His people needed to do the unthinkable to survive—leave the city and surrender to Babylon. Their sin for generations now led to this devastating consequence. God was going to allow Jerusalem to be ransacked and razed, and His people were going into captivity. They now had a choice—surrender and survive or fight and die.

 There would certainly be questions as people looked upon the devastation. Why had God allowed this? How could He? The people needed to be prepared to admit their own guilt. They had violated the covenant (22:9), and God had promised this would be the result. The hearts of His people had bent toward dishonest gain and selfish interest rather than defending the widow and orphan and insuring justice.

 By devastating the leaders and the nation, God was leaving no option for restoration except by His mighty hand. His Righteous Branch would come to rule wisely and do what was right in the land (23:5-6). To see that day, the people had to admit their guilt and trust Him.

 Praise God for mercy and restoration through Jesus.

Saturday, August 12, 2017—Jeremiah 24-26

 God is faithful, so God is consistent. He promises never to leave or forsake His people, yet He continually tells them to demonstrate their love for Him through their obedience. His faithful love will not tolerate unfaithful children. His consistency to His word requires His discipline.

 Jeremiah heralded this faithfulness and consistency throughout his ministry, and as the unfaithfulness of Judah increased, his message grew less and less popular. During the reign of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem as punishment for disobedience (26:1-6). The priests, prophets, and people were so scandalized they threatened to kill Jeremiah (26:8) and took him to the king. Some wise elders stepped forward and quoted the prophet Micah (26:18) who had said the same thing a generation or more earlier. Micah was not killed. In fact, King Hezekiah responded to Micah’s words with repentance. The elders urged this threat to end. The consistency of God’s message saved His faithful servant’s life.

 Despite the hardship, Jeremiah continued sharing the coming judgment of God’s disobedient children. There would be a cup or wrath poured out on them and the surrounding nations (25:15-38), and His people would spend 70 years in Babylon before He punished Babylon as well (25:1-14). Jeremiah’s job was to deliver the message, not judge the fruit. God Himself would know who was healthy and who was rotten (24:1-10).

 Thank God for His word and His faithfulness to its truths. Seek a life which aligns with and obeys it daily.

*Read the Bible Through 2017*

Week 32

Sunday, August 6, 2017—Jeremiah 3-5

 When God orchestrates discipline or allows difficulty, His people wonder why. They are not sure whether they have done something wrong or are doing everything right. Jesus told His disciples that following Him would not be easy (see John 16:33 and Luke 9:57-62, for example), so challenges come to the obedient, and judgment comes to the wicked. Personal evaluation and corporate discussion can help determine the status.

 Through Jeremiah, God was crystal clear about His people’s standing. They had defiled themselves through idol worship and made them detestable, like a prostitute or an unfaithful wife (3:1-5). The physical suffering they were experiencing was an illustration of the spiritual devastation they were bringing on themselves—this in spite of the example of Israel’s judgment which should have moved them to repentance. In His great mercy, God called them back from unfaithfulness and stubbornness to repentance and restoration (3:14-4:4).

 One of Jerusalem’s great problems was hypocrisy. God said the people were using words of devotion, but they were swearing falsely (5:2). There was not a single person in Jerusalem who dealt honestly and sought truth (5:1). God was raising up a foreign power to overtake Jerusalem. Their spiritual service to false gods would become physical service to foreign leaders (5:18-19). Jeremiah’s task was to proclaim this judgment (5:14).

 Evaluate your faithfulness to God. Which idols compete for your true faithfulness to Him? Are your identity, security, and activity aligned with Him or something else? Ask Him and others for honest answers.

Monday, August 7, 2017—Jeremiah 6-8

 Jeremiah’s task was unenviable. God was using him to pronounce judgment on Judah, and Jeremiah could not contain the wrath of the Lord he felt within (6:11). This was not a pleasurable gloating but a dire warning of what lay ahead. He felt compelled to share it with all. Add to his personal heaviness the utter disdain the people were developing toward him, and this was a calling no one would want. His obedience meant derision.

 The people had avoided God’s direction and ignored God’s messengers (6:13-17). Like other prophets, Jeremiah pointed out this blatant sin. The time was closer than ever for judgment. God’s refining had not purified them, so they were rejected silver (6:30). In His amazing grace, God continued to provide an opportunity for repentance and reformation (7:3-8), but He had little hope they would overcome their personal deception. Stunningly, He told Jeremiah not to pray for the people any longer (7:16). He was going to bring desolation on the land (7:34).

