



WEEK 11

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 11: The fall of Jerusalem (for 28 November, please read chapters 52):

'... in the year Awel-Marduk became king of Babylon, on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month, he released Jehoiachin king of Judah and freed him from prison.³² He spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honour higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon.'—Jeremiah 52:31,32

Some of the best detective novels leave you guessing until the very end. Just when you think you know 'who-done-it', the plot turns, the stakes are raised and you're left surprised at how the author pulled everything together to bring the real culprit to justice. You turn the final page and suddenly realise it was more obvious than you thought.

That's a bit of what it's like to read the last chapter of Jeremiah. God, through the prophet, has been calling on the people of Judah to repent throughout the book, warning of the judgment and punishment coming their way for their stubbornness and defiance if they don't. Chapters 46-51 spelled out the fall of the nations, bringing them to justice for their treatment of God's people and idolatrous behaviour. Now at chapter 52, the end of Jerusalem has arrived and it's not what you think it might be.

It's worse. As Jeremiah had predicted many times (21:1-10, 27:1-15, 32:1-5, 37:1-10), Babylon has finally sacked, burned and destroyed Jerusalem. The descriptions in chapter 52 are not for the faint of heart; this battle is brutal, gory and bloody. And at first it seems as if Babylon's armies will emerge victorious. After all, they slaughter the sons of King Zedekiah before his eyes (52:10), take out all of his officials and then even gouge out his eyes before chaining him and throwing him into prison. King Zedekiah had done evil in God's sight (52:2) because he failed to heed God's warnings. And now God was allowing the Babylonians to be his tools for punishment.

And that's not all. The Babylonians went on to burn the Temple, the very house of the Lord (52:13), as well as all the houses. Not without first, though, pillaging all of the

ornaments, artefacts and bronze, silver and gold (52:17-23). Then through a series of events over time, Babylon took all the leaders and thousands of people into exile (52:24-30). But did they win?

Yes, Jeremiah spent his last years in Egypt in exile without seeing Judah return to their Lord. Yet he remained faithful to God and his call as a prophet. Though he doesn't get a mention in this final chapter, his words reflect the same themes of judgement and salvation God has promised all along.

So while the chapter might seem dismal, the final verses suggest God is in fact the victor here (52:31-34). They describe the surprising turn from the author. The Babylonian king sets free one of the few kings who had tried to bring God's people back to him—and ended up in prison because of it. King Jehoiachin, who may have been the longest imprisoned opposing king, is brought to the palace, his prison garb removed and he's invited to dine regularly at the king's table. It's an ironic ending to a chapter of such violence and despair. But it's crucial: why? Because Jehoiachin is of the Davidic line and his waiting in exile points to another king to come: Jesus!

And so this book of grim images and immense sorrow reflects God's persistent and sovereign pursuit of his people. It ends with an image of hospitality and grace, of a prisoner being set free and invited to a table, to a relationship. It reminds us how God continually invites us to himself, no matter what has happened in our lives or world. And he waits for us to come.

Reflection Questions:

1. Consider how you've expected something bad to turn out in your life, and then it took a different turn, a surprisingly grace-filled turn. What happened? What did it teach you?
2. What does this final chapter, with all its imagery and surprises from verse 1-34, reveal to you about God's character?
3. What lessons has Jeremiah taught you that you'll continue to try to integrate in your daily life?

Prayer: *Thank you, Sovereign King, that you have always pursued your people in grace, desiring that we live holy and obedient lives with you. Help us to come to your table daily and receive your grace that we might offer it to others, for the sake of Christ's kingdom. Amen.*

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