



WEEK 10

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're exploring the book of Jeremiah in a sermon series. We encourage you to read over the assigned passages of Scripture and to reflect prayerfully in the week before each sermon.

Week 9: The Last Days of Judah (for 21 November, please read chapters 46-51):

'God's judgement on the nations'

'Do not be afraid, Jacob my servant, for I am with you,' declares the Lord. 'Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only in due measure; I will not let you go entirely unpunished.'—Jeremiah 46:28

Sometimes it's easy to get caught into thinking our own culture is the only one that matters. We become accustomed to 'how we do things', or our specific ways of expressing ourselves, and in the process, we overlook, or belittle, the diversity of other cultures around the world (and within our city). It's easy to become 'ethnocentric', dismissing how the customs of other nations. Yet because all people in all cultures are made in God's image, our lives are enriched when we appreciate and respect both our similarities and our differences.

These next six chapters in Jeremiah are all about the other nations around Israel. It's interesting to note that Jeremiah is called a 'prophet to the nations' and yet chapters 1-45 focus primarily on his words to the people of Judah, with only the occasional reference to other nations (and usually as a warning of their invasion). In fact, the only other nation Jeremiah visited was Egypt when he was dragged along as a captive!

Still, Jeremiah has long declared God's sovereignty over all nations, and now in chapters 46-51, he gets specific. He describes God's coming judgement on Egypt (46), Philistia (47), Moab (48), Ammon (49:1-6), Edom (49: 7-22), Damascus (49:23-33), the 'ends of the Earth' (49:34-39) and Babylon (50 & 51).

The chapters sound a bit like war poetry (and it's worth reading some of them aloud for their imagery and rhythmic warnings). In each, the nations and their cities are often personified, chastised and shamed. Jeremiah uses stark and vivid language to point out their evils and punishment as the 'day of vengeance' (46:10) nears. What's going on?

Simply this: The Sovereign Lord will avenge himself on these foes for the same reasons he's punished his own people, disobedience. And yet he will save his people, though not without disciplining them as a loving father would (Hebrews 12:7).

These judgements come from a history of evil and plots against Israel. Whether Egypt's captivity of God's people, Moab's cities that acted as enemies of Judah as they prepared to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 22-24), and of course Babylon's armies who ultimately disobeyed God's instruction (50:13,14), the arrogance and idolatry of each nation would bring God's judgment.

As Jeremiah 48:29, 30 says, 'We have heard of Moab's pride— how great is her arrogance!—of her insolence, her pride, her conceit and the haughtiness of her heart. I know her insolence but it is futile,' declares the Lord, 'and her boasts accomplish nothing.' Though Moab is called out in this passage, these sinful attributes could have easily described any of the nations, including Judah.

And while these chapters are bad news for the nations, they present a hint of good news for Judah showing the thread of God's grace throughout. God's plan is not thwarted and God's people finally will receive the loving hand of the Father's discipline.

But if these chapters teach us anything it's this: God is not the God of only one nation but of all the Earth. His words confirm that he holds all nations and all people accountable before him and offers each salvation. Just as we see Jesus inviting Jew and Gentile to himself during his time on Earth. Whether engaging with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) or a Roman Centurion (Matthew 8:4-13), the poor or the marginalised, Jesus' love, grace and salvation extended to all regardless of culture or background. They still do! And someday people from all tribes and languages will stand together before the Lamb (Rev. 7:9)!

Reflection Questions:

1. What are some ways Australians get 'trapped' in our own culture? How have you learned about other cultures that have made you appreciate God's diversity?
2. These six chapters proclaim God's sovereignty over the nations. How might this affect your perspective of the world and current events?
3. What nations has God laid on your heart to learn about and pray for?

Prayer: *Gracious God and Lord of the nations, thank you that you have made us all in your image and have placed each of us in various cultures. Forgive us for thinking our ways might be better than others and give us opportunities to serve and celebrate those who have come from different parts of the world. For your glory, Amen.*

Sources: Gary Millar, Chapel talk, QTC <https://www.qtc.edu.au/podcasts/>; English Standard Version Study Bible.