

Jeremiah

Week 2/

Lamentations

Monday: Jeremiah 39-45

Tuesday: Jeremiah 46-49

Wednesday: Jeremiah 50-52

Thursday: Lamentations 1-5

Friday: Ezekiel 1-6

Introduction

Another Look at Jeremiah

The prophets were preachers. God sent Jeremiah to speak words of warning to the people, to call them to repentance, and to show them how to escape the coming wrath of judgment that God was sending to them through the Babylonian empire. One of the interesting aspects of Jeremiah's teaching was his use of creative and interesting visual aids. From parading a rotten, filthy belt in front of the royal family, to smashing a clay jar outside the city gate, to walking through the streets like an ox with a yoke on his neck, Jeremiah was always doing something that would stick out in the mind of his listeners.

The daily reading schedule this week takes us through some chapters that are very difficult to read and can, quite honestly, get a little tedious. In light of that, the daily devotionals this week will focus on 4 of these colorful visuals that Jeremiah used throughout the book. The final day will look at the poem called Lamentations that was written after the destruction of Jerusalem.

A word to the weary.

No matter how you slice it, Jeremiah and Lamentations are “downer” books. Both books were written during the absolute darkest moments of Israel’s history. As we saw last week, there is a brief glimmer of hope in chapters 29-34 when he speaks of the restoration of the exiled people, but other than that these are words of human despair. If you are struggling with depression or a deep sense of loss this week, here are two words of encouragement that can be gleaned from Jeremiah’s experience and should be used when reading his prophecy.

First, it’s OK to express your deep pain in the presence of God. He invites you to be brutally honest with Him. The book of Lamentations definitely displays this truth. Second, there is hope, even in the pit of despair, when you focus on the eternal plan of God and realize that He is working a master plan that goes beyond our understanding and ultimately brings meaning to our worst circumstances. You may not be able to emotionally grab hold of this truth, but use your will to trust that God means what He says. During this time of being down, lean into your community and allow others to “bear your burdens” (Galatians 6:2).

Monday: Worthless Waistband

Read Jeremiah 13:1-12.

What does God ask Jeremiah to do?

What happens to the belt? Why does this happen?

How do you think the people felt when Jeremiah compared them to the belt?

What do you think was the point of this visual lesson?

Food for thought:

Here are some observations about the sash that we can think about in relation to our own lives.

1. The linen belt was a fine piece of clothing. God viewed Israel, and He views us, as something precious and valuable to Him. Jeremiah wore the belt around his waist for a while. A belt was a symbol of trust and commitment because it bound the rest of the wardrobe together. God desires to have a vital relationship with His people and wear us around in pride like we were a fine linen belt.
2. Perath was a symbol of the pagan religion that the people of Jerusalem had immersed themselves in. The belt was buried in the mud just like the people were buried in paganism. Fine linen goes bad when it is not washed and cared for. Insects begin to eat it, the cloth begins to decompose, and it starts to stink.
3. A good cloth will get dirty with regular use, even if it is being worn by its rightful owner. The normal procedure for a good belt is to be taken to the river to be washed with soap and properly dried. When this happens, the belt can be worn with pride for a long time.
4. The question we must ask ourselves is what are we soaking in? Are we buried in a sinful attitude that, if left unchecked, will rot out our heart? Or, are we allowing God to soak us in the detergent of His Word and be rinsed by His Spirit on a regular basis so that we can stay fresh and clean?

Tuesday: I Guess the Yokes on You!

A yoke is a wooden frame, usually consisting of a bar with an oxbow or similar collar-like piece at either end, for attaching to the necks of a pair of draught animals, esp. oxen, so that they can be worked as a team.

Collins English Dictionary.

Read Jeremiah 27-28.

What did the yoke represent in Jeremiah's message?

In ch. 27, what was Jeremiah's instruction to King Zedekiah?

What were the false prophets telling the King?

In ch. 28 we see a showdown between two prophets; Jeremiah and Hananiah. What did Hananiah do to Jeremiah's yoke? Why?

What was Jeremiah's response to Hananiah's message? (vv. 5-10)

What was the Lord's response to Hananiah? (vv.15-17)

Read Matthew 11:28-30.

What is Jesus' message in these verses?

