiced in the Near East during Jeremiah's time. This was the way for families to bring a good season of crops. Jerusalem was the place to worship Yahweh

¹ Jeremiah hints at the problem of worshipping the gods of the heavens in 2:4-8.

and the home was the place to worship Ishtar. One had to cover all the bases. But the stakes were high.

The cult of the Queen of Heaven was a rejection of Yahweh's sole sovereignty as the supreme Lord of the covenant. Such a rejection was a provocation, but it was not only Yahweh himself who was provoked or spited (*hik'is*). The people were spiting themselves by such practices, to their own confusion. (Thompson, p. 285)

Think about our time and place. What parallels do you see? Are the sins of our era on the same level with those referred to by Jeremiah? In other words, are we as bad as they were?

How does the worship of the gods of our land bring with it its own *spite*? What price do we pay when we bow before the false gods of American life?

7:16 *Don't pray, it's too late.* . . Yahweh has already said this to Jeremiah. See 11:14 and 14:11. Does this mean Jeremiah refused to quit praying and God had to repeat himself?

Is there ever a time when we should quit praying for someone because of the darkness in his or her life? Consider 1 John 5:16-17.

Jeremiah's Temple Sermon: Refusing to Hear 7:21-26

7:21 again is shocking. Yahweh says, in effect, *Go ahead, eat your sacrifices because they mean nothing to me!* In the first part of Jeremiah's sermon he swept the temple from under the feet of his listeners, saying, *This temple is not safe when you are so disobedient.* Here the prophet invalidates the people's sacrifices. *Eat the food yourselves. . . it means nothing to Yahweh.*

- What religious practices do you cherish?
- What would it feel like if God said to you something like he said to Jeremiah's listeners?

7:23 seems to look back to the book of Deuteronomy. The word translated *obey* in Hebrew is *shema*' which means *to hear*. Any Jewish reader would immediately be reminded of the most basic prayer of the Jews:

"Hear [*shema*], O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

To really *hear* God was to *obey* God. Now Yahweh is saying to Jeremiah, *These people did not 'hear.'*

Listening is readiness to be addressed and commanded, to have life ordered by Yahweh. Listening is to cede control rather than to retain control through religious manipulation and ritual acts. (Brueggemann, p. 82)

Based on the Old Testament sense of the word, how is your *hearing*? Where could your hearing be improved? What wax of disobedience needs to be cleared out of your ears?

7:24 God's people were never saved by works. But the gracious salvation Israel experienced was to result in obedience. Respond to the following quotation.

But the grace which gave much, asked much; it demanded self-surrender. And without self-surrender on the part of those who received it, grace

became an empty work. No other nation changed its god, non-entity though that was. The reason for the constancy was that it all meant so little. There was no cause to forsake such gods, because it involved so little to follow them. Israel forsook Yahweh, because the relation to Him was full of ethical content. . . . Yahwism had this iron core in it. The iron core was that Israel could only have Yahweh on His own terms. . . . Yahwism was no colorless faith which was simply the expression of the people's pride in itself and its destiny. It laid a curb on men, it had a yoke and bonds. The bonds were those of love, but love's bonds are the most enduring and the most exacting.¹

- How do you understand God's grace in your life with relation to *self surrender*?
- How do you experience the *exacting bonds of love*?

7:25 By the time of Jeremiah, God had sent Israel prophet after prophet to correct, encourage and warn an insolent people. Read the following verses:

- 2 Kings 17:13
- Matthew 23:37
- Acts 7:51-53

What prophets and messengers has God placed in your life over the years?

What was your reaction to their message?

Have you ever played the role of the prophet to another believer? What was his or her reaction to your message?

¹ Adam C. Welch, *Jeremiah, His Time and His Work* (1928; repr. Oxford: Blackwell, 1951), p. 183.

Yahweh's Second Oracle to Jeremiah: Speak to the People 7:27—8:3

These verses chronicle some of the darkest deeds imaginable. And they were being practiced by the so-called people of God. Child sacrifice was part and parcel of ancient Near Eastern religion.

The remains of hundreds of children have been discovered at Carthage, apparently sacrificed to Baal. But child sacrifice also had a long history in Israel. Already in the book of Leviticus the children of Israel had been warned not to sacrifice their children to Molech (18:21), an offense punishable by death (20:1-5). Molech, the god of the Ammonites, had a way of turning up in Israel. Ahaz, King of Israel, sacrificed his own son in the fire (2 Kings 16:3). The same thing happened in Manasseh's day, when children were sacrificed to the gods of Canaan (2 Kings 21:6). (Ryken, p. 140)

Topeth (7:31) means fireplace or oven. The word, in Hebrew, rhymes with *shame*. The shocking truth is that within a few hundred yards of Yahweh's temple parents were burning their infants to appease the god of fire, Molech.

Where do they do such detestable things? In the *Valley of the Son of Hinnom* in Hebrew this is *gé ben—hinnom* which was shortened by New Testament times to *gehenna*, the word for hell.

What is Yahweh's response to such practice?

It is hard for us to comprehend the horror of parents taking their infants to be burned just outside of Jerusalem. It seems impossible to believe it really happened. Yet we live in a country which permits the lawful taking of unborn life. About 3,500 children a day lose their lives on the *altar of convenience* in America's abortuaries. How does this passage speak to our time and place?

8:1-3 Notice the irony in these verses. The people worship the Queen of Heaven and now their bones are exposed before the *host of heaven*. Sin is avenged by its own success.

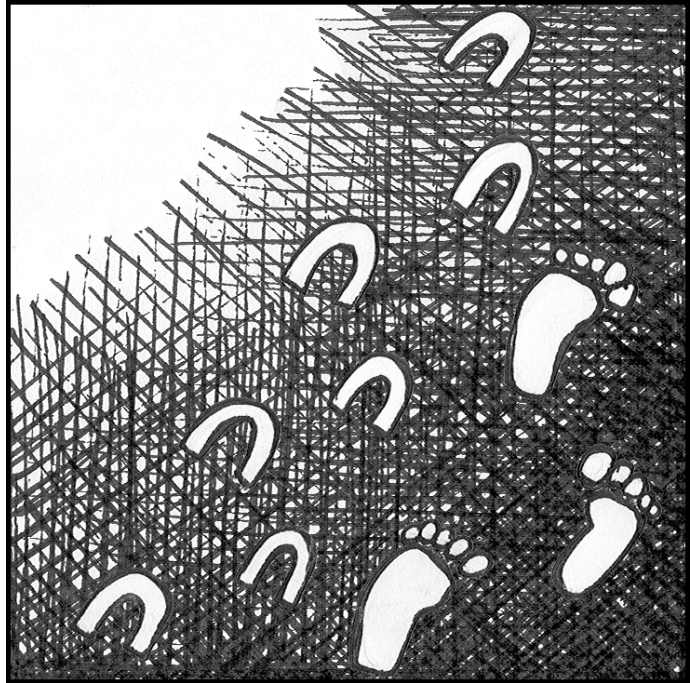
Study Five

Running With Horses

Jeremiah 11:18—12:6

What would it have been like to be Jeremiah? Perhaps we might be tempted to think the life of a prophet is somewhat glamorous. Prophets were public speakers. . . They went from town to town and the crowds adored them for their preaching skills. The prophets got the good cabins when they spoke at camp and received nice honorariums when they held public crusade meetings. Is that what it was like to be a prophet?

