

Jeremiah

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Dr. Paschal takes us deep into the book of the prophet Jeremiah. One of the strengths of these lessons is the connections that are made throughout the Bible that both place Jeremiah in the Old Testament context, and also thematically as a whole. In the materials, you will find timelines, backgrounds, and cross-references that provide you the teacher a wealth of knowledge in which to teach from.

There are more materials in each lesson, then you could possibly teach in a normal session, so you the teacher will have to make tough decisions on what to cut out in the materials. As with most teaching, one of the hardest decisions that you will make is what not to say or teach. Dr. Paschal also provides some questions that you can use to help people go deeper into the text. If you are looking for an orderly book, Jeremiah is not it, so the thematic based approach that Dr. Paschal uses is very helpful to understand the big concepts. Please familiarize yourself with the Historical overview in lesson one, which I found to be extremely helpful.

Here is an overview of the lessons.

- Lesson 1: The Life and Times of Jeremiah, Part One
- Lesson 2: The Life and Times of Jeremiah, Part Two
- Lesson 3: The Life and Times of Jeremiah, Part Three
- Lesson 4: The Prayers of Jeremiah
- Lesson 5: The Failure of Leadership
- Lesson 6: The Problem of Sin
- Lesson 7: The Return of Israel after 70 Years
- Lesson 8: Messiah and Future Salvation

Jeremiah, Lesson 1 **The Life and Times of Jeremiah, Part I**

The Historical Context

Jeremiah was born 648 BC and called to his prophetic ministry in 627 BC. The relevant history of his period begins much earlier. In 734/3 BC Assyria dominated and subjugated first the Northern Kingdom of Israel and then Judah. Israel lost its independence and was governed by foreign governors. Judah remained under Judean Kings, but was dominated by Assyria.

Under Josiah a measure of Judean independence was re-won. The power of Assyria was beginning to fade. Eventually the southern part of the Assyrian Kingdom in the Tigris and Euphrates valley near the Persian Gulf would break off and form the Babylonian Empire. In the waning years of the Assyrian Empire, before the rise of Babylon, Josiah was able to grab power for Judea.

Part of Assyria's hold over its client kingdoms was the use of Assyrian religion. Vassal kings and peoples were required to follow Assyrian rites (see p. 14, Kidner, *The Message of Jeremiah*). Josiah initiated a reform of Judah's religion to rid the country of these vestiges of foreign influence (2 Chronicles 34). This is both a religious and political reform--it is part of the overthrow of Assyria and a re-establishment of the King's power in Judah. Jeremiah begins his ministry in the midst of Josiah's reform. He is an

enthusiastic supporter of the reform, and in his early ministry goes out to the towns and villages of Judah preaching in order to help the reform movement.

In reading the book of Jeremiah it is helpful to understand that the book is not written in chronological order. At the end of the lesson dates are given for the events related in particular chapters. Some chapters cannot be dated. This may seem strange to us—we are used to going through a story from start to finish. However, prophets had no such goal. Prophecies were given individually and then collected later into writings. Jeremiah is unique because a particular scribe is mentioned (Baruch) who wrote down the prophecies as Jeremiah dictated them to him (Jeremiah 36:4). We do not know how much Baruch had to do with the final order of the book—but it does show that more than one hand was involved in the writing.

As a whole the book of Jeremiah moves from optimism (approval of Josiah's work) to growing pessimism (as Josiah's heirs fail to keep the covenant) to final hope anticipating the return of the exiles and more. Jeremiah is tasked with telling his people unpleasant truths—at times telling the King that his best hope is to surrender to his enemies. The patriots of Judah who want to remain independent hate this. Other prophets exist who tell quite a different message and often Jeremiah is alone or one of few who are speaking the truth to the people. He does not enjoy his role, but stays with it until the end.

What can learn from Jeremiah?

- 1) We get insight into what obedience to God may mean. Jeremiah's life is anything but comfortable—and God does not promise Jeremiah comfort. Jeremiah's life shows us that faithfulness to God is good—but challenging.
- 2) We gain insight into the nature of sin and rebellion. The people of Jeremiah's time do horrible things—they sacrifice infants in the fire to get their gods to do what they want. But, all that rebellion starts in the human heart and in a failure to understand what it means to follow God.
- 3) Jeremiah's time is above all a failure of leadership. The problems of the nation start at the top—with political and spiritual leadership that will say anything and do anything to get what they want and to protect their own comfort.
- 4) We see into the nature of God. On the hand God deals with the sin of the people through judgment and disaster. This only happens after much pleading and giving the opportunity to repent. But God cannot allow evil to go on without justice. At the same God always has a plan to restore the nation and return the people. There is no judgment for revenge or simply to punish. God always intends to restore Israel to Jerusalem and David's family to the throne.
- 5) God has further and deeper plan for salvation. God intends to start a new covenant which will change the hearts of the people. God wants a people who not only know what righteousness is, but want to do it.

6) Read 1:1-19. What do we learn about Jeremiah in this chapter?

v 1 He is a son of a priest at Anathoth. Anathoth was the home of Abiathar (2 Kings 2: 26ff) of the priestly house of Eli. Solomon eventually moved Abiathar out of power and sent him back to Anathoth. Anathoth seemed to be home for many priestly families, and was probably a rival with Jerusalem for spiritual leadership in Judah. Jeremiah's loyalty to Josiah--whose reform centralized worship in Jerusalem--might not be popular in his hometown.

v 2 Jeremiah's ministry lasted from the 13th year of Josiah's reign (627) to past the exile (587)--more than 40 years. He saw the rise and fall of several kings and the destruction of his country. During that time he often had to tell the people of Judah bad news: God was not with Judah, but was in fact working with Judah's enemies! Needless to say, this message was not well received. Jeremiah was to suffer persecution for his message. Moreover, he did not enjoy seeing his people suffer, and often wept and prayed for his people.

vv 4ff. What is the nature of Jeremiah's call? What is Jeremiah's response?

v 5 God knew him before he was born. God called and appointed him.

The concept is that Jeremiah is not an accident. His very being is part of God's plan. His call is not, therefore, based on his (Jeremiah's) ability, but on God's sovereignty. With

all the difficulties of Jeremiah's life, it had to be comforting to know none of his hardships were unknown or unanticipated by God.

v 6 Jeremiah feels too young--feels unable to speak. Jeremiah here focuses on his own ability.

v 7 God's word focuses on God's ability.

He sends---it is not Jeremiah's task.

He gives the word and commands--it is not Jeremiah's word. The word "given" = "appointed" emphasizes that this is God's commission.

He will rescue--Jeremiah has nothing to fear (although he may have some complaints about God's timing as he goes along!)

Note: Jeremiah's call is much like Moses'. Both are called to go to the nation, both feel inadequate to the call and try to beg off. Moses' story begins when he is rescued from the infanticide ordered by the Pharaoh and raised under the protection of Pharaoh's daughter. Jeremiah is told he was chosen before he was born. The OT almost always emphasizes the unworthiness of God's chosen agents—which in turn emphasizes the fact that God enables those whom God calls. The talent or worthiness of the agent is never in question.

v 9 God touches Jeremiah's mouth--this is God's commissioning and empowering of Jeremiah. Compare this to Isaiah's call in Isaiah 6—in both cases the mouth of the

prophet is touched to enable them to speak the word of God. No human being can simply decide to speak for God—they must be enabled to speak for God.

