



WEEK 6

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 6: Jeremiah's confrontation (for 17 October; please read chapters 21-29 this week)
'This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."'—Jeremiah 29:10-14

All of us respond differently to conflict. Some avoid it at all costs while others dive in to clear the air as soon as possible. Conflict often brings about confrontations and few of us know how to confront others in a way that brings peace and growth. It's not easy to 'speak the truth in love' (Eph.4:15).

By this point in Jeremiah's journey, he's been well schooled in confrontations and has tried every type of communication to help his people listen to God's word. But they refuse. Still, in the process, Jeremiah has solidified his relationship with God, survived beatings, worked through his feelings of betrayal, and come to realise the trustworthiness of the Almighty to have the final say in this conflict.

These next nine chapters reflect God's standards for justice as Jeremiah confronts his foes and their beliefs (22: 3, 13). In fact, he links care for the poor with knowing God: "He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the Lord," (22:16). As a result, he opposes kings who have oppressed the poor (21:1-23:8), false prophets (23:9-40), his people (again) (24:1-25:38) and their many false beliefs (26:1-29:32). By now, he's learned to stand up for the truth of the Creator, for his steadfast love/character, showing how God reigns uniquely over all the other worldly authorities or false prophets.

Still, it must have been lonely for Jeremiah who remains faithful to the mission God had given him: to speak words of truth. As he confronts three different audiences with God's

truths—kings, prophets and the people of Israel—he hears God reinforce his desire for the people to listen to him, and he clings to the hope that, one day, they will. ‘I will build them up and not tear them down. I will plant them and not pluck them up. I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart,’ (24:6,7).

But the fulfillment of that promise is a long way off and none who hear God’s word through Jeremiah are happy about it. By 26:11, even after warning of 70 years of captivity, the officials of Judah proclaim that Jeremiah deserves death. He is spared death though; his mission of care and word remains crucial to God’s plan for his people.

As they are carried into exile in Babylon (remember our sermon series in the book of Daniel?), God through Jeremiah—quite amazingly—provides the people with a plan for survival: ‘Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare,’ (29:7). It is a plan for the common good, to seek their *shalom*.

After all the people’s disobedience, after all the confrontations, violence, judgment and now what will be a very long exile, God still waits. The key verses in 29:10-14 remind us of God’s faithfulness and desire for our good. Consider the important weight 29:11 carries now in light of all the times the people *hadn’t* listened or obeyed. God’s plan for their future and hope is in the context of their exile, an exile that happened because of their disobedience. Yet still God gives. This is grace—undeserved favour—he offers in spite of their hard hearts. In spite of their selfish ways, God waits for them to do what he’s always desired: seek him with all their hearts. And he still does with us.

Reflection Questions:

1. Why do you think God links caring for the poor and oppressed with knowing him?
2. Can you think of a time when you felt compelled to seek the ‘common good, the shalom’ of those around you, though you had little in common with them? What happened?
3. Set aside some time to sit with God and seek him with all your heart. What does that look like for you?

Prayer: *Gracious God, Like the people of Judah in exile, we are a people who are often led astray. Help us instead to care well for the ‘welfare of our city’ and to seek you alone for our future as our only hope. In Christ alone, Amen.*

Sources: *English Standard Version Study Bible*. Rev Gary Millar, Queensland Theological College.