Hardly. Jeremiah feels *like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter*. . . (11:18), a tree about to be destroyed (11:19). Jeremiah groans. He doesn't understand and asks Yahweh, *Why does the way of the wicked prosper?*



Jeremiah is often called the *weeping* prophet. He might as well be called the *whining* prophet. When all is said and done he seems to have perfected the art of complaining. But he complained for good reason. This passage contains the first of Jeremiah's many *complaints* or *lamentations*.¹ In the beginning Jeremiah was reluctant to be called as a prophet. Now he has tried out his calling as a preacher and his reluctance has only grown stronger.

The setting of this passage makes it doubly painful. Jeremiah is not in the *big city* of Jerusalem, he is in his home town, Anathoth.

Anathoth was a town known for its priests and prophets. It was one of the 48 cities set aside for the Levites, the priestly tribe, when Israel was given possession of the land in Joshua's time (Joshua 21:18). And Jeremiah came from a family of priests. Here we find the reluctant prophet rejected by the people of his own small town.

¹ See 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 20:7-18.

Read Jeremiah 11:18—12:6.

- What stands out on your first reading of these verses?
- What are Jeremiah's adversaries saying about him? Look for their specific quotation.
- What are the main ideas in this passage?

To gain an appreciation for the context of our passage read 10:9-17.

Now work through 11:18—12:6 a second time while considering the following outline, comments and questions. Notice how this section goes through two cycles of prophetic complaint and divine answer.

1. The First Complaint 11:18-19
2. The Petition 11:20
3. The Divine Response 11:21-23
4. The Second Complaint 12:1-4
5. The Divine Response 12:5-6

1. The First Complaint 11:18-19

Why would there be a conspiracy against Jeremiah?

Consider the content of Jeremiah's message.

- 5:31
- 6:13

It was not the kind of preaching to endear a young man to his elders. Jeremiah seemed like a traitor in his hometown. Not only did he criticize the priests, but he condemned the idol worship that made up such a large part of the local economy. Jeremiah's reformation preaching threatened the whole religious, social, and economic structure of his hometown. He was practically putting the priests of Anathoth out of work. (Ryken, p. 214)

Think about your understanding and explanation of the gospel. In what ways is your message offensive to the social norms of our day? In what ways should the gospel challenge the *American way of life*?

2. The Petition 11:20

What does Jeremiah want God to do with those who threaten to take his life?

Is it appropriate for a Christian to pray in this way about the destiny of an enemy? Why? Why not?

There are many Psalms that record these sorts of prayers (Psalm 94, for example).¹ How do these Psalms inform the way in which we may pray?

Have you ever prayed in this way? Explain.

3. The Divine Response 11:21-23

What is Yahweh's response to Jeremiah's complaint?

¹ See Psalms 5, 6, 11, 12, 35, 37, 40, 52, 54, 56, 58, 69, 79, 83, 137, 139, 143.

4. The Second Complaint 12:1-4

Jeremiah 12:1-6 is a classic passage from this book. Jeremiah asks the age-old question, *Why do the wicked prosper while the righteous suffer? Where is God's justice?*

Have you ever seriously asked this question? What were the circumstances? What answer(s) did you get?

Read 12:1-4 carefully. In addition to Jeremiah's bold preaching to Judah as a prophet, he also carried on a bold conversation with God.

Make a list of Jeremiah's complaints and requests from these verses. What has gotten under Jeremiah's skin? What does he want God to do?

Complaint

Request

Notice 12:4. Because of evil the *land* mourns. Jeremiah has a very *earthy* sense of the consequences of sin. Compare Hosea 4:1-3.

What are the comprehensive consequences of sin in our land? Where do you see the *mourning* of the land in our society?

5. The Divine Response 12:5-6

We might call this section the divine non-response. God speaks to Jeremiah in a similar way that he spoke to Job (Job 38-41). Yahweh makes no effort to answer the question as to why the wicked prosper. Jeremiah is upended.

These passages are models for the depth of honesty that is appropriate in prayer. The hazard of such honest prayer, as we shall see, is that Yahweh can be equally honest and therefore abrasive in response to prayer. (Brueggemann, p. 114)

We would expect God to comfort Jeremiah as he did in 1:8 and 1:19.

Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD.

They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you.

But instead, *there is only a hard-nosed response which reprimands and warns that more severe demands are still to come.* (Brueggemann, p. 119)

When have you experienced such an answer to your prayers? What did this feel like?

12:6 The passage closes with the assurance that even Jeremiah's family has rejected him. In the Hebrew Bible and in some English translations there is a threefold repetition of the word *even* which emphasizes the prophet's desperate situation.

*For even your brothers and the household of your father,
Even they have dealt treacherously with you,
Even they have cried aloud after you
Do not believe them, although they may say nice things to you.*

In other words, God gives Jeremiah no comfort as he complains. The point is a strong one.

Those who raise this question [*Why do the wicked prosper?*] are given no comfort. It is as though fidelity to Yahweh must be its own reward. The one who is faithful cannot expect that others will see and be changed. To serve a God is not merely an act of dedicated loyalty and intentional decision-making. It is, rather, an inescapable destiny once one has grasped a certain reading of reality. The prophet is compelled to speak without any assured award. (Brueggemann, p 120)

Jeremiah asks God why the wicked prosper while he suffers. God only says, *Get ready, you haven't even gotten out of the starting block.* Respond to the following quotation.

If you complain about the simple things God has already asked you to do, then you lack the spiritual strength to do what he wants to do next. If your troubles keep you from doing the Lord's work now, you will never have the strength to do it later. If you want to do some great thing for God, then you must begin by doing the little things for God. And the only way to do little things for God is to do them by the strength of the Holy Spirit.
(Ryken, p. 222)

Are you being faithful with the *simple things* God has asked you to do? In what ways can your homegroup pray for you in these areas?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Six

The Master Complex

Jeremiah 18—19

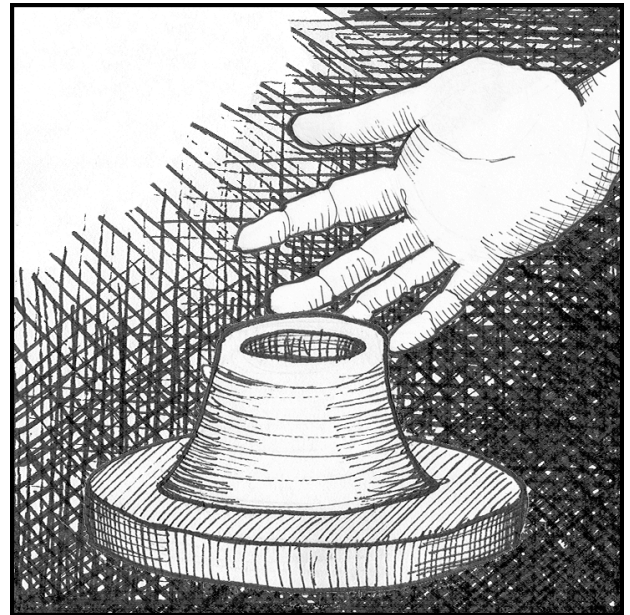
William Ernest Henley (d. 1903) is one of the better known poets of our time. As a boy he suffered tuberculosis of the bone and had a foot amputated. But he survived and lived a fairly normal life for the next 30 years. His poem *Invictus* seems to grapple with his time in the hospital and his subsequent life. He was impaired yet defiant. The last two lines of *Invictus* are his most famous. Together they almost form a slogan for our era. *I control my own destiny. . . I answer to no one or nothing. I am my own master!*

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul*

*In the fell clutch of circumstances
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of change
My head is bloody, but unbowed.*

*Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the year
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.*

*It matters not how straight the gate,
How charged with punishments the
scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.*



The kingdom of Judah had a similar *master's complex*. The people of Jeremiah's time wanted no help or guidance from God, much less instruction or correction.