Note the power of God's word:

a) Jeremiah is set over nations--he will oversee the tearing down of nations. In particular he speak to Israel and Judah, but his word his also universal. Jeremiah comes in the first part to speak God's word of judgment against those who are sinning.

b) It is also a positive ministry; this word will also build up and plant. Jeremiah's ministry will root out evil and will help replace it with God's new life. Actually, his words will anticipate the new work which God will do in the age of the Messiah and the Spirit.

Read 1:11-16 What are the first two signs Jeremiah sees? (vv 11-16) What is the meaning of each sign?

v 11 The Almond. Almond in Hebrew is pronounced "sha-ked," while the Hebrew word for "watching" is pronounced "sho-ked." The almond symbolizes that God is watching. God is involved in His creation. He is active and getting ready to act.

The nation may think they are in charge and have the freedom to act without consequences, but God is watching and aware and ready to act in judgment.

v 13 The boiling pot from the North = God's judgment coming from the North (=Babylon; north would be the direction from which the invasion would come). The idolatry and evil of the people mean that they will *not* be delivered as they had before from earlier enemies. Now, the approaching enemy is a sign of God's coming judgment.

Note the reasons given for the judgment:

Jeremiah 1:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ And I will declare my judgments against them, for all their evil in forsaking me.

They have made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their own hands.

The basic sin of Israel is forsaking God for idols—idols they make with their own hands. There will be other specific charges against the nation, but it all stems from the fact that they have left the worship of God and obedience to God and have been seduced with the worship of idols.

What is God's final word to Jeremiah?

v 17 Jeremiah will be tempted to give into fear.

v 18 He will have to stand against the political and religious powers of his day.

v 19 He will experience active opposition and persecution.

v 19 His opposition will not overcome him. God will rescue Jeremiah.

This is hardly encouraging! Jeremiah's first prophecy is that he himself will have to go through trouble and opposition. The only sure thing is that he will not be overcome by this. It will not be easy.

The Lord's honesty was important. Jeremiah did experience frequent rejection:

11:18 The people of Anathoth plot against Jeremiah to kill him because of his critical prophecies.

18:18 His opponents plan to "attack him with our tongues" or libel him.

20:1f. Pashur, son of the chief officer of the temple, imprisons Jeremiah in the stocks.

26:8ff. Seized in Jehoiakim's time and threatened with death.

26:22f. Uriah the prophet is killed even after fleeing to Egypt for saying things similar to Jeremiah's prophecies.

37:1ff. Jeremiah is thrown into prison by Zedekiah.

38:1ff. Jeremiah thrown into the pit/cistern. Ebed-Melech saves him.

43:1-7 Jeremiah goes to Egypt with the remnant of the people left in Judah.

Key dates for Jeremiah's life (note the non-chronological order of the chapters):

Dates of Jeremiah's prophecies

chapters 1-20: 627-605BC under King Josiah

chapters 11-12: 622/21 with the rediscovery of the Book of the Law

13:18 --- refers to Jehoiakim

18:20 --- refers to Jeremiah's imprisonment in 588/87

Chapters 21-45

21 588, the final siege of Jerusalem

22 598, oracles on kings from Josiah to Jeconiah

23	?
24	597
25	605
26	609 or after
27-28	594
29	after 597
30-31	?
32-33	588/87
34	588
35	after 601
36	605-604
37-43	588/7
44	585?
45	605

Key dates of history around Jeremiah:

640/39	Josiah becomes King (2 Chron. 34:1)
628	Josiah begins reforms (2 Chron. 34:3)
627	Jeremiah is called
626	Nabopolassar founds Babylonian Empire
622/21	Book of the law is found (2 Chron. 34:8, 14)

- 612 Fall of Nineveh and Assyrian Empire
- 609 Josiah killed (2 Chron. 35:20-25)
- Jehoahaz king for 3 months (2 Chron. 36:1-3)
- Jehoiakim made king (2 Chron. 36:4)
- 605 Nebuchadnezzar defeats Egyptians at Carchemish (Jeremiah 46:2).
- 604 Jeremiah's scrolls read to Jehoiakim (Jere. 36)
- 601 Jehoiakim rebels against Babylon (2 Kings 24)
- 593 Jehoiakim is deposed and dies (2 Chron 36:6)
- Zedekiah is made king by Babylon (2 Kings 24:17)
- 588 Zedekiah rebels
- Fall of Jerusalem. 2nd set of exiles leave (Jeremiah 39)
- 587 Gedaliah appointed governor of Judah.
- Gedaliah assassinated. Refugees flee to Egypt. (Jere. 41-43)
- 582/1 Third deportation to Babylon (Jere. 52:30)
- 561 Jehoiachin released from prison. (Jere. 52)
- 539 Fall of Babylon (to the Medes and Persians)
- 539/38 Cyrus the Persian liberates the captive Jews (Ezra 1)

Jeremiah, Lesson 2

The Life and Times of Jeremiah, Part II

The book of Jeremiah is interspersed with the history of his times and personal events and struggles. Prophecy and history are mixed together in a way which is unusual for the major prophets. In this lesson we will look at the "Life of Jeremiah" as revealed in various chapters in the book.

Conflict and Inner Turmoil

Jeremiah 19-20 deals with the conflict Jeremiah had with the priestly powers of his day, and the resulting inner turmoil.

Read Jeremiah 18:1-11; 19:1-20:6.

What is the meaning of Jeremiah's action with the potter's earthen flask? What is the message of the Lord through him?

Many times in Jeremiah we will see him "act out" in symbolic drama the message of his prophecy. In this case Jeremiah takes an earthen flask (v 1) and breaks it (v 10), symbolizes the coming destruction of the nation (vv 11-12). The breaking of the clay flask comes after chapter 18 where God shows Jeremiah a potter forming a clay jar. There Jeremiah sees the clay spoiled in the potter's hand (18:4) causing the potter to re-work the jar into another vessel. In the same God is warning Judah that if they do not reform turn away from the evil deeds, God will bring disaster upon them (18:10-11).

But instead of listening to God, the people begin to plot against Jeremiah.

c. 19 turns up the heat as God's complaints against Judah mount. In particular

God's complaints against the people are these:

v 4 The people have forsaken God.

v 4 They have worshipped other gods.

v 5 They have built altars to Baal.

Therefore, God promises to judge Judah:

v 6 by bringing war and death to Judah;

v 7 by bringing desolation to Judah;

v 8f. so that the very name of Judah will be synonymous with defeat and sorrow.

How do the people react to Jeremiah's prophecy?

Not surprisingly, the people in charge of the nation were not happy with Jeremiah's prophecy. Pashur, the chief priest, ordered Jeremiah imprisoned and beaten.

How does Jeremiah respond?

In the first sense Jeremiah responds to his ill treatment with further warnings.

