



WEEK 1

Reflection notes on Jeremiah

September-November 2021

Jeremiah's Call: Hope and Lament in a Time of Change

From 12 September to 28 November, we'll be exploring the book of Jeremiah in a sermon series. It is a powerful, complicated and fascinating book and so we invite you to use these reflection notes each week to prepare for the upcoming message. We encourage you to read slowly over the assigned passages of Scripture and to reflect prayerfully in the week before each sermon. This will help you better understand the narrative and how God might be speaking to you and our church community as we grow together.

Week 1: Overview (for 12 Sept.)

"If you, Israel, will return, then return to me," declares the Lord. "If you put your detestable idols out of my sight and no longer go astray, and if in a truthful, just and righteous way you swear, 'As surely as the Lord lives,' then the nations will invoke blessings by him and in him they will boast."—Jeremiah 4:1,2

In a time of so much global sorrow, when we're all struggling with lock down and the evening news conveys tragedy after tragedy, why study an Old Testament book written by an author known mostly as 'the weeping prophet'? Isn't that just going to make us more discouraged?

Yes, if the book's 52 chapters were only about Jeremiah. But the book reflects a much more complex narrative than that of a lamenting prophet; it shows a holy and good God passionate in his pursuit of, and love for, his wayward people. Yes, it is a book full of troubling metaphors, hard words and disconcerting images toward a faithless, selfish people, but it also one of profound hope and grace.

Why else would Jeremiah call the people, over 100 times throughout the book, to turn away from their sins, to repent and return to their covenant-making God? After all, a recurring theme in Jeremiah is God's grievance that 'my people have forsaken me.' In other words, the back story of Jeremiah is that God loves Israel and wants them to be close to him. God warns them so often through Jeremiah because he knows the choices they're making are anything but life-giving, and that they are about to experience intense hardship and change when Babylon forces overthrow them. At times the people look like they hear him, but they turn away



again, ignoring the prophet and therefore the Lord. And yet God does not back down.

So Jeremiah's heartbreak reflects the much bigger heart of the Almighty God for his people. God calls Jeremiah to the unenviable task of calling a stubborn people away from their selfish and idolatrous ways. And we watch, as Rev John Stott said, the reluctant prophet's *'own priestly family oppose him. He is put in the stocks and thrown into a cistern. God's word burns like fire in his bones; he cannot hold it in. But nobody listens to him. He is thought to be a traitor and witnesses the decline and death of his own nation.'* Yes, he—like our Lord Jesus wept over Jerusalem— weeps bitter tears for a lost people. Why? Love.

It is this love that offers hope in difficult times, that says it is never too late to return to your Maker, to draw near to the God who offers a new covenant, a new opportunity, no matter how bad the circumstances might look.

Reflection Questions:

1. What are your initial impressions of the book of Jeremiah?
2. What do you expect to learn from studying Jeremiah?
3. How do you hear God calling you today?

Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank you for your word to, and through, your prophet Jeremiah. Help us to hear your voice as we explore this book, and to live in your hopeful love. Amen.*

Sources: John Stott, *'Through the Bible Through the Year'*; *English Standard Version Study Bible*.