But they say, 'That is in vain! We will follow our own plans, and will every one act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.' (18:12)

Jeremiah 18—20 contains two parables (one spoken and one acted out). Each parable is followed by hostility toward the prophet. More important, each chapter teaches us a profound truth about God. First, God asserts his sovereignty over the nation. Then, God promises his wrath against a deeply rebellious people.

Before going on in this study, read Jeremiah 18—19 with the following outline in mind. Notice how chapter 20 continues with the pattern set in 18—19.

What initial thoughts and questions do you have upon your first reading of these chapters?

- 18:1-11 Parable of the Clay
- 18:18 The Threat to Jeremiah
- 18:19-23 Jeremiah's Complaint
- 19:1-15 Parable of the Jug
- 20:1-6 The Persecution of Jeremiah
- 20:6-18 Jeremiah's Complaint

18:1-11 Parable of the Clay

Describe what happens when Jeremiah goes to the potter's house.

The key question comes in verse 6:

O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

Yahweh can do with Israel and with us anything he wants.

When the Hebrew noun for *potter* is turned into a verb it means *to fashion, shape, or to create*.

Consider the following verses along with this parable in Jeremiah.

- Isaiah 29:15-16
- Isaiah 45:9-10
- Isaiah 64:8

Think about your own life. Think about how God made you, your height, aptitudes, gifts, etc. How do these clay and potter verses lend comfort to your life? In what ways do they challenge your attitude about yourself?

In what ways have you been disappointed with the way God formed you?

What would you say to someone who said *It's not fair that God is the potter and I am the clay?*

In verse 4 the clay is reshaped by the potter. Has God ever reshaped you? What did this feel like? Did you trust God along the way?

18:7-10 Notice the *if . . . then* clauses in these verses. Each half of the argument has two clauses and a conclusion. In each Yahweh's sovereignty and Israel's freedom are balanced.

Trace God's argument with Judah.

18:7-8 *If . . . I declare* _____

and

if that nation _____

then _____

18:9-10 *If . . . I declare* _____

and

if it does _____

then _____

God is clearly sovereign over the nation of Israel, but the people's behavior, nevertheless, determines their destiny as a nation. The same is true in our lives. God is sovereign over every moment of our destiny yet our obedience and disobedience to God's will reaps either divine blessing or divine discipline. God's sovereignty should be understood as a great comfort and the future fruit of our behavior should keep us on our toes. We need to rest in God and yet still be diligent in Christian behavior.

Discuss the above paragraph in your homegroup. What motivates you to holy living? Share the fruit of obedience or disobedience that you have experienced.

How have you experienced the discipline of God? See Hebrews 12:3-11.

Ulrich Zwingli was the Swiss leader of the Protestant Reformation. Respond to his prayer:

I beseech Christ for this one thing only, that he will enable me to endure all things courageously, and that he break me as a potter's vessel or make me strong, as it pleases him.

19:1-15 Parable of the Jug

If Jeremiah's first parable demonstrated God's sovereignty, this parable predicts his wrath. Jeremiah predicts, in gruesome detail, the coming wrath of God on a deeply sinful people.

Review these verses.

19:2 Recall where the parable takes place, The Valley of the Son of Hinnom. As we noted earlier in this study, this valley was south of Jerusalem and was the place where human sacrifices were offered to Molech and Baal. This detestable practice seems to be the final straw for Israel. In 2 Kings 16:1-3 we read,

In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, began to reign. Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God, as his father David had done, but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even burned his son as an offering, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel.

The implication is clear. Judah will likewise be driven off the land.

By the time of the New Testament, this valley was called, Gehenna. Gehenna is usually translated as *hell*. Jeremiah's parable of judgment looks forward, ultimately, to God's judgment of all unforgiven sinners at the end of time.

- Matthew 23:33
- Mark 9:45
- Luke 12:5

This is where we find the close association of *hell* and *fire*.

- Matthew 3:12
- Matthew 5:22
- Matthew 13:42
- Revelation 21:8

19:4-5 What specific charges does God bring against the people of Judah?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

19:7-9 describes, in lurid detail, what lies ahead for Jerusalem. These details were fulfilled when the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem. The pain and suffering seem unimaginable.

*Happier were the victims of the sword
than the victims of hunger,
who wasted away, pierced
by lack of the fruits of the field.
The hands of compassionate women
have boiled their own children;
they became their food during the destruction of the daughter of my people.*
Lamentations 4:9-10

Respond to the following:

All these accusations could be sustained against postmodern America. We, too, have forsaken God. We, too, have followed after other gods. Not just one god, but dozens—money, sex, power, pleasure, food, beauty, success, comfort, self. We, too, have shed the innocent blood of children through abortion and infanticide. If Jeremiah were alive today he would stand outside the clinics to condemn the abortions being done inside.

The point of Jeremiah's message is that there is justice in God's wrath. Every sin deserves the wrath and curse of God. To break even one commandment is to break the whole law of God (James 2:10). But these sins especially deserve divine judgment. Is there a sin more heinous than forsaking God? More foolish than worshiping other gods? (Ryken, p. 306)

Judah had The Master Complex and received God's just judgment. Should we expect anything other than this in America?

Spend time in your homegroup confessing your sins. Ask God to turn the hearts of our sinful nation toward him.

Study Seven

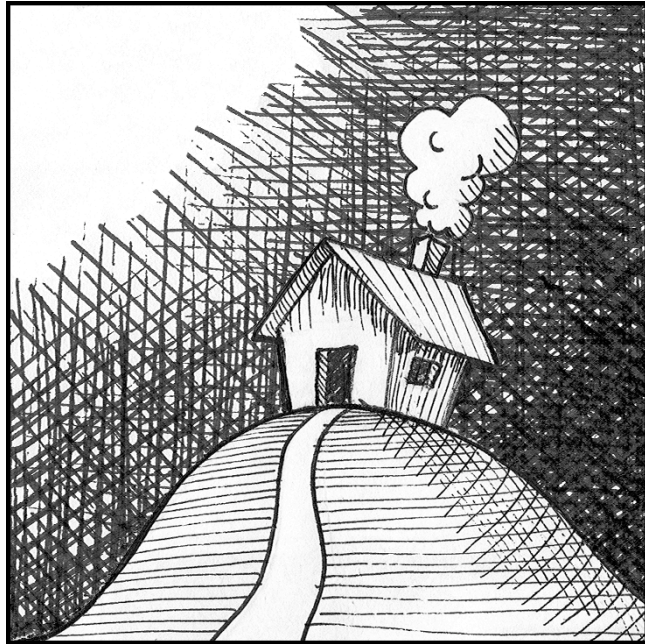
Longing For Home

Jeremiah 29:1-32

The only ultimate disaster that can befall us, I have come to realize, is to feel ourselves at home here on earth.

Malcolm Muggeridge (1903-1990)

By the time we get to Jeremiah 29, the people of Judah are far from home. In 597 B.C. Jerusalem was sacked by the Babylonians.¹ King Jehoiachin was deported and the prime movers of Jerusalem society were taken into captivity while the common workers and people without distinction were left behind. Jeremiah, tellingly, was left behind. Evidently, because of his social status as a hated prophet, he was not perceived as a threat to the Babylonians. The exiles, on the other hand, are where they do not want to be. They are resident aliens. They have been uprooted, transported over hundreds of miles of desert and are now living in a strange land with strange gods, different kinds of foods, new languages and a hotter climate. They long for home.