 Unlike Jeremiah, many others called themselves prophets and spoke words of peace and safety (8:11). There was no shame in any of them for their blatant lies and open rebellion, so God had no choice but to remove His blessing from the land and His protection of the people. Nothing else had led them to repentance and His glory. This drastic move was dreadful and stirred mourning and questioning of God’s goodness and presence (8:18-22), yet there was no other way without repentance.

 Worship God today for His holy and righteous ways.

Tuesday, August 8, 2017—Jeremiah 9-12

 Jeremiah is often called the Weeping Prophet because of his intense emotion toward Judah and its destruction. He begins Jeremiah 9 wishing his head were a spring and his eyes a fountain to be able to weep enough tears to match the devastation he was seeing. Despite the warnings God had given through previous prophets, this prophet himself is astounded by what God is allowing. “What man is wise enough to understand this? Who has been instructed by the Lord and can explain it? Why has this land been ruined and laid waste like a desert that no one can cross?” (9:12). God’s response mimics his others. Sin is utterly devastating, and what they are seeing and experiencing is because of their disobedience.

 God was addressing the sin which had condemned their hearts. Despite their heritage as Israel, their spiritual conditions were no different than Egypt, Edom, Moab, and Ammon (9:25). These nations worshiped senseless idols (10:8), and Judah was following along, giving lip service to Yahweh but heart service to others. Jeremiah begged for the grace and mercy of God to correct him for his error (10:24). God said the cure was simple—obey the covenant He had established generations earlier (11:4). Jeremiah had his direction from Yahweh to declare these truths, and many were threatening him for doing so (11:21). God would deal with them.

 Admit your frustrations (12:1-4). Repent of idolatry and sinful habits. Declare God’s righteousness and the joy and purpose He gives.

Wednesday, August 9, 2017—Jeremiah 13-16

 Good teachers use more than words. To convey information well, they often will use visual aids and active techniques to help students do more than listen. They want them to change and truly learn the truth.

 God told Jeremiah to take a linen belt and hide it in a rocky crevice. Days later, he unearthed the belt to find it ruined. In the same way, God said, He had bound Israel about Him for His glory, yet they had allowed themselves to become completely useless through their stubbornness and idolatry (13:10). Their acts were nothing less than shameful (13:27).

 The drought in the land was affecting man and beast. The physical need led Jeremiah to a spiritual confession. Their souls were as dry and desperate as the land and animals around them. “Although our sins testify against us, O Lord, do something for the sake of your name. For our backsliding is great; we have sinned against you” (14:7).

 God told Jeremiah for a third time not to pray for the people of Judah (14:11) because they were so hard-hearted. Instead, Jeremiah prayed for himself and gave God a reason to answer his personal prayer. “For your glory remember your covenant,” Jeremiah prayed (14:21), yet God was intent on sending disciplinary destruction on the land (15:1-4). Until there was true repentance, God would not move. When, however, He saw genuine brokenness, He would work powerfully (15:19-21). One way or another, He would teach them that He was Yahweh (16:21).

 Thank God for being a patient teacher and loving Father.

Thursday, August 10, 2017—Jeremiah 17-20

 The root of all sin is selfishness, a desire to please or provide for self which supersedes all concern for anyone or anything else. Temptation creates a sense of dissatisfaction in the person that drives him to sin. That sin is always a trust in a person or object to bring satisfaction. Often this is satisfaction God has promised at a later time or through different means or a pleasure God has forbidden. This sin leads to destruction every time. “Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord” (17:5).

 In contrast, Jeremiah saw the blessing promised to the one who trusted in Yahweh. His confidence was in Him. “He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its root by the stream” (17:8). Heat and drought have no effect on this kind of tree, so the trials of life present no burden or worry. The heart is deceitful (17:9), but the heart surrendered to Yahweh finds satisfaction, provision, and hope.

 God was looking for a people who would honor Him with their words and actions. The Sabbath was the most overt difference between Yahweh’s people and the rest of the world, yet they dishonored Him and His day (17:19-27). He wanted to shape them like a potter, yet they were headed toward the day He would crush them and start over (18:1-19:15).

 Even in trouble (20:7-18), ask God to shape your heart more and more into one aligned solely with Him.

Friday, August 11, 2017—Jeremiah 21-23

 Jeremiah and the kings of Israel had seen God do miraculous works in driving away their enemies, so the request from King Zedekiah was no surprise. He came to Jeremiah asking him to inquire of Yahweh as to whether He might work powerfully again against Nebuchadnezzar. This time God gave the worst news of all. He would not act in deliverance from Babylon but in order to turn His people over to them (21:3-8).