

Tuesday, August 11, 2020—Jeremiah 21-23

The siege of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians lasted for more than two years. During that time, Nebuchadnezzar began deporting people to Babylon and appointed Zedekiah as the new king. God said Zedekiah would be the last leader because He was finally and fully going to hand His people and city over to the Babylonians. The people had a choice to die fighting or to surrender and live (21:9-10).

If they chose to live, they were to live with God's standards still guiding their lives. "This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood" (22:3). Though they were going to live outside the Promised Land, they were to live as holy people.

Circumstances and surroundings don't limit God or change His expectations.

God was going to remove them for a time and then bring them back. He was preparing them for a day when the Righteous Branch, a descendant of David, would take the throne and be the shepherd and the king His people needed (23:5-6). Prophets had made promises for God that God Himself had never spoken (23:8-40). This Branch would speak the words of God that were true and life-giving. God was going to accomplish this in time, and in the days to come it would all make sense (23:20).

Thank God for fulfilling His promises. Live by His standards in comfort and in difficulty.

Monday, August 10, 2020—Jeremiah 17-20

God had given the Promised Land to His people. They gathered crops they didn't plant and lived in houses they did not build. They were blessed beyond measure, yet they strayed from sole allegiance to God, so He was going to give away all the gifts He had given them (17:3).

They had grown to trust themselves and the tangible things around them instead of Yahweh. "Cursed is the man who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. . . . But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him" (17:5, 7). Those who trust in Him will be confident and flourish in all conditions, but the one who follows his heart will be deceived (17:8-9). He had given them instruction for living, like keeping the Sabbath, but they continually ignored and disobeyed.

God sent Jeremiah to the potter's house to watch the process of forming clay into something useful. (18:1-12). When the creation is flawed, the potter starts over. God had called His people to repentance, but they refused, so He was starting over. Rather than the easier process of being reformed on the wheel, they were going to be smashed to pieces (19:10).

The officials punished Jeremiah for his prophecy (20:2), and Jeremiah complained to God about the difficulties he faced (20:7-18). Obeying God is the only option, but it will not always be easy. Pray for an awareness of the goodness and greatness of God to outweigh suffering.

Sunday, August 9, 2020—Jeremiah 13-16

God is faithful to His people, so He repeatedly and clearly communicates His

thoughts to them. He uses words, symbols, and actions so His people have ample opportunity to know the truth and respond to it. Any failure to understand and obey falls on the people.

God instructed Jeremiah to purchase a linen belt, a beautiful possession and accessory to his clothing, and to hide it in a crevice in the rocks. When Jeremiah went back to get it, the belt was useless. Likewise, God's people had been His precious possession, but they were now useless because they had disconnected themselves from Him. Instead, they trusted in other gods (13:25) and made themselves of no use to Yahweh.

When drought came to the land, God said this paralleled their spiritual emptiness. He had been faithful to nourish them, but they had not soaked it up. Now there was literal famine in the land, and everyone was suffering. How much more deeply were they suffering because He was not giving them spiritual nourishment? He even told Jeremiah not to pray for the people any longer (14:11). There was no stopping the coming judgment (15:1-9), but there was already in place a path for restoration (16:14-15).

"Do any of the worthless idols of the nations bring rain? Do the skies themselves send down showers? No, it is you, O Lord our God. Therefore, our hope is in you, for you are the one who does all this" (14:22). Profess your trust in God alone. Live in this truth daily.

Saturday, August 8, 2020—Jeremiah 9-12

Jeremiah was known as "the weeping prophet." He saw the decline of his people and the destruction of his beloved city, and it moved him to tears. He wished he could leave the unrighteous behavior and unbelievable devastation and move to the desert (9:1-3). God Himself said He would weep over the discipline He had to bring (9:10), and He called on the women of Judah to weep on behalf of the people (9:17-25).

God wanted Judah and the world to be clear about who He was and what He deserved. "But the Lord is God; he is the living God, the eternal King. When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath" (10:10). The gods His people and the surrounding nations had served for so long would not survive His judgment. Jeremiah knew he could only survive if God were merciful (10:24).