The backdrop for this chapter is found in chapters 27-28. There the prophet encourages the people and the leaders of Judah to accept the yoke of slavery offered by Babylon. If they refuse to submit to Babylon they will surely perish. Jeremiah is preaching against the *health and wealth* preachers of his day who were saying precisely the opposite (see especially 27:12-15).

In chapter 28 there is an interchange between Jeremiah and Hananiah, a pseudo-prophet from Gibeon. Hananiah assures the people that God will restore the fortunes of Jerusalem within two years. Jeremiah says it will be 70 years.²

¹ See 1 Kings 24—25

² Which 70 years does Jeremiah have in mind? The people were exiled from Jerusalem in 597 B.C. The first return from Babylon took place in 538 B.C., a period of only 59 years. Many scholars count the years 608 B.C. (the year of the Babylonian victory at Carchemish and the first deportation to Babylon) to the first return of the exiles in 538 B.C.

28:1-17 Read through, chapter 27 and then carefully read 28:1-17. Look for the following:

- What is Jeremiah's two-fold response to Hananiah?
- In what ways does Jeremiah show restraint in the ways that he deals with this false prophet?
- What is Hananiah's response to Jeremiah's challenge?
- What, then, is Jeremiah's / Yahweh's message to Hananiah?

Read Jeremiah 29. Notice the four concerns of Jeremiah's letter¹ to the exiles in Babylon. What initial questions and reactions do you have to this chapter?

- 29:1-9 Seek the welfare of Babylon.
- 29:10-14 Yearn for your true home.
- 29:15-23 Beware of false prophets.
- 29:24-32 Shemaiah be warned.

¹ It is quite possible, or probable, that this chapter includes two or even three different letters from Jeremiah to Babylon.

29:1-9 Seek the welfare of Babylon

Jeremiah's letter is nothing short of remarkable. The people are distraught exiles, yearning for Jerusalem. The prophet tells them to stay put, to make Babylon home, to seek the welfare of the city.

29:1-3 As a group sort out the characters referred to in these verses (see the chart on page 10).

- Who is the real author of this letter?
- To whom is the letter addressed?

Read verses 5-7 carefully. Make a list of the specific instructions Jeremiah gives to the exiles.

How do these instructions inform the way in which we should live our lives?

29:7 says to seek the *welfare* of the city (ESV) or the *peace and prosperity* of the city (NIV). The Hebrew word used is *shalom* which is often translated *peace*. The word is full of connotations.

Shalom means wholeness, the dynamic, vibrating health of a society that pulses with divinely directed purpose and surges with life-transforming love. (Peterson, p. 152)

Respond to the following quotation:

Jeremiah's letter is a rebuke and a challenge: "Quit sitting around feeling sorry for yourselves. The aim of the person of faith is not to be as comfortable as possible but to live as deeply and thoroughly as possible—to deal with the reality of life, discover truth, create beauty, act out love. You didn't do it when you were in Jerusalem. Why don't you try doing it here, in Babylon? . . . You are in Babylon for a long time. You better make the best of it. (Peterson, p. 152)

In Santa Barbara we don't *sit around feeling sorry for ourselves*. After all, ours is a city in which people dream of living. Nevertheless, it is very possible for Christians in the twenty-first century to have an *other-worldly* mindset. *This world is not my home, I'm just-a-passin' through* as one chorus has it. *My true home is in heaven. . . so I'll not get too involved here and now.*

How do these verses speak to the church in Santa Barbara? How do they speak to your life?

Think of some ways in which Santa Barbara Community Church could and should *seek the welfare* of Santa Barbara.

One ancient manuscript that lends insight into the early church comes from the second or third century. In a document usually called, simply, *A Letter to Diognetus*, we find a description of the way Christians conducted themselves in a pagan society.

Though they are residents at home in their own countries, their behavior there is more like that of transients; they take their full part as citizens, but they also submit to anything and everything as if they were aliens. For them, any foreign country is a homeland, and any homeland a foreign country.

Does the church in America have this same balance and proportion? Where should the American church make adjustments?

Is your behavior in the midst of American culture, or Santa Barbara culture, more reflective of a resident or an alien? Explain.

29:7 Look again carefully at this verse. What is the hidden motive for God's people to seek the welfare of the city?

29:10-14 Yearn for your true home

Read these verses again and ponder for a moment how encouraging they must have been to people living in exile. This begins a string of wonder-provoking promises in this part of Jeremiah.

When judgment finally arrived, something remarkable happened. Jeremiah changed his tune. The next several chapters are filled with some of the most wonderful promises in all of Scripture. After twenty-eight chapters of gloom and doom, Jeremiah came bearing tidings of grace and glory. He promised that God would bring his people back from captivity (30:3). He would love them "with an everlasting love" (31:3) and "turn their mourning into gladness" (31:13). He would make a new covenant with them (31:31) and give them "singleness of heart and action" (32:39). God would even "cleanse them from all the sin they have committed" (33:8). (Ryken, p. 407)

We, too, are living in exile, yearning for our true home. These promises are for us!

When have you wondered or doubted that God has a plan for your life?

In this passage we learn that God knows the plans he has for you. What difference does this make to your plans for your life?

29:15-23 Beware of false prophets.

This section of Jeremiah 29 reads like a confusing script of a play. Notice the quotations within Jeremiah's letter. What is at stake is the false teaching of two prophets in exile, Ahab and Zedekiah. Both of these prophets were named after evil kings in Israel's history.

But the section has two indictments. Verses 15 and 19 critique the prophets who say that Jeremiah is wrong, that the Babylonian exile will be short lived.

Read 29:15 and 19. What is the specific charge God brings against those who listened to the false prophets? Why is Yahweh going to punish the people of Judah?

Because of the people's sin we find a dual consequence.

First, Jerusalem will again be sacked, and this time utterly destroyed (29:17-18).

Remember, Jerusalem fell in stages. First the Babylonians came in 597 B.C. and deported the brightest and best to Babylon. They left king Zedekiah (no relation to the false prophet of the same name in 29:21ff.) in charge as a puppet king who would pay homage to king Nebuchadnezzar. Eleven years later, the Babylonians came again and utterly destroyed the city, fulfilling 29:17-18. Judah and Jerusalem became *a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth*. Zion, the city of David, became *a curse, a terror, a hissing, and a reproach among all the nations where I have driven them* (29:18)

Second, the false prophets, Zedekiah and Ahab will be *roasted* by King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon.¹

29:22 Notice that the deaths of Ahab and Zedekiah are to serve as a warning to others. *The LORD make you like Zedekiah and Ahab. . . roasted in the fire!* The exiles, evidently, were to warn one another by the example of the deaths of these two false prophets. This is the polar opposite of the blessing of Aaron in Numbers 6:24-26.

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

¹ We are not told why Nebuchadnezzar put them to death, but we may surmise that these prophets tried to lead a rebellion against the king in order to take the people back to Jerusalem. *Roasting*, or death by fire, was the penalty for insurrection in Babylon.

29:23 Why does God sound so harsh? What is at stake here?

29:24-32 Shemaiah be warned..

Shemaiah, along with Ahab and Zedekiah, fought the notion that God's people should seek the welfare of the city.

What Shemaiah failed to understand was God's loving plan for the city. He did not understand that God wanted his people to love the city, not leave it. (Ryken, p. 413)

Jacques Ellul writes,

We have our job to do in the city. We have seen that down through history God's answer to the construction of man's closed world was to move in just the same. And if [God] is there by his hidden presence, he is also there by those whom he sends. Our task is therefore to present him in the heart of the city.¹

We began this study with a quotation from the British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge to the effect that making ourselves at home on earth is a *disaster*. But there is another, equally pernicious, disaster. That is, to live our lives as if our society doesn't matter. Jeremiah calls God's people to *seek the welfare of the city*.

