



## WEEK 3

# 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 3: Israel's Covenant Adultery (for 26 September; please read chapters 2-6 this week)**

*'Does a young woman forget her jewelry, a bride her wedding ornaments? Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number,' Jeremiah 2:32*

We live in an age where weddings are big business. Brides spend thousands on dresses they'll wear for one day, while much time, energy and money goes into making the event a celebration to remember. Sadly, though, one in three marriages in Australia end in divorce today. What if the same attention on the wedding day was also given to the marriage relationship? After all, a covenant relationship requires intentional work, patience and focus, from both wife and husband.

Throughout the biblical narrative, God's people are often referred to as his bride. Many New Testament references to the church as Christ's bride even point us to the coming 'marriage supper of the Lamb' (Revelation 19:9). So Jeremiah's metaphor of God's people as the bride is consistent with all of Scripture and speaks volumes about God's love for us!

The problem is, as we see in chapters 2-6, *this* bride is selfish and stubborn. Though we hear the Lord remembering in 2:2, 'the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness', the rest of chapter 2 to the end of chapter 6 reveals troubling metaphors about Israel as a faithless spouse, a promiscuous wife, even a prostitute who regularly commits 'spiritual adultery.' (For more on this consider reading the book of Hosea.)

What went wrong? We know that forsaking the Lord is a regular theme in the book of Jeremiah, that God's people turn away from him to other 'loves' time and again. Probably delivered during the reign of King Josiah (3:6), the relational messages in chapters 2-6 included several warnings of the violence that would come IF the people of Israel and Judah continued to break their covenant vows. As Theologian



Jill Firth said of these early chapters, ‘foreign invasion is not far away and the text repeatedly expresses amazement and disbelief that Israel could be so blind to God’s goodness and their own dangers.’ No matter how much Jeremiah calls the bride to repentance, to return (a word used often in these chapters) to their Merciful God for protection, they do not. Even as enemies will soon approach the gates of Jerusalem and take them into exile, they reject his call.

‘Surely as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so have you been treacherous to me, O House of Israel,’ declares the Lord,’ (3:20). Though he warns them disaster is coming, that consequences of their promiscuity are inevitable (4:17,18), the people of God are still unwilling to admit their guilt. Even knowing God’s path is better than the precarious one they’ve chosen, they keep *self* on the throne of their hearts. They go after other lovers, other ways to satisfy their selfish desires. Even God’s loving discipline does not soften their hearts. Though God desires to give them only good, their sins keep that good away (5:25). All of human nature is ‘greedy for unjust gain’, (6:13).

And so Jeremiah’s warnings to the bride are stubbornly ignored—to their peril (6:15). And when God sends another prophet, his son Jesus, to give the abundant life he has always intended for us, many struggle to accept his offer of goodness. Only a hard heart can look on Jesus and not be captivated by his grace and love, the same grace and love written across the pages of Jeremiah!

#### Reflection Questions:

1. What does God’s persistent pursuit of his bride say about his character?
2. Why do you think repentance is so hard?
3. How have you received the goodness that God offers you in Jesus?

*Prayer: Oh, Holy God. Forgive us for turning away from your love and mercy. Soften our hearts that we might receive from you all that you desire to give in your compassion toward us. In Jesus name, Amen.*

Sources: McCrindle Research; Jill Firth, ‘Desert Spring, Dead Dog Waterhole, Disappointment Creek: Is the God of the book of Jeremiah Bad for Women?’, English Standard Version Study Bible.