

Sunday, August 19, 2018—Jeremiah 47-49

The climate in Israel is desert-like. For most of the year, the land was dry, but spring and fall rains provided the right amount of moisture to sustain crops. Those rains would run off into waterways called wadis. Empty for much of the year, these wadis would swell with the rushing runoff. The water was an unstoppable force.

God used that picture to describe the march of the Babylonians on the Philistines (47:2). The rumble of chariot wheels and horses hooves would be like the rush of mighty waters. These forces were coming for all of the nations in the Middle East as Babylon rose up in Yahweh's service.

God was bringing judgment on His people for their idolatry and disobedience. He told the Moab their punishment was a result of their trusting their works and treasures (48:7). Like Israel, they trusted in the creation rather than the Creator, and they committed great sin in worshiping their idols (48:13). The time had come to pay for those errors.

Even those who did not deserve such punishment would face the consequences of others' sin (49:12). In reality, there was not a single person who was righteous. Only God Himself is perfect. The consequences of sin had affected the land and all the people, and God was bringing a purifying power from the east to cleanse His possession.

What God puts into motion cannot be stopped by financial power or military might. Praise Him for His righteousness and His integrity to do what He says. Pray for personal righteousness that pleases and honors Him.

Saturday, August 18, 2018—Jeremiah 43-46

God calls His people to faithfulness, not success. He said He desired mercy, not sacrifice (Hosea 6:6), because He looks at the condition of the soul rather than the outward appearance or practice. To be sure, outward action and corporate worship are important, but they are meaningless if they come from a soul that is empty or hard.

Jeremiah was a failure by human measures. In his 40 years of ministry, he had one convert—his scribe Baruch. Jeremiah told the people they were not to go to Egypt because God was going to use Babylon to destroy that nation. The people went anyway, and they took Jeremiah and Baruch with them. While in Egypt, Jeremiah told them they needed to repent of the idol worship they were practicing in Egypt. The people refused, saying they were better off when they worshiped idols than when they lived exclusively in obedience to Yahweh (44:17).

Their claims sound similar to those who complained to Moses generations earlier, who wished they were in Egypt as captives rather than in the desert as free people because they had plenty to eat. Sin has a subtle way of dulling the senses to reality and making sinners comfortable when they face what outsiders see is obvious trouble.

Being rejected while being faithful is hard. God was continually rejected by His people. Baruch felt miserable, so God spoke a word directly to him—a lowly servant—and assured him of His protection (45:5). He continued to speak to Jeremiah to assure him of His pleasure.

Pray for a life which hears from God and faithfully obeys.

Friday, August 17, 2018—Jeremiah 40-42

In Acts 12, Peter found himself miraculously delivered from the chains of prison through the work of an angel. So amazing was the process, Peter at first thought he was having a vision but then realized God was actively working to make him free. He went to the home of Mary and her son John Mark to tell them of the astounding development.

In Jeremiah 40, the captain of the Babylonian guard comes to Jeremiah, who himself is in chains like his fellow countrymen being carried off to Babylon. The captain of the guard came to Jeremiah and told him Yahweh was the one at work bringing judgment on his people, but Jeremiah

would now go free and could choose to go wherever he desired. A foreigner spoke truth, freed Jeremiah, and gave him provisions. Only God can do something so out of the ordinary!

Times of crisis often reveal the true character of a person. Like a tea bag placed in boiling water, a person in crisis reveals what is inside as the pressures bring those inner truths into outer realities. The king of Ammon sent an agent to assassinate the leader the Babylonians had put in place. When the assassin had been run out of the country, many of God's people began to make a plan to flee their current situation and go to Egypt, something God had warned them earlier not to do. Crisis can cause the previously faithful to sacrifice obedience for something that seems safer.

Pray for faithfulness. Praise God for powerful answers to prayer.

Thursday, August 16, 2018—Jeremiah 37-39

To become who God wants us to be we sometimes have to go to places we never planned to go. The Puritan prayer book *The Valley of Vision* includes a prayer which speaks to the paradoxes of life. A part of that prayer says, "Let me learn by paradox, that the way down is the way up, that to be low is to be high, that the broken heart is the healed heart, that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit, that the repenting soul is the victorious soul, that to have nothing is to possess all, that to bear the cross is to wear the crown, that to give is to receive, that the valley is the place of vision."

Jeremiah spoke of this paradox in Jerusalem. He told the people they needed to go with the people from Babylon into captivity rather than trying to stay in the city and repel the Babylonians. Any who attempted this would die by sword, famine, or plague (38:2). In order to bless His people, God first had to discipline and refine them.