As you look at the city of Santa Barbara, where is the church most needed?

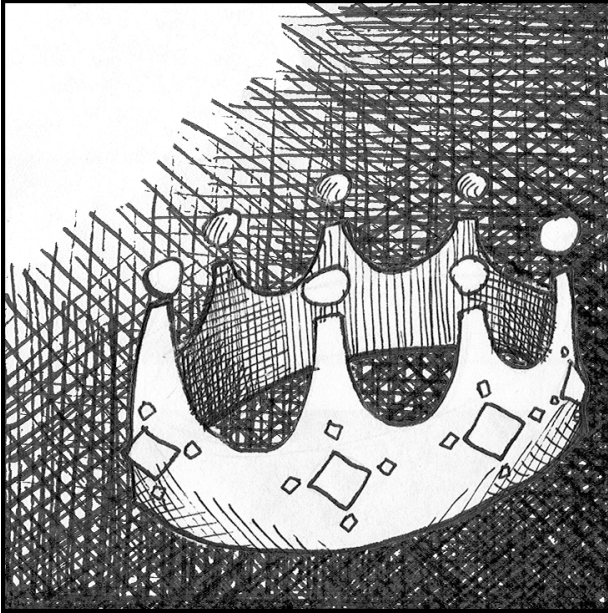
¹ *The Meaning of the City*, 1970, p. 181.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Eight

The Coming Prince

Jeremiah 30:1—31:6



In his commentary on Jeremiah, Charles Jefferson writes:

A small man can see when it is growing dark. . . but he cannot see beyond the darkness. He does not know how to put a sunbeam into his picture. A great man pierces the darkness and sees the glory of a hidden dawn. (cited in Wiersbe, p. 127)

Jeremiah was such a *great* man. After preaching about the coming wrath of God for 29 chapters, the weeping prophet changes his tune. Accordingly, Jeremiah 30—33 is

often called the *Book of Hope*. As we saw in last week's study, Jeremiah takes a sharp turn from doom and gloom to promise and reward. In the darkness of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon, the prophet begins to make promises of a future which is far better than anything God's people have ever known. Not only does the prophet speak of a return from exile, he promises a coming messiah who will lead the people into the presence of Yahweh!

*"Their prince shall be one of themselves;
their ruler shall come out from their midst;
I will make him draw near, and he shall approach me,
for who would dare of himself to approach me?"
declares the LORD.
"And you shall be my people,
and I will be your God." (30:21-22)*

And these promises are not only for Judah, the southern kingdom, but also to *Israel* in the north, that part of the nation which had ceased to exist over a hundred years before Jeremiah's time.

Again, Jeremiah's *Book of Hope* looks forward to the time when Judah came back from Babylon and rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. But Jeremiah's prophecies are much larger than that. As Kidner puts it,

Throughout this God-given dream (cf. 31:26) of things to come, the language and the landscape are those of Jeremiah's day, dominated by the theme of exile and restoration. Nevertheless a vaster ingathering than the modest one of 538 is foretold; and the covenant with Israel and Judah (31:31) would, in the event, embrace the world-wide 'sons of the living God', 'not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles'.¹ Even the rebuilding of the city is envisaged in terms which outstrip the literal event, to draw the mind beyond the 'Jerusalem which now is' to 'Jerusalem which is above'.²

In other words, this prophecy, like so many in the Old Testament, has a multiple fulfillment. In its immediate context, Jeremiah is prophesying a return from Babylon. But the prophet also looks forward to the time when messiah will come and usher in the kingdom of God! At last the promise God made to Abram in Genesis 12 will be fulfilled! *All the nations of the earth* will be blessed.

Read Jeremiah 30:1—31:6. Make a list of the promises God makes to his people. Notice that this chapter contains promises of both judgment and restoration.³ A few definitions might help your reading.

- *Jacob* generally refers to the southern kingdom of Judah.
- *Israel*, in this context, refers to the northern kingdom which ceased to exist when the Assyrians plundered it in 722 B.C.
- *Ephraim* is shorthand for the tribes of the northern kingdom.

Read this chapter and list the promises God makes to his people.

¹ See Romans 9:24-26 and 1 Peter 2:9-10.

² See Galatians 4:25-26 and Hebrews 12:22ff. See also Isaiah 49:6 where God says to the Servant (messiah), *It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.*

³ Kidner calls this a chapter of *alternating distress and delight* (Kidner, p. 106).

30:9, 21 At the heart of chapter 30 is a bold and often unnoticed prophecy of the coming messiah. Judah's problems, and Israel's, will not be solved by politics, they will be solved by a person, the Messiah!

What do we learn, specifically, in 30:9 about the coming messiah?

Notice what Jeremiah predicts in verse 21. The Messiah will be from the people of Israel (*one of themselves*) and *will be what no king had ever been allowed to be: their mediator and priest*. (Kidner, p. 105) Again, Jeremiah looks beyond the immediate near future to the time of Christ!

Nehemiah fulfilled many of Jeremiah's prophecies, but not all of them. God's people did not remain faithful. The time of blessing did not last forever. Most importantly, the palace was never rebuilt. Jeremiah promised that the Messiah would sit on his throne in his palace. He said God would raise up a son of David to be king (Jeremiah 30:9). But Nehemiah was no son of David and could never be king. Therefore, Jeremiah's promises about the city were waiting for the Messiah to come. (Ryken, p. 445)

Compare 30:21b with John 10:30.

*I will make him draw near, and he shall approach me,
for who would dare of himself to approach me?
declares the LORD.*

Jesus was the *prince* Jeremiah promised. What are the implications for our lives?

Read Hebrews 10:19-22. We have Jesus as our high priest and are invited to approach God with *confidence*. What is the appropriate response for us who worship God on this side of the cross?

30:10-11 Read these verses carefully. They promise both proportionate discipline and generous reward. What is at the center of the promises of these verses? Compare Deuteronomy 31:6.

How has this promise from God sustained you in your Christian life? What difference has God's presence made during difficult times?

30:12-15 Here Jeremiah touches on the darkness of the human condition. What Paul says in a few words in Romans 3:23, Jeremiah says with poetic eloquence. Sin is not similar to a common cold that one gets over in a few days time. Our *hurt is incurable*. The *Book of Common Prayer* expresses this same idea.

We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us.

Or, as Philip Ryken writes,

Sin is like a vicious strain of bacteria that has grown resistant even to the most powerful antibiotic. It spreads in the soul until it carries the sinner to the grave. (Ryken, p. 438)

Consider your awareness of your own sin and sinfulness. As the months and years of your Christian life transpire, are you growing more sensitive to the sin in your life? If not, what would help remind you of your *incurable* wound?

Read and respond to the following quotation by Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Do you find yourself seeing sin as a set of actions (and omissions), or do you see sin as a state of the heart? Give examples.

Evangelical repentance is repentance of sin as sin: not of this sin nor of that, but of the whole mass. We repent of the sin of our nature as well as the sin of our practice. We bemoan sin within us and without us. We repent of sin itself as being an insult to God. Anything short of this is a mere surface repentance, and not a repentance which reaches to the bottom of the mischief. Repentance of the evil act, and not of the evil heart, is like

men pumping water out of a leaky vessel, but forgetting to stop the leak. Some would dam up the stream, but leave the fountain still flowing; they would remove the eruption from the skin, but leave the disease in the flesh. (emphasis added)

30:18-20 Here God promises to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Again, this prophecy was fulfilled during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, but that was only the beginning. Notice what two New Testament writers do with the idea of God rebuilding the city of Jerusalem.

