



WEEK

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 8: The Last Days of Judah (for 24 October; please read chapters 34-39 this week)

'But I have spoken to you again and again, yet you have not obeyed me. Again and again I sent all my servants the prophets to you. They said, "Each of you must turn from your wicked ways and reform your actions; do not follow other gods to serve them. Then you will live in the land I have given to you and your ancestors." But you have not paid attention or listened to me.'—Jeremiah 35:14,15

One of the reasons adventure movies are so popular is not because of the endings. Everyone knows the good guy or girl will survive and the world will be 'saved'. No, we watch them to see how they'll get there, because the stakes are constantly being raised. The hero faces challenge after challenge and each becomes more dangerous. Just when we think they'll never survive, something happens and they make it through!

If these next six chapters of Jeremiah were a screenplay, we'd wonder if Jeremiah the prophet would make it out alive. His faithfulness to God gets him in more and more hot water with kings and leaders, and Jeremiah suffers greatly for his obedience. Having declared Judah and Israel's current sins (2-29) and future renewal (30-33), Jeremiah now depicts Judah's final days. And they're not pretty. He contrasts God's faithfulness with Judah's infidelity (34-35), Judah's stubborn rejection—again—of God's word (36) and Judah's last days before Jerusalem's destruction (37-39), all while trying to stay alive. (Note: these six chapters are not necessarily chronological; think flashbacks and Shakespearian drama!)

Jeremiah first warns Zedekiah (the second exile king of Judah and a descendent of David, 37:1) that King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon would burn his city and take his people into exile (34:2-7). He also instructs his people to free their slaves (34:8-16) which they do—for a second. They change their minds and re-enslave their fellow

Hebrews, increasing God's anger at their disobedience. God desired good for all, but the people of Judah again 'profane his name' (34:16) with the evil of slavery. And they paid the price. They became a 'horror to all the kingdoms' (34:17) as God—who is the ultimate authority—gives them into the hands of their enemies (34:20).

But one group of people, the nomadic Rechabites, listen to God and Jeremiah contrasts their favour with the coming disaster, their faithfulness with Judah's disobedience (35). By chapter 36 God sends Jeremiah to see if the house of Judah might just turn back (36:3) so 'I may forgive . . . it may be that they may plea for mercy' (36:7). Jeremiah's scribe Baruch reads the words to the King's leaders and they report it to Jehoiakim (the vassal king of Judah just before the Babylonian conquest). Jehoiakim, in a scene of absolute arrogance, cuts up the scroll and tosses it into the fire (36:23-26). He has Jeremiah and Baruch beaten and thrown into a dungeon prison cell for not giving him the 'truth' he wanted to hear.

The prophet is left to survive on bread, but still hears another word from God for Zedekiah. Jeremiah is released and sets out from Jerusalem when he's accused of deserting his people (37:11-15). Despite his track record for truth telling, Jeremiah is accused of lying, beaten, imprisoned and eventually tossed into a cistern to die. In a plot twist similar to the Parable of the Good Samaritan, God sends an Ethiopian eunuch (who trusts God) to rescue Jeremiah (38:7-13). In one final appeal to King Zedekiah, Jeremiah warns him to surrender to Babylon so their lives and the city will be spared. 'Obey now the voice of the Lord in what I say to you and it shall be well with you' (38:20). Instead, Zedekiah gives into fear of the other armies and Babylon does indeed besiege Jerusalem. Jeremiah is sent to live with the people and chapter 39 ends with a promise of life from God to the Ethiopian who rescued Jeremiah.

In each scene, Jeremiah's goal is simple: to reflect the true words of God to the people, despite the suffering he endures as a result. Both kings trust their own arrogance and suffer horrors of judgment. And when the people do not turn back their stubborn ways, God does fulfill his words of judgment and exile. Likewise, through Christ's suffering on the cross, we are given the ultimate invitation to turn from our sins—which he took at Calvary—and receive the grace, forgiveness and new life that comes in the resurrection, the promise of life for trusting in the One true God.

Reflection Questions:

1. What do you think keeps Jeremiah going despite the suffering he endures?
2. What do these six chapters reveal to you about God's character?
3. How can you trust God and care for those who are suffering?



Prayer: Gracious God, trusting you is indeed an adventure that surpasses any other, yet it can also be costly and difficult. Thank you for calling us into relationship with you. Please strengthen us by your Spirit and lead us into opportunities to care for others. In Jesus name. Amen.

Sources: English Standard Version Study Bible.