Jeremiah himself experienced paradox as he attempted to enjoy a respite from the Chaldean invasion but was accused of defecting to the Babylonians and thrown into captivity. He did not change his message even though it cost him dearly. A compassionate foreigner pled Jeremiah's case before the king (another paradox) and had him removed from the mud. When Jerusalem fell, Jeremiah received grace from Nebuchadnezzar while the king and his family suffered.

Praise God for working in strange ways for His glory.

Wednesday, August 15, 2018—Jeremiah 33-36

To forgive is not to restore trust. To forgive someone is to absolve the guilt, but this does not demand a restoration of trust and relationship. This is what makes God's declaration to Jeremiah remarkable (33:3). God said He would forgive His people, but He was also going a step further. He was going to restore. "This city will bear on my behalf a name of joy, praise, and glory before the nations of the earth, who will hear of all the prosperity I will give them. They will tremble with awe because of all the good and all the peace I will bring about for them" (33:9). Fields would fill up. Flocks would flourish. The Temple would be busy with praise and sacrifice.

In Jeremiah 31, God said He would write a new covenant on the hearts of His people. That work would be done by the Righteous Branch (33:15), who would rise up and save God's people. The work would be so thorough and obvious that Jerusalem itself would be renamed The Lord Is Our Righteousness (33:16). Before that, the necessary work of destruction and discipline would visit at the hand of the Babylonians (34:1-22).

God was looking for people who were committed to His word and His righteousness like the Rechabites (35:1-19). Despite hardship, they endured. Despite temptation, they remained disciplined. They listened, and they obeyed. God's people lived recklessly, typified by a king who heard the words of judgment and destroyed the scroll which prophesied it (36:23).

Praise God for forgiveness and restoration. Live righteously.

Tuesday, August 14, 2018—Jeremiah 30-32

Reading Scripture and learning its meaning are worthy endeavors. To gain the most from God's word, the reader needs not only single verses and pithy thoughts for living each day. Knowing the larger context of sections, chapters, and entire books helps explain why God spoke and to whom He was speaking. That allows accurate, contemporary application.

Many enjoy quoting Jeremiah 29:11 because of God's promise for a future and a hope. They often miss the preceding verses that speak of 70 years of captivity and the following chapter where God speaks of great suffering. "I will discipline you justly, and I will by no means leave you unpunished" (30:11b). He promises, too, to restore His people and judge those nations which took them into exile. God paints a big picture of what He is doing, why He is doing it, and how it will come about.

Jeremiah grieved what he saw happening in Jerusalem, and he dreaded what he prophesied was coming. The news surely had an emotional, physical, and spiritual effect. To hear God say there would be renewal and to imagine the people's restoration of spiritual worship and physical abundance was comforting medicine on a deep wound. "At his I awoke and looked around. My sleep had been most pleasant to me" (31:26).

To convey his faith in God's promise, Jeremiah purchased a plot of land and buried the deed. One day, he would be able to unearth it and own the land which would once again belong to God's people (32:1-25).

Praise God today for His faithful to discipline and restore.

Monday, August 13, 2018—Jeremiah 27-29

God uses His people to speak to one another and shape them for His glory and service. He also uses His people as messengers and examples to a watching world. Jeremiah was such a messenger in a most challenging way. He spoke to the people of Israel, but he also sent messengers to the surrounding countries, who were to submit to Babylon, God's chosen instrument, or they would surely crumble under His mighty hand.

Not surprisingly, no one was pleased with Jeremiah's message. Other prophets were claiming the siege would be brief, and Babylon would return the Temple articles soon. Likely, the surrounding countries dismissed Jeremiah's message as pure lunacy. Why would anyone willingly submit to outside rule? How could God be a good God and allow such nonsense? Why would unbelievers trust anything from God's speaker?

Jeremiah himself wished the false prophets were right. He did not want to endure the discipline God had planned, yet he knew what God said would come to pass. He spoke against the false prophet Hananiah, and Hananiah died with the year (28:17). God confirmed His speaker in the short-term so the listeners could be certain the long-term was accurate.

Jeremiah then shared the most famous words of his letter. God had plans for a great future for His people, but they would endure 70 years of captivity before its fulfillment. They were, therefore, to seek prosperity in Babylon and wait patiently for His words to become reality.

Praise God for His certain word. Pray for patience to wait on Him.