- Hebrews 11:16
- Hebrews 12:22
- Hebrews 13:14
- Revelation 21:2

Now Jesus Christ is at work to build his city. It is not an earthly city, but a spiritual city. Its citizens are those who love him and believe that he died for their sins. They come with “songs of thanksgiving and the sound of rejoicing” (30:19a). They will not decrease (30:19b) but will grow as they did in the days of the early church, when “the Lord added to their number daily those were being saved” (Acts 2:47b). They are not “disdained” (Jeremiah 30:19c). They are called Christians and thus have the honor of bearing Christ’s own name. “Their community,” the church, is being “established” (30:20). The Messiah is building his spiritual city. (Ryken, p. 446)

What are the implications of the above quotation for the church? What are the implications for your own Christian life?

31:3-4 speaks of the relentless love of Yahweh for his people. Notice these verses in context. In 30:12 we read,

*All your lovers have forgotten you;
They care nothing for you. . . .*

The picture is one of Judah's sin of spiritual adultery. God's people have played the role of the harlot (a continual theme in Jeremiah and the prophets), yet Yahweh continues to love with an everlasting love. He treats his people, sullied and soiled by paganism, as a *virgin*.

The same is true in our lives. God welcomes us back again and again. His everlasting love is our deepest comfort.

Sermon Notes. . .

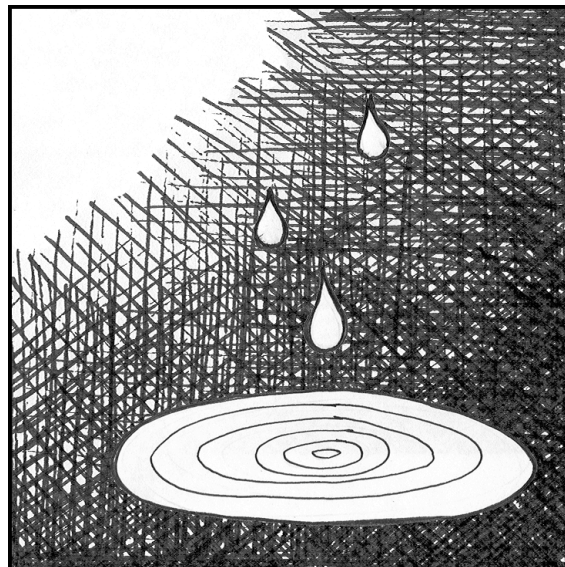
Study Nine

Rachel's Tears

Jeremiah 31:7-26

If the Bible teaches anything at all about God, it teaches that He is gracious. God has an eternal habit of giving us good things we don't deserve. Such is the message of Jeremiah in *The Book of Hope* (30—33). God has loved his people with an *everlasting love* (31:3). His plans to bless his people beyond measure are spelled out in poetic eloquence in these chapters.

At the outset, read Jeremiah 31:1-26 before going on in this study. See how much of Jeremiah's prose-poetry you can decipher. What do these images bring to mind? What portrait of the future is the prophet painting? What are some of the questions these verses bring to your mind? Share these thoughts and questions with your group.



31:7-14 A Party in Jerusalem

In 31:1ff. Jeremiah presents the return of the exiles from Babylon as a second exodus experience. Just as the Jews left Egypt and were in the wilderness on their way to the promised land, so also are those of the Babylonian captivity in the *wilderness* (31:2). They will come back to the land of promise and a fabulous party will ensue.

Much of the language used by Jeremiah in this chapter sounds similar to Isaiah's prophecies of the coming age of messiah.

Notice some of the similarities. Compare the following verses:

31:8 —————▶ Isaiah 42:16

31:9 —————▶ Isaiah 40:3-5
Isaiah 43:1-7
Isaiah 48:20-21

31:7 What are the five commands in verse 7 (Note: the NIV only translates four of the Hebrew verbs). What is the common thread of these commands?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

The picture in this verse is that of a people worshipping God because he has delivered them from captivity. The parallel to the Christian life is fairly obvious. We have been delivered from a greater captivity, the captivity to sin. Explain how these verbs describe your own worship.

What do your habits of daily living (thoughts, actions, interactions) shout, proclaim, praise or say to the Lord?

31:8b speaks of all kinds of people, even the weak, who are included in God's blessing. The *blind, lame, the pregnant woman*, even the woman *who is in labor* is included. Think of Jesus' ministry. How did and how does Jesus fulfill this promise? What are the implications of this promise for the church? See Galatians 3:28-29.

31:10-14 present a picture of tremendous blessing for God's people. This is a party unlike any other!

Promises are heaped one upon another—predictions of joy, return to Jerusalem, nature transformed, and a new prosperity (v. 12). Israel will be ransomed, redeemed, rejoicing, and restored. When the people come to Zion, they will find every need supplied. God's "bounty" (lit. "goodness") includes material blessings as the text shows. Never again will God's people sorrow as they did in the time of their Exile (v. 13). So great will be the prosperity bestowed on them that the priests will be satiated because of the many sacrifices brought by the worshipers (v. 14; cf. Lev 7:34). With abundant harvests, the portions of the priests will increase. (Fienberg, p. 568)

Notice the end of verse 14. "*And my people shall be satisfied with my goodness,*" declares the LORD.

Are you *satisfied* in God's goodness? What does this look like in your life?

How should a believer's yearnings and longings be different from a non-believer's?

How can we cultivate yearnings and longings for God?

37:15-22 The Drying of Rachel's Tears

At least one commentator says this section of Jeremiah contains the prophet's *most daring* use of poetry.¹ It also contains the middle stitch of a thread which ties the whole Bible together.

Re-read 31:15. Here Jeremiah speaks of *weeping* in a town called Ramah and the tears of Rachel over her children. What would this verse have meant to those who heard it from the lips of Jeremiah? What would Ramah and Rachel and *bitter weeping* have brought to mind?

We need to go back in Israel's history to understand. Recall the patriarchs of Israel, Abraham, the father of the Jews, had a son named Isaac. Isaac had a son named Jacob. Jacob inadvertently² marries Leah and then her sister Rachel. Leah bears four sons to Jacob while Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife, is seemingly unable to conceive. In time, however, Rachel bears Joseph and Benjamin. Joseph has two sons named Ephraim and Manasseh who become the fathers of the northern tribes of Israel. Benjamin becomes the father of a southern tribe.

But as Rachel is giving birth to her second son, she dies. Where does this take place? Rachel was buried near Ramah, about five miles north of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah sees *Rachel* as the mother mourning the loss of her *children* who are the descendants of her son Joseph, that is, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. These children or tribes were destroyed by the Assyrians about a century before the time of Jeremiah.

Ramah is of particular significance in that it was the staging area for the exiles who were being deported to Babylonia. The captives were dragged to Ramah amidst the confusion of warfare and sorted out before the long march to Babylon.

It must have been a place of utter despair—fathers chafing against their chains and mothers lifting their voices in lamentation. Their children, their babies, were gone! Some had starved during the siege. Others had been put to the sword during the invasion. In the confusion of battle, still others had been ripped from their mother's breasts, never to be seen again. (Ryken, p. 455)

With the above in mind, read 31:16. God tells *Rachel*, a symbol of grief over what has and will happen to Israel and Judah, to dry her tears. *There is hope for your future!*

¹ Brueggemann, p. 286.