"Pashur" is misnamed. "Pashur" could be interpreted as a combination of two words, one meaning "fruitful" and the other, "on all sides." "Fruitful in every way" would be a very positive name! But, according to Jeremiah, he should be called "terror on every side."

Pashur cannot bring good times by beating the messenger. Jeremiah is saying that it is this sort of hardness of heart and rejection of God's message that is leading Judah into certain destruction. As a result, the following will happen:

20:4 Many will die in war.

The King of Babylon will triumph over Jerusalem and enslave many.

20:5 The wealth of the city will go to Babylon.

20:6 Pashur himself and his family will be exiled, and will die in exile.

At the same time, Jeremiah is not inwardly as confident as he is outwardly.

Read 20:7-18. How does Jeremiah really feel while he is suffering?

Note Jeremiah's complaints:

v 7 He feels deceived. His call to be God's prophet is a lot harder than he realized.

There are more sacrifices to obedience than he expected.

vv 7b-8 Because he has been given a message of judgment, people have turned on him. He is not enjoying the reproach and hatred his prophecies cause.

v 9 Nevertheless, he cannot give up his call. He is tempted to be quiet and not take a stand, but something within him will not let him. That something is God's own word.

v 10 He senses plots against him, and even the desire of some to kill him.

v 11 But at the same time he knows God is with him, and eventually he will be justified and protected.

Note how far Jeremiah sinks. At one point (20:14) he goes so far as to say, "*Cursed be the day on which I was born!*"

What is the source of Jeremiah's anger at God and his self-pity?

1) His own message brings grief to him. He does not enjoy prophesying the doom of his own people. He is grieving over what he is saying, even as he says it. The fact that people deserve the punishment does not make it any more pleasant. Jeremiah takes no pleasure in being right, since so many will suffer.

2) Jeremiah does not enjoy persecution. It's one thing to claim "we are able" to suffer with the Lord, but another thing to suffer in reality. He is facing both personal persecution and possible death. It is frightening, and the very loneliness of his position is depressing.

3) Note that God is not afraid of Jeremiah's honesty. This passage of inner turmoil is "scripture" in the same way that God's message of judgment is scripture. Obedience does sometimes cause pain, and God accepts our honest complaints. That does not mean that God takes away the burden of obedience, but there's nothing wrong with being honest to God about what we feel and experience.

Read Jeremiah 26. What does Jeremiah prophesy here?

What almost happens to him? What saves him?

Chapter 26 occurs in the reign of Jehoiakim about 609 BC, so this action probably happens earlier than chapters 19-20 (where the reference to Jeremiah's imprisonment in the pit in 18:10 suggests events that happened about 587BC). The action is similar.

Jeremiah prophesies the destruction of the people if they do not repent and return to the

Law. The city of Shiloh had been destroyed about 1050 BC by the Philistines; so by referring to Shiloh (v 6) Jeremiah is predicting a coming (successful) invasion by Judah's enemies.

Opposition comes immediately from the priests and prophets (probably temple prophets on the payroll of the temple) in vv 7-10. The priests, however, are not allowed to kill Jeremiah without a hearing (vv 10-19). Here Jeremiah does not back down from his strong prophecy, but again calls for repentance (v 13), warns that to kill him would only bring worse punishment (v 15). The civil authorities (v 16) acquit Jeremiah, referring to the precedent of the prophecies of Micah, who likewise warned of coming judgment in the days of Hezekiah (cf. Micah 3:12).

What does the example of Uriah the son of Shemaiah suggest?

In vv 20ff. Uriah is mentioned as a prophet with a message similar to Jeremiah's. However Uriah upset the King (Jeremiah seemed to attack the priests more directly), and he was pursued to Egypt and killed. This reminds us that obedience does not mean absolute protection. Jeremiah was protected by people in the royal court who respected and feared God (v 24, Ahikam), something Uriah lacked. God's call is not always a call to comfort and safety.

Read Jeremiah 28: 1-17.

Who is Hananiah and what is his message? How does Jeremiah reply to him?

In chapter 27 Jeremiah made some yokebars and placed them on his neck--another "drama prophecy" acting out the coming slavery of the Jews under Babylon. Hananiah in 28:3 does a similar act. Now he breaks a yoke, and later the yoke Jeremiah is wearing (v 10) as a sign that the slavery Jeremiah predicted will last only two years. Zedekiah, the present king of Judah, was placed in charge by Nebuchadnezzar after the first arrival of the Babylonian army. Hananiah's words are an encouragement to rebellion, a promise that the kingdom will be restored to Judah, and that even the exiled king, Jeconiah, will be brought back (v 4).

Jeremiah wishes that Hananiah's words were true (v 5) but suspects otherwise (vv 6-8). He knows that the proof of predictive prophecy is that it happens, as indeed his own prophecies have been verified. In fact, later (vv 12ff.) Jeremiah receives a specific word from God that there will be no short exile, but a long and severe enslavement lies before the people (v 14). Hananiah is guilty of lying and deceiving the people, and dies for his daring.

Why would Hananiah do this?

No specific motive is given. It may be that he merely wanted to encourage the people. But if so, we are reminded that false encouragement is deadly. It may be that he hoped to foment armed rebellion, which Jeremiah knew was doomed and would be costly and bloody. He may have simply wanted prestige and power from being a prophet. But it is dangerous to use spiritual offices for personal gain. It is also dangerous to push your

own personal hopes and desires as "God's word" without being sure that it is God's word. It is an easy temptation to dress up our own wants, wishes, and sincere beliefs as belonging to God, when in fact we only hope that this is true. It is dangerous and deadly to try to use spiritual power for our own ends--God will not allow his word to be mocked.

What lessons can we learn from Jeremiah's life so far?

- 1) God gives the people a chance to repent and amend their lives. The earlier prophecies (c. 26) allow for the possibility that the people will hear and change—but they do not.
- 2) The tendency to shoot the messenger is an old, old human habit. The first reaction of the people when they hear Jeremiah's warning is to blame the prophet! People do not like bad news, even it is truthful, and will react against the messenger. Jeremiah does not much like being blamed for trying to tell the people the truth, but it happens.
- 3) Serving God is no promise of easy rewards. Jeremiah will face stiff opposition for simply telling the people the truth. He will be attacked verbally and personally. He will be in the stocks, later thrown into a pit and assaulted. Uriah, who has a similar message will be killed. It is not clear that Uriah is less a servant than Jeremiah (although his escape to Egypt may be a negative—he runs away from trouble). Serving God may end up with different immediate consequences. For a NT example, look at John 21. After Jesus

predicts Peter's death on a cross, Peter points to the beloved disciple and asks a very human question:

John 21:20-23 (ESV)

²⁰ Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?"

²¹ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?"

²² Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"

²³ So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

The point of the episode is that Peter has his call and the Beloved Disciple has his. God only asks for obedience.

- 4) God allows Jeremiah to complain. Jeremiah is never disciplined for his struggle with his call. It is hard and God allows him to complain and rant. The point is Jeremiah takes his rants to God and does not use his suffering as an excuse to leave God behind. Many of us when we suffer want to turn away from God—which is the least helpful of all. God stands with Jeremiah and does deliver him in spite of all the suffering and in spite of all his complaints. We can let our circumstances drive us to God, or away. "To" works best.