God had made a covenant with His people that was incredibly simple, "Obey me" (11:7). Instead, generation after generation wandered where their affections and attentions took them, and they broke their covenant promises to remain allegiant only to Him. Jeremiah had seen so many who honored God with their lips but whose hearts were far from Him (12:2). Jeremiah wondered why God allowed them to flourish.

God said the measure of true success was one's standing before Him. In compassion, He was going to renew His people after their punishment. He desires to share His love and joy, but His people cannot divide their hearts and serve others. He deserves complete devotion.

Friday, August 7, 2020—Jeremiah 6-8

Children are rarely as shocked as when their parents decide to give away their toys. Repeated requests to clean up the room have gone unheeded. Warnings of

punishment and restriction have been deemed unthreatening. Then, when mom and dad begin bagging up the toys to take to the resale store, the children look confused, wondering what could possibly be wrong. Some begin weeping and begging for mercy.

For centuries, God called His people to repentance and faithfulness. He loved His children and did not want them to continue walking in a self-destructive path. When His cup of patience was empty and His cup of wrath was full, Jerusalem was attacked. They had ignored Him long enough (6:19). They had downplayed His warnings to their detriment. A loving God has to express judgment, or He is not loving at all.

They had come to the Temple all their lives and believed they would be safe because it was His house. God would protect His dwelling no matter what. God said their safety lay not in His power but in their faithfulness to Him and in their service to one another (7:1-11). They were neither faithful to Him nor sacrificial toward others, so He could not sustain such a sorry lot. It was not honoring to His name. It brought no glory to His Law. It perpetuated shame and weakness among His people.

God was deeply troubled by the judgment He was bringing (8:21-22). Live so your life brings Him glory and pleasure, not shame and sorrow.

Thursday, August 6, 2020—Jeremiah 3-5

God loves His people. He wants them to know Him and love Him in return. God teaches His people so they can know Him intimately and more fully. He expresses Himself through nature to everyone but expresses Himself more completely through the teaching of His word.

The prophets filled this vital teaching role for Israel and Judah. They put God's thoughts into contemporary words and pictures so God's message was clear. Through Hosea decades earlier, God showed how His people were committing spiritual adultery, yet He was willing to take them back. Through Jeremiah, He said His people had seen the devastation of spiritual adultery and spiritual divorce yet were unwilling to change. He had extended mercy to no avail. The only option now was punishment in order to cleanse the land of their sinful actions and its consequences (3:1-24).

An army was coming from the north to devastate the land, and the people were going to be appalled. They would cry out to God wondering why this was happening. "Your own conduct and actions have brought this upon you. This is your punishment. How bitter it is! How it pierces the heart" (4:18). Great misery was coming to Jerusalem and its people.

Israel and Judah had been unfaithful (5:11). No one was righteous. God had supplied everything they needed, yet they repeatedly turned to others for protection, provision, and pleasure. They had served foreign gods, so now they would serve foreign masters.

Tell God He is completely holy and righteous. Everything He does is right. Thank Him for the grace He gives in Jesus.

Wednesday, August 5, 2020—Obadiah, Jeremiah 1-2

When the bad guy is arrested, how do you react? When the speeding motorist is pulled over by the trooper, what thoughts go through your mind? If you have no connection to the guilty party, you likely smile or maybe celebrate. If they one detained

is family or friend, your emotions are something far more complicated.

Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. Jeremiah wrote from personal experience about the warnings he gave to his own people and the misery of the devastation they experienced because they didn't repent. Obadiah wrote to the bystanders to the tragedy. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Edom should have lamented the suffering of their relatives. Instead, they celebrated and helped sack the city. They gloated that no one could bring them harm because of the fortifications around their capital, but God assured them He would bring them down. His judgment was coming for all. Israel was an example for everyone watching. Instead of celebrating, they needed to repent and seek God's mercy.

Jeremiah had the unenviable task of prophesying to Judah in their last days. God assured Jeremiah He had called him and would strengthen him for the task. The people of Israel had followed worthless idols and become worthless themselves (2:5). They had exchanged the living God for lifeless idols. God called them to shudder over this travesty (2:12).

Punishment of others may be just but should not stir celebration. It should be a reminder of where we all would be without the grace of God.