² The story takes a dramatic turn when Jacob, thinking he has married Rachel, wakes in the morning to find he has slept with her older sister Leah! Yikes! See Genesis 29-30.

But that is not the end of the story. Matthew picks up on this prophecy, applies it to King Herod's slaughter of the baby boys in Bethlehem and sees it fulfilled in Jesus.

Read Matthew 2:16-18. What does Matthew have in mind by citing this prophecy in connection with Herod's detestable deed? Matthew ties the tears of the mothers in Bethlehem to the tears of the mothers in Ramah during the exile. And he promises hope in Messiah.

. . . Jeremiah 31:15 occurs in a setting of hope. Despite the tears, God says, the exiles will return; and now Matthew, referring to Jeremiah 31:15, likewise says that, despite the tears of the Bethlehem mothers, there is hope because Messiah has escaped Herod and will ultimately reign. . . . The heir to David's throne has come, the Exile is over, the true Son of God has arrived, and he will introduce the new covenant (Matthew 26:28) promised by Jeremiah.¹

The implications of this passage are profound. Here we can learn how to suffer rightly. There is a place for grief and tears in the Christian's life, yet those tears are not ultimate. They will be wiped dry at the coming of Messiah.

- Revelation 7:16-18
- Revelation 21:3-4

Spend time as a homegroup discussing how Christ has dried your tears. Spend time worshiping the Messiah who came to dry the *tears of Rachel*.

¹ D.A. Carson, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, p. 95.

Sermon Notes. . .

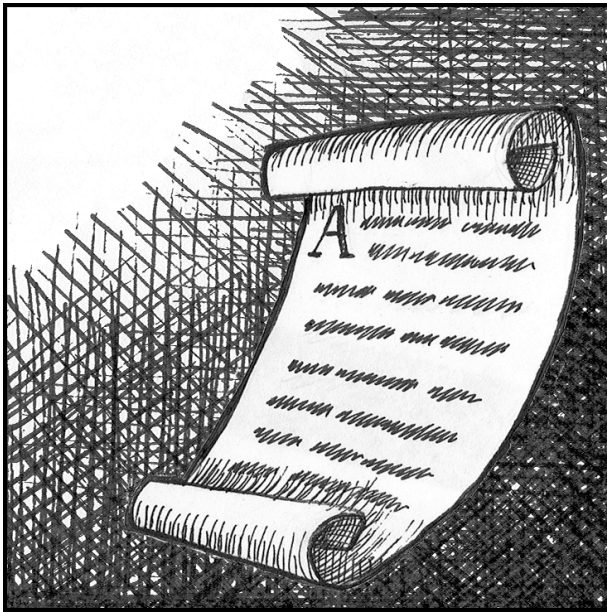
Study Ten

A New Covenant

Jeremiah 31:27-40

In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 1 Corinthians 11:25

What would the best title for this study be? A New Covenant? A New Deal? A New Agreement? A New Contract?



When we get to this passage, Jeremiah makes a startling announcement in his *Book of Hope* (30-33). It is something that has not yet been said in the Old Testament, nor will it be said again until it comes from the lips of Jesus. God is going to make a new covenant with his people.

Jeremiah 31:27-49 is the fulfillment of what the prophet hinted at in 3:17-18.

At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart. In those days the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel, and together they shall come from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers for a heritage.

Before going on in this study, read Jeremiah 31:27-40. Answer the following questions as you read.

- 31:31 With whom is this *new* covenant made?
- 31:33-4 What is *new* about this covenant?

- 31:38-40 What will happen to Jerusalem when this new covenant is ratified?

The Covenant and God's People

Throughout what we call the *Old Testament*, people entered into relationship with God by way of a *covenant*, or an *agreement*. Every biblical covenant is initiated by God's grace, but also looks for a response from God's people. There are numerous *agreements*, or, *covenants* in biblical history.

- Adam and Eve promised perfect obedience in the Garden of Eden (which meant they had to abstain from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil).
- Noah enters into a covenant with God before the flood (Genesis 6:18). This covenant is renewed after the flood (Genesis 9:1-17). The scope of this covenant is far-reaching. God will protect every living creature throughout all generations.
- Abraham enters into covenant with God when he leaves home and follows Yahweh (see Genesis 12:1-3 and, especially, Genesis 15:1-21). This covenant was symbolized with circumcision (Genesis 17:1-27).
- The covenant of Jeremiah 31:32 looks back to the agreement God made with Moses and the Jews after the Exodus. There, Yahweh made a covenant with people who had been *saved* out of Egypt.

This *Mosaic* covenant takes us back to Exodus 24. There Moses read the law of God to Israel. Then, long before the building of the tabernacle, he made sacrifices to God.

He sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed oxen as offerings of well-being to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed against the altar. (Ex. 24:5-6)

At this point Moses read the law to the people and they responded,

All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.

And then it happened. Moses took some of the blood of the bulls which had been sacrificed and sprinkled it on the people! The covenant was ratified.¹

But the people couldn't keep their part of the agreement. As Yahweh says through Jeremiah,

But this command I gave them: 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.' But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward. (7:23-24)

Disobedience to the old covenant brings with it a curse from God.

"They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused to hear my words. They have gone after other gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers. Therefore," thus says the LORD, "behold, I am bringing disaster upon them that they cannot escape. Though they cry to me, I will not listen to them." (11:10-11)

Read Exodus 20:3-17. Reflect on the past studies in Jeremiah. What is the specific sin which the people committed against Yahweh?

Consider the features of the *new* covenant:

1. 31:31 Reconciliation: The new covenant promised reconciliation between antagonistic people groups. The northern and southern kingdoms of Israel will be brought together. Consider what Paul does with this concept.

¹ We should notice that everything was covered with blood. The altar, the people, even the scroll from which Moses read was sprinkled with blood. Such a worship service was anything but tame. Why? Why the emphasis on blood? Because, as Paul points out, *The wages of sin is death*. . . (Romans 6:23). Blood sacrifice showed Israel, and it shows us, what Anselm called *the heavy weight of sin* and the high price of forgiveness.

- Galatians 3:26-29
- Ephesians 2:11-22

What is your experience of reconciliation as a believer? How has this new covenant affected your relationships with people who are different from you?

2. 31:33a Internal: The new covenant is *internal* while the old was *external*. The old covenant was written on tablets of stone. The new covenant is written on the heart. The implications of this are profound. God will give his people the will to do his will! The problem with the *old* covenant was not its content. The law, in a sense, doesn't change in the *new* covenant (see Matthew 5:17ff.), the law it is fulfilled in the new covenant. The problem with the first covenant was in the people's heart. They lacked the requisite desire to do God's will.

Consider the following quotation.

[I]n the new covenant the doubtful element of human obedience as it had been known up to date drops out completely. If God's will ceases to confront and judge men from outside themselves, if God puts his will directly into their hearts, then, properly speaking, the rendering of obedience is completely done away with, for the problem of obedience only arises when man's will is confronted by an alien will. Now however, the possibility of such a confrontation has ceased to exist, for men are to have the will of God in their heart, and are only to will God's will. What is outlined here is the picture of a new man, a man who is able to obey perfectly because of a miraculous change of his nature.

Do you agree? If so, in what sense are we, today, living in the *new covenant*? In what sense did Jesus fulfill Jeremiah's prophecy? What are we still waiting for with regard to Jeremiah's prophecy?

George Croly (1780-1860) wrote a hymn called *Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart*. Consider the last verse of the following stanza.

*Spirit of God, descend upon my heart;
Wean if from earth; through all its pulses move;
Stoop to my weakness, mighty as Thou art,
And make me love Thee as I ought to love.*

Croly is praying for the new covenant in his heart. Do you pray similar prayers? Spend time doing so for one another in your homegroup.