Jeremiah, Lesson 3 The Life and Times of Jeremiah, Part III

The Final Days of Jerusalem and Afterwards Jeremiah 37

The context of this passage is a brief time of hope for Judea and the enemies of Babylon. Egypt has put an army in the field to challenge Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. For a while (37:5) the Babylonians are forced to withdraw from Judah and face the Egyptians. The question naturally arises: Is this God's deliverance? Is this the time to throw off Babylonian domination? In the past God had miraculously delivered Israel from the overwhelming might of foreign armies (for Jehosephat, Hezekiah, Gideon, etc.). Was this another such time? Jeremiah was to crush the hopes of Judah, because they were still not sincerely repenting for their sins. They wanted to use God, not serve Him.

Read 37:1-10. What is the hypocrisy of Zedekiah and his helpers?

vv 1-2 Zedekiah does not listen to/obey God's word, but he still wants to hedge his bets, and so he asks Jeremiah to pray for him (v 3).

What is the Lord's word to Zedekiah?

v 6 Pharaoh's army will go back to Egypt, and the Babylonians will return to Judah.

vv 9-10 Even if the Jews fight Babylon and seemingly win, God will still execute judgment through the Babylonians.

Because there has been no sincere repentance, this is only a temporary reprieve. Babylonian forces will return and conquer Jerusalem.

Read 37:11- 38:6. Why is Jeremiah arrested (vv 11ff)? How is he punished (37:11-38:6)?

Jeremiah is arrested trying to leave the city. According to 37:12, Jeremiah is seeking to return to his home (Anathoth) to do business, But, the army fears that he is deserting to the Babylonians (37:13f.). The authorities accuse Jeremiah of treason (v 15). As a result he is imprisoned (v 16) in dungeons for a while, and then in house arrest (cf. vv 20-21).

What does Jeremiah say during his imprisonment?

v 17 The King continues to consult Jeremiah. It looks as if either the King was secretly impressed with Jeremiah and wanted to know what he said, even if it were bad news, or he hoped that imprisonment would soften Jeremiah and make him 'prophecy' good news instead of judgment. It may be that the King felt that Jeremiah's prophecy had some sort of magic to make things happen. He probably did not understand that Jeremiah's prophecies 'worked' because they were God's words and not his.

Jeremiah does not compromise even in prison. He maintains his commitment and tells the King, *"You shall be delivered into the hand of the King of Babylon."*

His message does not soften--he even begins to urge people to leave the city so that they will not die from starvation during the upcoming siege. Again, from the authority's point of view, this is treason! Jeremiah, they point out, is weakening the resolve of the people to fight and resist the enemy (38:4). Zedekiah refuses to help Jeremiah, and he is cast into an empty cistern (v 6). This is in essence a sentence of death by starvation.

Read 37:7-13. How is Jeremiah saved? What final warning does he give Zedekiah?

v 7 Ironically, it is an Ethiopian eunuch who saves Jeremiah. His name is "Ebedmelech" which means "servant of the King," and he indeed serves the true King of Heaven. As a foreigner and a eunuch he is twice despised by the Jews--neither foreigners nor eunuchs were allowed in the temple. But alone in Israel he is willing to save God's prophet. This judgment against Judah is that despite knowing God's law, it takes an outcast to save God's prophet.

Read 37:14-28.

When Zedekiah sends for Jeremiah again, he may be hoping for something better from the prophet now that he has helped him. He is again disappointed. 38:17 repeats the promise of judgment. Death can only be avoided if the city surrenders to the Babylonians (v 18). Zedekiah, however, fears Jewish enemies of his who have joined the Babylonians, and even Jeremiah's assurance is not enough to overcome these fears (cf. vv 19-20).

33:2-3 parallels this account indicates that Jeremiah continues to prophesy even while imprisoned.

Jeremiah 32:1-25 (NRSV)

¹ The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar.

² At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah,

³ where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him. Zedekiah had said, "Why do you prophesy and say: Thus says the LORD: I am going to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it;

⁴ King Zedekiah of Judah shall not escape out of the hands of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him face to face and see him eye to eye;

⁵ and he shall take Zedekiah to Babylon, and there he shall remain until I attend to him, says the LORD; though you fight against the Chaldeans, you shall not succeed?"

⁶ Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came to me:

⁷ Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours."

⁸ Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the LORD, and said to me, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself." Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.

⁹ And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver.

¹⁰ I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales.

¹¹ Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy;

¹² and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard.

¹³ In their presence I charged Baruch, saying,

¹⁴ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time.

¹⁵ For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards

shall again be bought in this land.

¹⁶ After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah, I prayed to the LORD, saying:

In this passage the judgment (vv3-5) is balanced by hope for the future (vv6-25).

Jeremiah's trip to get his inheritance and the deed to land is a sign that intends for the people to return to the land, much as they did after their slavery in Egypt. Their present trouble is directly related to their disobedience (v23-24), but God still has a future for Israel.

What do we learn from Jeremiah's work in Jerusalem?

1) Obedience to the word of God is not always going to bring us comfort and popularity. There will be those who have a vested interest in the way things are, who will fight us. Words of judgment will be resisted. There is no guarantee that being a servant of God will lead to an easy life--often the opposite!

2) There is a natural tendency to resist the idea that God wants us to change our lives--that what we are doing is wrong. This was especially true for Israel because they saw themselves as "God's people," and they were! But they compromised themselves in foreign alliances, lost their first love and commitment to God, and fell under judgment.

3) There can easily be tension between our loyalty to God and loyalty to institutions. Jeremiah, from the point of view of 'patriotic' Judeans, *was* a traitor. He was telling the people to give up, to surrender! But that *was* God's will. This is not to say that

patriotism and obedience to God are necessarily in opposition. Rather, it is to say that loyalty to *any* institution can come into conflict with loyalty to God (whether we're talking about the nation or our favorite football team), and this can put us in tension.

After the Conquest

Read Jeremiah 39:1-17

Babylon does conquer as Jeremiah foretells, and the resistance of Zedekiah is vain. All his family is killed, and he is blinded and taken to Babylon in chains (39:7).

Notice that God promises to save Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian eunuch who saved Jeremiah in the cistern. Even in the midst of this mass destruction, God remembers the righteous.

Summary of chapters 40-41:

Gedaliah is appointed governor of Judea under Nebuchadnezzar (40:5). However, plots are immediately devised against Gedaliah (40:13ff.), and he is finally killed by Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, a pretender to the throne (41:2). This was an act of great treachery since Ishmael killed Gedaliah after eating with him as a friend. Then came a counter-revolution against Ishmael under Johanan, the son of Kareah (41:11-18), but the people still faced reprisals from Babylon for the death of Gedaliah. At this point they consult Jeremiah (42:4), asking for guidance.

Read 42:7-43:7.

What does God prophesy through Jeremiah? How do the people respond?

v10 The Lord tells them to remain in the land; then God will build them up and repair the judgment against them.

v 11 The Lord promises to save them.

v 12 The Lord promises mercy.

vv 13-22 Disobedience will mean destruction.