Food for thought:

There are two important lessons in these chapters.

1. The world is full of false prophets who speak well and claim to be representing God's Word for today. Be careful who you listen to. Hananiah was probably very convincing when he smashed Jeremiah's yoke and claimed that God would protect His people. Of course people wanted to listen to him; after all, doesn't God want the best for His people? It is important, as Christians, that we know the message of the Bible really well and have the tools to discern whether a teacher's message is truly biblical or if it is infected with the world's systems and philosophies. How do we do that? Study! Ask questions! Research! Don't take someone's word for it just because they've been to seminary. Be a student of God's word on your own.

2. Everyone wears a yoke. Another way to say this is that everyone is a slave to something. The idea of autonomous freedom is an American myth. We each need to ask ourselves an important question. It's like the scene from the movie Remember the Titans when the new head coach asks the hotshot players, "who's yo daddy?" We need to ask ourselves, "who's our daddy? Who do we serve?" Jesus said that He has a yoke as well. If we choose the world's yoke, it will become like Hananiah's and become a yoke of iron that will crush us under its weight. Jesus' yoke, the yoke of truth, is not easy, but it's light, and will make us strong and healthy as we plow the fields of righteousness in His Kingdom.

Wednesday: Smashing Results!

Read Jeremiah 19.

What did God ask Jeremiah to do?

Read the following excerpt from the Bible Knowledge Commentary.

The Hinnom Valley ran along the south and west of the city and served as Jerusalem's "community dump." The gate at the south of the city which opened into the valley was called the "Potsherd Gate" because people carried their potsherds (broken pieces of pottery) and other refuse through this gate to throw it in the Hinnom Valley. The Targum identifies the Potsherd Gate with the Dung Gate (cf. Neh. 2:13; 3:13-14). The modern Dung Gate in Jerusalem is also located on the south of the city, but the present walls are several hundred yards north of the walls in Jeremiah's day.

With the Hinnom Valley as a backdrop, Jeremiah delivered his message. God vowed to bring a disaster on Jerusalem because of her idolatry. The valley itself was a witness against the People because it contained the high places of Baal where people slaughtered their sons to offer them as sacrifices in the fire. Because of these wicked deeds God again (cf. Jer. 7:32-33) vowed to rename the place the Valley of Slaughter as He destroyed the people there

Walvoord, J. F. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures (Je 19:1)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

What was the significance of using the object lesson of the clay jar in this particular spot in the city?

A running motif in our teaching has been that of the clay vessel. In 2 Corinthians 4:7 Paul reminds us that we hold this treasure (our relationship with God) in jars of clay. We understand that our purpose in life is to be filled with God's presence so that our clay jars can overflow with hope and the gospel.

This study in Jeremiah reminds us what happens when clay jars become infected with the wrong thing. Sometimes a clay jar can be so far off track that the only thing to do is to smash it out on the dung heap. These are harsh words and Jeremiah's message in ch. 19 is not a feel good, "God is great," session. Jeremiah brought a sobering word of judgment on the nation that had abandoned God's presence.

The challenge for us is to remember our purpose and to remember our focus. Our vessel exists for God, nothing else. At the end of the day, at the end of our life, we will be faced with the reality of how we filled our life. May we all be filled with God's presence and stay far away from the Potsherd Gate.

Thursday: Our True Shepherd

Read Jeremiah 23:1-8.

Who is Jeremiah attacking in this passage?

What is the accusation he is making against this group of people?

What is God's solution to this problem?

Food for thought:

In this visual teaching image of the Shepherd we get to encounter our first ray of real hope all week. Jeremiah is indicting the shepherds (the spiritual leaders) of Israel for abandoning their post and allowing the sheep (God's people) to be led into dangerous places of idolatry. He promises that He will punish the false teachers and salvage his flock.

There are two key lessons from this passage:

1. Being a shepherd is a big responsibility that God does not take lightly. God will hold teachers and shepherds, the leaders of the church, to a high standard since they have direct influence over how people think about the nature of God. May we who hold this responsibility fall on our faces and ask God to work through us to bring glory to His name.
2. We have hope in the fact that Jesus is our ultimate shepherd. There is only one true shepherd and the rest of us in leadership roles are "shepherds" who are sheep that need to be led while we in turn are leading other sheep. Before you cast stones at a struggling church leader, realize that they have a sheep side as well. Make sure that you are focusing on the one true shepherd, Jesus, and find ways to lovingly support those whom God has called to serve as shepherds of the flock.