3. 31:33b Intimate: The people of the new covenant will be in an intimate relationship with their God while the people of the old covenant were often distant from God. Again, consider Jeremiah 7:23-24 (cited above).

Leland Ryken writes,

Whenever God makes a covenant with his people, what he is really giving them is himself. Thus the primary blessing of the New Covenant is friendship and fellowship with the Triune God. (Ryken, p. 471)

Think through and try to explain your relationship with God. How do you experience the love of God? Do you consider your relationship with God to be distant or close? Warm or cold? Explain how you experience this part of the new covenant.

4. 31:34a Universal: There will come a time when everyone *knows* God. This does not mean God won't judge those who have rejected him and his will. It means that after that judgment we will not need evangelization. In the final form of the new covenant we will all *know* God. The Hebrew term is one of deep intimacy. We will be in love with God.

5. 31:34b Forgiveness: Yahweh will *forgive* our iniquity, and *remember* our sin no more. How do these two truths affect you emotionally?

Notice how the writer of the book of Hebrews works with this theme by pointing to the work of Christ on the cross. First, the writer quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Hebrews 8:8-12). Then the book explains Jeremiah.

Read Hebrews 9:11-14. Work on this passage as a group. Let those who are older in the faith explain the passage to those who are newer to the pages of the Bible.

Notice the last words of this passage. The new covenant results in our *serving* the *living God* with a clean conscience.

Yes!

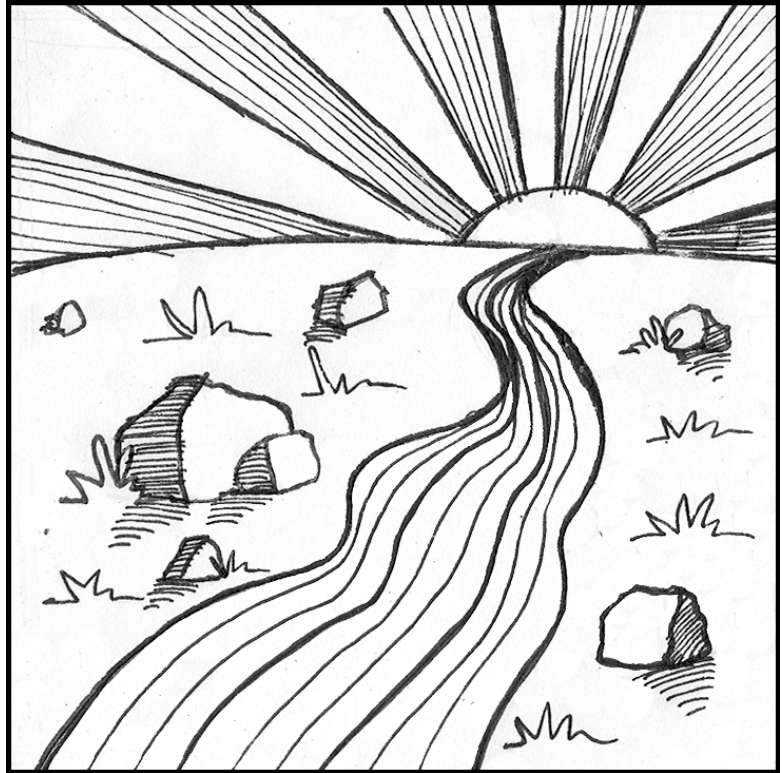
Study Eleven Field of Dreams Jeremiah 32

As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is mere flattery or platitude. It is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength at all. Like all the Christian virtues, it is as unreasonable as it is indispensable.

G. K.
Chesterton

Recall the sequence of events in Jerusalem during Jeremiah's time.

- The Babylonian armies captured the city and took the leaders into exile in 598 B.C.
- The second and third tier of the population was left in the city to go about their business, provided they were loyal to Babylonia.
- After 11 years of this state of affairs, Judah made an alliance with Egypt.
- The ire of Babylon was provoked and their armies showed up at the doorstep of Jerusalem.
- The Egyptians failed to protect their new vassal state, and the people of the city were hopelessly overshadowed by what was, undoubtedly, the strongest military power on earth.
- The City of God was under siege. Mt. Zion, the city of God was about to crumble.



The situation was unthinkable and hopeless, and the darkest time in Israel's history.

And Jeremiah buys property.

Read Jeremiah 32 with the following outline, questions and comments in mind. Note where this chapter falls. It comes after, and illustrates, the hopefulness of chapters 30 and 31. What does this chapter make you think about Jeremiah? About God?

1. Jeremiah's field (32:1-15)

- Who is king in Babylon?
- How long has he been the king?
- Who is the king of Judah?
- Who offers Jeremiah the real estate deal?
- Where is the property located?
- What is the significance of the real estate deal? (see vs. 15)

The answer to this last question should be fairly obvious. Jeremiah's purchase puts his money where his mouth is. He buys the field as a sign of hope that Yahweh will deliver on his promises. Jeremiah's purchase is bad financial planning. The property is, in fact, worthless. The Babylonians occupy the land! On the other hand, Jeremiah invests in the hope of God.

What similar investments do Christians make in our own time? Many Christian thinkers speak of the *twilight of western civilization*, meaning that our culture is doomed to extinction. Nevertheless, Christians live lives of hope in the meantime. They get married, raise children, spread the gospel in dangerous countries, etc. What other signs of hope can you think of in the Christian life? In your life?

2. Jeremiah's Prayer (32:16-25)

Jeremiah's purchase was so ludicrous that buyer's remorse set in immediately. He takes his remorse to God in prayer. Use the following comment by Derek Kidner to help you navigate Jeremiah's prayer. Does Jeremiah ever ask God for anything in his prayer? How can this prayer be a model for your own prayers in times of difficulty?

It is a fine example of the way to pray in a desperate situation: concentrating first on the creative power (17) and perfect fidelity and justice (18-19) of God; remembering next his great redemptive acts (20-23a; to which the Christian can now add the greatest of them all) — and then with this background, laying before God the guilt of the past (23b), the hard facts of the present (24) and the riddle of the future (25). (Kidner, p. 113)

Jeremiah feels the situation is impossible, yet he affirms, *Nothing is too hard for you* (32:17). Spend time as a homegroup praying about those things that seem *too hard* even for God, yet are not.

3. God's Response (32:26-44)

Read these verses. What is God's answer to Jeremiah's prayer? Search for the gracious illogic of God. God's response begins with wrath and ends with mercy and grace. The people deserve the punishment of God, yet, illogically in verse 36, God's mercy breaks out.

- Make a list of the reasons for God's wrath (verses 26-35).
- Make a list of the promised gifts of God (verses 36-44).

How do these lists speak to your life? To your dreams?

Consider this chapter as a whole. It is a message of hope in a hopeless situation. Jeremiah buys a field and then prays. God speaks and says, *After judgment, mercy!*

Judgment and then mercy nicely summarizes the whole of Jeremiah's book. The weeping prophet, the man in the mud thunders and complains, he weeps and wails, he acts dramatically and he sits in prison. In the end, Jeremiah promises, God will have the last word. Nothing is too difficult for Yahweh and his judgment will be tempered by mercy.

Do not doubt the power of God in your own life. You may doubt that your marriage can be saved, or that you can have victory over a particular sin, or that a family member will ever get saved, or that God will ever bless your work. As long as you try to solve your problems, things will continue to be impossible. But not when you entrust them to the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for him?

Well? (Ryken, p. 495)

Sermon Notes. . .