The people, however, do not believe Jeremiah. They have evidently come expecting God to confirm what they wanted to hear. They accuse Jeremiah of lying (43:2), and of being influenced by Baruch (43:3). So they go down to Egypt despite what Jeremiah said.

Why does God tell the people to stay in Judah? Why do they disobey?

It's easy to see why the people wanted to go to Egypt. Obviously, Nebuchadnezzar could re-enter Judah at any time with his army. To stay there was to be at risk. They had already suffered greatly through the siege in Jerusalem and they feared further suffering. Egypt at least had an army of its own. It was possible that Babylon would never conquer Egypt, and so the Jews might be safe there.

This, however, was the same old problem. They were trusting in human security rather than God's security. To stay in Judah on Jeremiah's word would be to trust in God despite human weakness. It would be a real act of faith, but they were not a people of faith

yet. They trusted in human ability, not God's love and mercy and God's ability to deliver. Since they had just been defeated by Babylon, they may have blamed God for their defeat rather than their own sin. If so, they never really understood Jeremiah at all.

Jeremiah warns them in 43:8ff. that going to Egypt will bring disaster, but they go anyway.

Their blindness is made clear in Jeremiah 44. In verses 1-14 Jeremiah warns them that they are continuing in the same idol worship that got them into trouble in the first place, and it will bring further destruction. **Note their response in Jeremiah 44:15-19.**

How do the people interpret all the bad things that have happened to them?

v 16 They refuse to listen to Jeremiah.

v 17 They reaffirm their commitment to worship another god, "the queen of heaven."

v 18 They go so far as to say that it was because they had stopped worshipping idols that all these bad things had happened; so now they are going back to idol worship. Their wives (v 19) agree.

As a result, in vv 20ff., Jeremiah repeats his condemnation of the people and their past idolatry. He goes on to predict Egypt's defeat by Nebuchadnezzar, which indeed came. The vain attempt to find human security fails, and idolatry begets destruction.

What does this say to us?

1) There is a warning here about how to interpret circumstances. Evidently the people had left off their idolatry for a while but failed to repent sincerely. They failed to make a connection between their past idolatry and the present circumstances, and so quickly returned to their errors. We, too, can be quick to interpret present problems as an excuse to return to past disobedience. We can too quickly say, "Well, I tried to change, but it didn't work," when in reality we have not continued in obedience long enough to undo the results of disobedience.

2) The passage also underlines how hard it is get through to people living in disobedience. Sin blinds our eyes to God's word. We come up with all sorts of rationalizations for what we are doing.

3) The passage is a great example of what faith is not. The attempt to trust in human power for security put the Judeans in trouble. They did not come to Jeremiah asking sincerely for God's word; they merely wanted their own wisdom confirmed. God challenged them to trust Him for their security, but they would not. Faith does not always mean going counter to human wisdom, but it does mean not placing ultimate trust in human power.

Jeremiah's prophecies are almost always counter-intuitive: give up to the Babylonians, stay in Jerusalem and trust the Babylonians even though you are vulnerable and have a right to expect their anger. Trust in God rarely means having security in the way we want

and seek it. Faith means the most when we feel vulnerable and at risk—we have to trust

God because only God can save us.

Jeremiah, Lesson 4 The Prayers of Jeremiah

The book of Jeremiah is full of his prayers. No other Old Testament book gives us such a personal view into the heart of a prophet--except, perhaps, the Psalms of David. We have already studied one of Jeremiah's prayers (Lesson 2, Jere. 20). We will now look at other prayers in the book.

Read Jeremiah 12: 1-6

What does Jeremiah ask of God? What is his complaint?

This is the essence of many of Jeremiah's prayers: why do the righteous suffer and the evil flourish? What is *fair* about the way God's will works out in history?

v 1 Jeremiah begins with a basic premise--that God is righteous. "Righteous" means that God does things in the proper way--like a carpenter who builds walls true to plumb, God acts in a way consistent with justice and fairness.

vv 1-2 However, real life doesn't always look so fair. The treacherous thrive instead of being struck dead. People talk a good "religion" but don't live it; yet God doesn't seem to judge them.

vv 3f. Jeremiah pleads his own righteousness—God knows Jeremiah's heart. God know Jeremiah has been faithful. Therefore, Jeremiah has a solution--judge the disobedient. Send them like sheep sent to the slaughter. He urges God to deal quickly with the contempt men have shown for Him.

v 5 This seems to be a word of the Lord to Jeremiah. First, since Jeremiah hasn't been able to handle the opposition of men, he shouldn't try to wrestle with God! God is warning Jeremiah not to judge His ways by human terms.

v 6 God tells Jeremiah that even his own family gives him trouble—the warning seems to be that Jeremiah does not yet know the full problem. Jeremiah is complaining life is unfair—well, it's about to get worse.

In a sense the whole book of Jeremiah is an answer to this prayer. At a particular point in time it does look as if the wicked prosper. But by the end of the book every transgressor is judged and every wrongdoer is punished.

We see that life is not fair—but we are impatient for things to be put right. God allows time for people for several reasons, not the least of which is to allow time for repentance. As a result, however, this means that at times it looks unfair. And it is, at that time, unfair to the righteous when they suffer at the hands of the wicked. But this is the only way to allow people to change. And the righteous are assured that eventually God will judge those who disobey. In the meantime the righteous are urged not to despair, and not to make the same mistakes others make by failing to trust God.

Jeremiah 15

This mixes conversation between Jeremiah and the Lord and prayers from Jeremiah

Jeremiah 15 begins with God's warning, *"Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people."* Since Moses and Samuel were two of the most powerful Old Testament prophets, who did intercede for the sins of Israel, Jeremiah is told by the Lord that there will be no answered prayers this time.

15:2-9 gives us stern prophecies:

V2 Some are going to die through disease, some through famine and some through war, and rest will go into captivity. Stern judgment is coming to Judah/

V3 God is about to judge Jerusalem for King Manasseh's sin. Hezekiah's faithfulness will not save his grandchildren.

V4-5 The problem: the people rejected God

Vv6-9 The judgment will decimate families.

In 15:10 we have a series of fragments:

V10—Jeremiah feels he is wrongly treated—he has done nothing wrong yet people persecute him. This verse is his complaint to God—life is not fair!

V11 is a difficult verse to translate and the NRSV seems confusing. The ESV says,

"Jeremiah 15:11 (ESV)

¹¹ The LORD said, "Have I not set you free for their good? Have I not pleaded for you before the enemy in the time of trouble and in the time of distress?" This seems closer to the intent of the verse—in spite of his enemies, God is involved in Jeremiah's life.

V13-14 State God's judgment—God will send the nation into exile and give their wealth to their enemies.

Jeremiah 15:15-21, however, goes a different direction. Jeremiah comes to the Lord with his own problems. Suffering persecution is never easy--especially when you feel you are in the right. Jeremiah is blunt with the Lord, but honest.

