



WEEK 4

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 passages of Scripture and to reflect prayerfully in the week before each sermon.

Week 4: False Religion and Idolatrous People (for 3 October; please read chapters 7-9)

'This is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the Lord.' — Jeremiah 9: 23,24

We've all heard them: 'Aliens have invaded Planet Earth. Credit cards are a mark of the Beast. Vaccinations are the government's ploy to control us.' Conspiracy theories like these breed fear and deception; they harm innocent people and pervert the course of justice, as all conspiracy theories do. By definition, they *conspire* against the truth. And no amount of sincere belief makes them true.

We saw last week (Jer. 2-6) how God's heart broke over his 'faithless bride'. Now they are being confronted about their willingness to believe everything but the truth. Chapters 7-9 takes their spiritual adultery to another level—idolatry and deception. They think their worship in the temple is enough (7:2) while at the same time, they ignore God's commands to care for the vulnerable (7:5) and simultaneously go after Baal and other gods (7:8-11). They trust in deceptive words and go after other gods before coming to the temple, as if to cover their basis. They boast in their riches, 'wisdom' and might, but ignore God's ways.

In other words, they listen to anything if it feeds their fleshly appetites. So God sends Jeremiah to the temple to publicly rebuke them. Nonetheless, they love their idols too much to make room for the Almighty and though they pretend to be religious, they are anything but. This is a people whom Rev. Gary Millar, Principal at Queensland Theological College, calls 'spiritually deaf.' As a result, their *'spiritual*



deafness leads to spiritual hypocrisy which leads to spiritual death. False religion, idol worship and deceptive living kills. Only the true God gives life and meaning.

Still, the promise and truth of exile, wrath and judgment do not turn around this stubborn people. They continually sin against the Lord (8:14), grieve Jeremiah with their carved images and foreign idols (8:18-22) and continually deceive their neighbours. 'No one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves committing iniquity', (9:5).

Why? When the persistent goodness of God is clear, when Jeremiah speaks God's truth to them consistently, why would these people—why would we—seek meaning or satisfaction or identity (which is idolatry) in anything or anyone but God? Why would we believe the lies?

As John Stott says, 'an unwillingness to repent is a deep-seated condition of the heart. The heart is the source of trouble and there is no human remedy'. Only the God of Truth can change us. And only in knowing him personally, the one who 'exercises steadfast love, justice and righteousness' can the eyes of our heart be opened to the truth. The verb for 'know' in 9:24 'denotes much more than intellectual knowledge but rather intimate knowledge that follows the personal commitment of one life to another.'

Through Jesus, the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6), we can live the life God intends for us, and reflect the truth of his love to a world often trapped in lies.

Reflection Questions:

1. Have you, or someone you know, ever been caught up in a lie that affected your life in a negative way? How did you discover the truth?
2. What are some 'idols' that you or those you know might worship, or look to for meaning?
3. Reflect on Jeremiah 9:23, 24 as well as Paul's reference to this in 1 Corinthians 1:31. How can you 'boast' in knowing the Lord?

Prayer: *God of all Truth, thank you for giving us your wisdom and discernment today. Help us to know you better, and to follow you more closely as we reflect your grace and love to others. In Jesus name, Amen.*

Sources: *Enduringword.com* David Guzik, 'Jeremiah 9: What to take Glory in'; Gary Millar chapel talks, QTC; *English Standard Version Study Bible*; John Stott, 'Through the Bible, through the year'.