Friday: A Time to Cry

Read Lamentations 5.

What is the attitude of the writer of this poem?

What has happened to make the writer feel this way?

Food for thought:

Let's paint the picture. For years this outspoken, jar smashing, yoke-wearing, loud-mouthed prophet has been pointing his finger at you for sinning, and has predicted that the Babylonians would destroy the city if you don't repent. Now you find yourself standing in the middle of your own city, everything is destroyed, there is nothing to eat, and everyone is in misery. You can just hear the prophet saying under his breath, "I told you so." How do you feel?

In our lives we often run into seasons where it seems like everything is going wrong and there is no hope. In moments like that we may feel like God is far, far away and has turned His back on us. In those moments, what do you do?

From the book of Lamentations we can learn three important facts.

1. It is OK to express your pain to God. In the book of Job we saw Job being honest with God about his emotions. In the book of Lamentations we see the nation being honest with God about their emotions. God can handle, and even invites you to bring all your burdens and cares to Him. He wants to hear from you.
2. Make sure you are being honest about your pain. If there is something in your life that is out of bounds with God's will, perhaps He is trying to get your attention with the pain you are experiencing.
3. Even in the darkest hour, God can bring good from it that ultimately brings Him glory. When Jerusalem was destroyed, He saved a remnant to rebuild the city. When Jesus died, He brought about the salvation of the world. When you suffer, God can use it to teach you something...if you are willing to hear it.

For a little deeper look

Jeremiah was speaking out for truth in a religious system that had totally abandoned the Law and had melded the “mother goddess” myth (and its accompanying practices) with the Law of the Torah. How can we know what are the deceptions of our day? Jeremiah had a clear vision from God, but most of us have never had the “voice from Heaven” or a burning bush. All we have to go on is the Bible, yet much of the false teaching that exists claims to use the Bible as its source as well. What are the false gods or our day?

One immediate image comes to mind. One of the many planks of the Protestant Reformation platform against the Roman Catholic church in the 16th century was the introduction of the Mary cult. This is a direct parallel to the mother goddess trap of the Old Testament. The Roman church allowed the pagan idea of a mother goddess to infect the church and be dressed in the robes of Mary. Mary and the saints are nothing more than the gods and demi-gods of paganism with Christian language.

So, as protestants, we spoke out against this heresy, and many suffered the consequences. Now, 500 years later, the Protestant churches have become the powerful institution. The question is, what are the gods of the age that have seduced us into syncretism.

Here are some obvious ones:

- ◆ success
- ◆ productivity
- ◆ effectiveness

- ◆ Political correctness
- ◆ tolerance
- ◆ The supreme god of all of these is the rationalism and empiricism of the 18th and 19th century that completely “secularized” the church.
- ◆ Now, as the bastions of modernity are falling to the postmodern tidal wave, the church is being tempted with new and foreign gods. It would be easy to view the new open-mindedness and its deconstruction of the modern god-structure as parallel and equivalent to the message of the gospel. While postmodernity does offer new windows of insight into the mysteries of God, it is a dangerous deception to believe that postmodern thought is synonymous with truth. God is God and remains the TRUTH throughout every epoch of human attempts at understanding. The new post-modern system is just like Babylon. God may be using it to destroy the syncretistic construct of the modern western church, but it in itself will also be judged for its arrogance. Ultimately, it is God alone that is to be sought, above and in spite of the human thought systems we use to process the data He has revealed.

For help with how to deal with this situation, read Jesus’ parable in Matthew 13:36-43. In order to discern what the false gods are and how to deal with them...

- ◆ we must admit that there are weeds among us; both in our own individual field of thought, and collectively in the body of Christ.
- ◆ we must not focus our energy toward the

weeding out, but toward the cultivating of all that is growing. God will do the weeding in the final day.

- ◆ We must spend our time speaking truth without apology, planting seeds in fertile soil, and cultivating the crops to full maturity. This is a positive process, not a negative one.