What is the essence of Jeremiah's prayer in 15:15-18?

v 15 Jeremiah begins by asking for God's justification in front of his persecutors. Jeremiah needs and expects God to act to verify his words to those who trouble him.

v 16 This verse reflects back on his original acceptance of his call. Remembering what God has done for us in the past is an important part of our prayers in times of distress. This builds faith and hope in our hearts and strengthens us as we pray.

vv 17-18 We come to the heart of the matter for Jeremiah. He feels like an outcast in his own land. While others are rejoicing over their prosperity, he broods over the sin he sees. He is an outcast, and the pain of that loneliness is almost unbearable. The burden of pronouncing judgment to a people who are hostile to his message will not leave him, and it makes him miserable.

This prayer shows us how honest we can be with God. Not all of God's burdens are easy, and we can be honest with God about our struggles. It helps to lay out our feelings, and let God deal with us. Note that God comforts Jeremiah in vv 19-21. He promises:

v 19 to restore Jeremiah if he continues faithful;

to honor him as His own mouth if Jeremiah continues to say God's words;
to bring the people around to listen to him--they will change (perhaps),
but Jeremiah must not;
ultimately to justify Jeremiah, to save and deliver him.

This is not a promise that the way will be easy, merely that obedience will be worth it.

That is always God's answer to our prayers. God is never offended by honesty--even when we are not completely correct in our perceptions of what is right and reality.

Read Jeremiah 17: 14-18

Jeremiah 17 is a great chapter on the problem of sin, and we will return to this in Lesson 6. Jeremiah 17:14-18 is a prayer following this disturbing description of the human condition. It is almost as if Jeremiah is looking into his own heart, wondering how God will touch him. Then he turns to his own problem--the opposition he is facing and his need for strength in the midst of persecution.

How does Jeremiah see his own condition? For what does he petition God?

v 14 First for healing. Jeremiah sees that the only answer for man's need for healing is with God.

v 15 Jeremiah complains that the people are taunting him. When they say, "*Where is the word of the Lord? Let it come!*" they are essentially saying that they doubt anything will happen.

v 16 Jeremiah is defending himself--this message of judgment is not his idea! His problems are God's causing; therefore he needs God's help and protection.

v 18 Jeremiah also prays that those who oppose him will be put to shame. He knows who is right, and who is wrong, and is not afraid to ask that God let right prevail and be seen as victor.

Again, Jeremiah is not afraid to let God know his true feelings. It is all right to pray for our real needs. It is all right to pray that God clearly vindicate the righteous and stop the evil in this world. We should not be deluded into the modern type of thought that relativizes between right and wrong and says that everyone is a mixture of good and evil. That, of course, is somewhat true, but it is also true that some positions and actions are flat wrong and some are right. Our prayers for righteousness and the triumph of God's kingdom are important.

Read Jeremiah 18:19-23

This is Jeremiah's prayer from the pit. In the bottom of the miry cistern, he is tempted once more to despair. Again, this is the honest prayer of a man suffering for speaking God's truth.

How does Jeremiah express his needs in this prayer? What NT verse teaches us a very different attitude?

vv 20-21 are a justification of Jeremiah's past deeds. He has done no evil. He spoke God's word to them, and sought to bring them to repentance that they might avert judgment. Yet now he is in the pit, apparently to die.

vv 21f. is a prayer for vindication. As in Jere. 17, Jeremiah knows who's right and who's not, and he is not afraid to ask that evildoers get their judgment.

v 23 Jeremiah trusts in God. He trusts him for his own future, and for the future judgment for others!

The harsh tone of Jeremiah's prayer may startle us. He actually asks God to starve children and make widows of women. This may seem extremely mean—but he is reacting against people who are ready to kill him, and to throw him in cistern and let him starve to death. As Christians we would not agree with Jeremiah's petition, "Forgive not their iniquity," since Jesus tells us to pray for our enemies and to forgive those who persecute us (cf. Matt. 5:38-48).

Jeremiah still lives in the OT world:

Exodus 21:23-25 (ESV)

²³ **But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life,**

²⁴ **eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,**

²⁵ **burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.**

The “mercy” in OT law is that it limits retribution to the extent of the original injury. The temptation is to want your enemies to suffer more pain and suffering than they caused you.

The NT has a different standard:

Matthew 5:43-48 (ESV)

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Jesus expects his disciple to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them—because this reflects God’s mercy on the people who reject God. Our heavenly Father is “perfect” and we see this perfection especially in God’s mercy toward us.

This is much easier said than done. Think of times you have felt unjustly criticized or attacked—how did you feel? What did you want to do? “Loving your enemies” is one of those commands that sounds much better in principle than it is to apply in reality.

But even in Jeremiah's day we see God opening up this mercy. While God will judge Jeremiah's enemies, God will also plan a new and better future for the people of God and will restore Israel, not only to the land, but eventually to a new heart.

Jeremiah, Lesson 5

The Failure of Leadership

One of the great themes of the book of Jeremiah is the failure of leadership—those who rule Judah fail to do their job. The civil authorities (the King and the nobles) fail in their job to execute justice and keep the law. The spiritual authorities (priests, prophets and scribes) also fail to lead the people in understanding and practicing the law. This common failure of leadership dooms the ordinary people who depend on the example of their leaders to guide them.

The failure of leadership in Jeremiah's day can probably be traced to Josiah's grandfather, King Manasseh (2 Kings 21:11-15).

2 Kings 21:1-9 (ESV)

¹ **Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah.**

² **And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel.**

³ **For he rebuilt the high places that Hezekiah his father had destroyed, and he erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them.**

⁴ **And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem will I put my name."**

⁵ **And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.**

⁶ **And he burned his son as an offering and used fortune-telling and omens and dealt with mediums and with necromancers. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger.**

⁷ **And the carved image of Asherah that he had made he set in the house of which the LORD said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name forever.**

⁸ **And I will not cause the feet of Israel to wander anymore out of the land that I gave to their fathers, if only they will be careful to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the Law that my servant Moses commanded them."**

⁹ **But they did not listen, and Manasseh led them astray to do more evil than the nations had done whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel.**

No other king did so much to destroy the works of the Lord.

After Manasseh died, his son Amon succeeded to the throne. Amon was just as ungodly as his father and, furthermore, he was unfortunate enough to incite his household servants to riot. The assassination of the King would, no doubt, have been followed by the death of Amon's family, except that the rebellion was snuffed out by a counter-coup. Amon's son, Josiah, was inaugurated at age eight.

The comment on Josiah's leadership in 2 Kings is telling:

2 Kings 23:25 (ESV)

²⁵ Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him.

Josiah's reform would not be enough to turn the nation to real worship of Yahweh. Manasseh's leadership had already sealed the fate of the nation. The prescribed exile was not an arbitrary punishment but rather the most humane solution toward the preservation of a sanctified Israel (2 Kings 23:26-27).

Josiah led the reform movement that was to shape Judah and most of the already vanquished northern kingdom. Josiah *led* the movement but ironically, once again, he did not *start* the reform movement. Manasseh must be given credit for beginning to undo the evil he had done, because he genuinely repented and was personally restored by the Lord (2 Chron. 33:10-16).

Josiah was unsuccessful in bringing about the repentance of the majority of people who had been led into idolatry by his grandfather. The best he could do was impose godly

guidelines, and provide inspiration and example, but a leader cannot mandate revival.

