



WEEK 9

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 9: The Last Days of Judah (for 14 November, please read chapters 40-45):

'And all the people from the least to the greatest approached Jeremiah the prophet and said to him, "Please hear our petition and pray to the Lord your God for this entire remnant. For as you now see, though we were once many, now only a few are left. Pray that the Lord your God will tell us where we should go and what we should do."—Jeremiah 42:2,3

One of the greatest mistakes we can make with God is seeing him as a genie in a bottle, available to grant us our wishes any time we ask. If he'll answer this prayer or move in the way we want him to, then we will be happy and faithful 'Christians'.

But if this were the case, God would hardly be God, the One who made the universe and who alone knows the hearts and ways of all people. He is sovereign and he often acts in ways that might seem contrary to our desires, but always with our best interest in mind. And though we are indeed invited to bring specific prayers to the Lord, they are to be in the context of his will, not ours.

Jeremiah 40-45 reinforces this fickle nature of God's people again claiming to want God's will and direction, yet not accepting it when they don't like what they hear. It's not what they want. These chapters begin with Jeremiah being freed (40), then depict the plot against Gedaliah, Babylon's governor of Judah (41:1-10), and the rescue of hostages who had been taken by Gedaliah's assassins (41:11-18).

You'll remember that the Babylonians had taken all but the poorest inhabitants of Judah captive, under Governor Gedaliah. The people had resisted God's will and though Gedaliah is warned that a plot (led by his officer Ishmael) is brewing against him (40:14,15), he doesn't believe it (40:16). Ishmael and his men do indeed gruesomely murder the governor and his men and take hostages (41:1-10), setting out to cross over to the Ammonites who also opposed the Babylonians.

Knowing what's happened, the people approach Jeremiah, requesting a word from God. They tell him they'll accept God's word good or bad ((42:5). So Jeremiah tells them to stay put, not to go to Egypt, so that they might receive God's promise of blessing and mercy (42:10,11). If they disobey, then the Lord will not protect them and all they fear will happen (42:13-17). Jeremiah drives home the point in 42:21,22, 'I have told you today, but you still have not obeyed the Lord your God in all he sent me to tell you. So now, be sure of this: You will die by the sword, famine and plague in the place where you want to go to settle.'

They accuse Jeremiah of lying to them and the commanders take him and the people into Egypt anyway (43). God's response? 'They aroused my anger by burning incense to and worshiping other gods that neither they nor you nor your ancestors ever knew. Again and again I sent my servants the prophets, who said, "Do not do this detestable thing that I hate!" But they did not listen or pay attention; they did not turn from their wickedness' (44:3-5). More warnings, more terrible consequences and still the people remain steadfastly defiant: 'We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord!' (44: 16).

Though they'd begged for a word from God, it was not the one they wanted to hear. As a result, their lives were thrown further into chaos, and they would come to see, 'whose word will stand—mine or theirs' (44:28). God's blessing was removed, and Jeremiah and Baruch were left grieving—again—for the self-centred, idolatrous people. In their grief, though, God promises the two faithful men will escape with their life (45:5). It is a promise that remains for those who obey God's word, the only word that stands. Because, 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth' (John 1:14).

Reflection Questions:

1. Can you think of a time when you—or someone you knew—was disappointed that God didn't answer your prayer in the way you'd hoped? What happened next?
2. What do these five chapters reveal to you about God's character?
3. How can you allow God's word, fulfilled in the person of Jesus, to become your anchor, even in difficult times?

Prayer: Sovereign Lord, forgive us for the times we defiantly say no to your will. In your great mercy, please give us ears to hear your voice and courage to act on your word in all we do and say. In Jesus name. Amen.

Sources: English Standard Version Study Bible.