The hearts of most people were not changed. Josiah's influence ended with his untimely death.

What were the conditions of society that led to a non-repentant heart? How could these conditions be remedied? [To answer these questions we will follow this outline, which will take us into the next lesson:]

I. False teachers were exalted (Jere. 8:1-17).

II. Political leaders were corrupted (Jere. 23:1-4)

I. The Failure of the nation (Jere. 8:1-17).

A. What is going on at the time of Jeremiah's prophecy? Who does he blame for the sin of Judah? What is the result.

Jeremiah 7 gives a grim list of acts that offended God;

7:5 The oppression of the poor

7:6-11 Following other gods, making the temple of Jerusalem "a den of thieves"

7:18 Worship of the Queen of heaven

7:30ff Child sacrifice in the Garden of Hinnon

As a result God promises to leave Jerusalem a field of bones.

Note the order that Jeremiah gives: “bones of kings...bones of officials...bones of prophets...bones of priests.”

The problem starts at the top. The leaders of Judah from the king on down fail and in fact lead Judah in the wrong direction.

Josiah (2 Kings 23:15-17) for a time reversed this trend.. Not only the south (Judah) but also a great portion of the former Northern Kingdom ("Israel") was purged of idolatrous practices during Josiah's reign.

However, Josiah died in a battle with Pharaoh of Egypt (2 Kings 23:29) and is replaced first by his son Jehoahaz and then three months later (from Egyptian interference) by another son, Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim quickly began to follow the path of his grand-fathers rather than his father.

B. What is God’s critique of Judah (8:4-17)?

The Lord had given sufficient warnings and even caused obstacles to stand in the way of Judah's backsliding, but to no avail. Self-deceit and deception of others continued, without repentance. There was no shame or reconsideration of their ways.

V4 the typical person sees their problem and corrects it

V5-7 But Judah continues to make the same mistake over and over

C. How does Jeremiah critique the scribes and the priests of his day (vss.

8-12)?

V 7-9 The failure of the teachers of the law

Jeremiah 8:8 (NRSV)

⁸ How can you say, "We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us," when, in fact, the false pen of the scribes has made it into a lie?

The scribes have preferred lies to God's word—they in fact reject the word of God. The scribes do not just copy the law. Their work made them intimately familiar with God's word. Scribes functioned as the chief teachers of God. If the scribes are not honest in their teaching, if they reject God's law, then the people are in even graver danger.

V10 leaders motivated by greed

Jeremiah 8:10 (NRSV)

¹⁰ Therefore I will give their wives to others and their fields to conquerors, because from the least to the greatest everyone is greedy for unjust gain; from prophet to priest everyone deals falsely.

The basic problem is greed. Other religions allow greater profit for both the rulers and the priests, and money has corrupted the leadership.

V11 Cheap grace taught

Jeremiah 8:11 (NRSV)

¹¹ They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace.

The job of the prophet especially is to speak truth to the people, to hold up the law of God and call people to obedience. Instead, prophets and priests are offering false hope to the people. They have told the nation that "everything is fine" when it is not. They are

giving people what they want instead of what they need. They use their position to pacify the nation instead of instructing them.

V12 The leaders lead in corruption without shame

Jeremiah 8:12 (NRSV)

¹² They acted shamefully, they committed abomination; yet they were not at all ashamed, they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time when I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says the LORD.

We don't know what Jeremiah means by "abominations"—but we do have the old example of the sons of Eli (2 Samuel 2:22) who used their priestly office to gain wealth and to exploit sexual favors from women who served in the temple. The Canaanite religions often used sex as a part of worship—it may be that many in the Jerusalem temple hierarchy saw the pagan religions as a source of both more money and more sexual license.

We may sometimes excuse sin in others because we want the same excuse for our own sin. The prophets and priests may be giving a message that "all is ok" because they do not want to great a light thrown on their own actions.

V13 The result is an unfruitful people. Instead of leading the people into holiness and justice, the opposite is happening.

D. What were the economic and political repercussions to this lack of leadership (vss. 13-17)?

There would be famine resulting not from crop failure but pillage. The invasion from the north is spoken of in poetic terms: "The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan"

Verse 17 talks about "snakes" among them, reflecting back to the time in Numbers when God sent snakes to bite and kill the Israelites for their disobedience (see Numbers 21:6).

If God sent judgment on the Exodus generation, why would Judah think they are immune from judgment now?

II. Political leaders were corrupted (Jere. 23:1-4)

A. How did the political leaders fail (vs. 1-2)?

B. Jeremiah 23:1-2 (NRSV)

¹ Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD.

² Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD.

Beginning with David the image of King and shepherd go together. As the shepherd watches after and defends the flock, the king (and his fellow leaders) should watch after and defend the nation. But, they have failed. The political leaders are blamed for the exile. Instead of shepherding the flock or the people, they have scattered them. Some of the "evil deeds" that Jeremiah condemns are listed in the previous chapter: they have failed to keep justice, robbed the poor and the needy, used the money of the kingdom to build themselves fine houses, and shed innocent blood.

B. How should the political leaders have responded to society's needs (vss. 3-6)?

They should gather, protect, feed, and care for the people. They were to promote a sense of general welfare and, by that, release from fear.

Read Jeremiah 23:9-40

What criticism does Jeremiah have for the prophets and priests of the temple?

V10-11 Jeremiah calls prophets and priests “adulterers” and “ungodly” bringing evil into the house of God. The “adultery” charge probably reflects the fact that religious leaders were leading the way into idol worship.

V13-14 The prophets in Samaria (Israel, the Northern Kingdom) were bad enough, engaging in Baal worship. But the Jerusalem set is worse: they are actually leading people into false worship. They are more like Sodom and Gomorrah, corrupt in every way.

V16 They promise people “all will be well”—the prophets go out of their way to assure the people that what they are doing is fine. The leadership of the nation in effect are trying to cover up what is really going on.

V28 God wants the prophet to share the dream or vision that God sends—but by no means should prophets use their office and the claim of dreams to mislead people. This is not merely ignorance or over-confidence but deliberately deception and misuse of the office.

V33ff the words about “burden” take advantage of the fact that the same Hebrew root can be translated “burden” or “oracle.” Note v36, **Jeremiah 23:36 (NRSV)**

³⁶ But "the burden of the Lord" you shall mention no more, for the burden is everyone's own word, and so you pervert the words of the living God, the LORD of hosts, our God."

In other words the prophets are passing off as “oracles” of God their own words—perverting the words of God. If they continue to do so they will face stern judgment.

Why is this all so important?

The failure of the leadership doomed the whole nation. The leadership used their power and position for personal gain, to build their own power, placate the people and justify their own sin. They took advantage of the poor and the vulnerable instead of protecting them. They put personal pleasure ahead of God.

The result was disaster.

People in leadership have a special duty not to use their position and power selfishly, but for God and for those they serve. When the leadership fails, they drag the whole community down with them.

It is no surprise then that part of God solution for the problems in Israel will be the development of a new nation and new leadership. We will look at this more in

chapters 7, but God will restore the Davidic kingship with a new “Branch” or Messiah. But God will go further to create a people who know God themselves and not as dependent on a leadership elite (Jeremiah 31:34).

What does Jeremiah say to the church today?

The NT church knew the importance of the right leadership. Note what Paul says to Timothy as he selects leaders for the church:

1 Timothy 3:1-13 (NRSV)

- ¹ The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task.**
- ² Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher,**
- ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money.**
- ⁴ He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way—**
- ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?**
- ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.**
- ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.**
- ⁸ Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money;**
- ⁹ they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.**
- ¹⁰ And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons.**
- ¹¹ Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things.**
- ¹² Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well;**
- ¹³ for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.**

Note what Paul values:

That they be free from the love of money

That they have stable, godly personalities

That they not be conceited or seeking power

That they understand and teach the basic faith of the church

Paul knows the health of a church starts with healthy leadership—he urges Timothy to choose these leaders wisely so the church can thrive.

Jeremiah, Lesson 6 The Problem of Sin

This lesson will outline what Jeremiah means by "sin" and the problems he identifies in the nation of Israel. No prophet has a more acute analysis of human sin and the human predicament.

Read Jeremiah 2:1-13, 17-37.

What was Israel in the beginning? What has happened to her since then?

Verses 1-3 describe Israel as she was: devoted, like a bride just married, willing to follow God. Israel was holy and precious to God, and anyone that disturbed Israel found that He would avenge her (v 3).

Verses 4-8 describe what has happened to disturb that relationship:

- 1) God asks, "What wrong have you found in me?" (v 4), assuming that if God was doing good to Israel there could be no good reason for leaving God. In fact God delivered Israel from Egypt (v6) and led them through the wilderness to the land of Canaan, a good and fruitful land (v7). Once there, however, everything changed.
- 2) Even those who were responsible for teaching the people, the priests and prophets, have not done their job (v 8) but have joined the general sin of the people.

How does the prophet describe the sin of Israel?

What do these images suggest is the real problem of sin?

v 11 The nation exchanged God for things that are not God.

v 11b They changed what brought their country honor and wealth, namely their God, Yahweh, and took up gods which cannot help them.

v 13 They left the living waters of a fountain for broken cisterns holding no water.

The incredible thing about sin is that it substitutes that which is unhelpful and hurtful for that which is helpful and healthy. Take any sin as an example: Lying takes deceit instead of the truth. Lying to people makes you enemies and gets you in trouble when you get caught. Truth builds trust and helps people respect you. We think lying will help us, but it does not. It only gives the illusion of helping, when in fact lying causes more problems than anything. This is the point: in forsaking God, the people are really moving from the only real source of life to things that will not help them at all. It is crazy, but that is the nature of sin.

Read vv 17-19.

To whom is Israel going for help instead of God? What will happen as a result?

v 18 The people are seeking help from Assyria and Egypt for the benefits and advantages they seem to offer ("drink the waters" of their rivers), particularly military and political security. Judah will find, however, that other nations cannot provide true security whatever political alliance they make. By signing treaties with these nations,

Judah will be compromised and forced to accept their gods, and will finally end up forsaking the true God.

v 17 By their choices Judah is bringing ruin on themselves.

v 19 God will show them the bitterness of sin and apostasy. Their actions will bring judgment.

Read vv 20-28.

What are the different pictures Jeremiah gives us for Judah's sin?

What does this tell us about the nature of sin?

v 20 Judah is a harlot.

v 21 Judah is a choice vine which has become wild.

v 23 Judah is a wild ass in heat.

v 26 Judah is a thief who has been caught and shamed.

Sin is first of all betrayal--the betrayal of a good God. Sin puts rebellion in the place of loyalty, and makes evil 'good.' The pictures of the harlot and the wild ass show that sin is basically personal desire and selfishness run riot. It is the exaltation of one's feelings over consequences and over the needs of others. The picture of the wild vine emphasizes that we were not made for sin. We were made for obedience, and we will only be fruitful and truly happy through obedience. The state of sin is not our natural or best state. Verse 26 reminds us that there is a coming judgment--that our sins will be found out. There is no way to keep sin hidden forever.

Read vv 29-37.

What specific complaints does Jeremiah lift up against the people?

v 29 The people have rebelled against God.

v 30 They refuse to take correction.

v 30 They kill the prophets sent to correct them.

v 31 They claim a false freedom.

v 32 They forget who they are.

v 33 They teach others to rebel against God.

v 34 They oppress the poor.

v 35 They deny their own guilt.

This is a typical description of sin: the sinner tries to avoid guilt. They deny correction and even attack those who correct them. It is easy to respond to guilt with anger. Moreover, the sinner cannot stand to be alone in sin. We want to convince others to join us--that way we feel better doing what we do. In this way there is no such thing as a "private sin," because inevitably we want others to join us in what we are doing.

Sin's allure comes from the claim of "freedom," of doing "what I want to do." But the end is always bitter. Moreover, once we begin living selfishly, we inevitably begin to oppress others--to take advantage of those who cannot protect themselves from us, the poor and the helpless. Once you get into a situation of the "survival of the strongest" it

means at the expense of the weakest and the most vulnerable. Sin is never simple or a one-time thing. Sin spreads and has long-term and social consequences. Sin is never an individual act, but an act which immediately involves others.

This latter point is developed more fully in Jeremiah 9:1-9.

Read Jeremiah 9:1-9

What is the progress of sin in a people? What results do we see in society?

vv 1-2 The prophet wants to leave the people because the vision of their sin is so painful.

vv 2-3 The basic images for sin are adultery (betraying our covenant relationship with God), traitors (betrayal of our obligation to our country) and deceit. Jeremiah describes sin as “going from evil to evil”—sin is progressive and moves into more and more destruction.

v 4 He warns them not to trust anyone. Everyone is looking to get ahead at the expense of others (= a supplanter). People are willing to tear each other's reputations down by gossip or malicious plot (= a slanderer).

v 5 Society has become dominated by deceit. No one can trust anyone else.

v 6 The root of it all is the refusal to know or obey God. And sin progresses until we become “too weary to repent”—sin traps us in a moral fatigue that keeps us from turning away from our habits and our sins.

v 7 God must "refine" his people to redeem them. Unless he deals with the problem of sin, God is not being faithful to the people.

v 8 The people say the right things but plot evil.

v 9 Therefore God will judge and correct them.

Here Jeremiah puts his finger on the essence of all sin: deceit. It begins with the lie of not believing that God is God, and not believing His word is true. It moves to the lie that we must take care of ourselves and declare our freedom by acting selfishly. Then, to 'take care of ourselves,' we begin to plot against others. We plan how to get ahead, and how to tear others down so that they don't get ahead of us. We can get so tied up in our lifestyle of "getting ahead" and deceit that we become "too weary to repent" (v 5d). Finally, society is corrupted by the treachery of people and no one can trust anyone else.

Read Jeremiah 17:5-13. This is the final great passage on sin.

What is the essence of sin according to this passage? What is the cure?

v 5 The first key to sin is the decision to trust yourself rather than God.

v 6 The result of this is gradual withering and dying.

v 7 The cure is to begin trusting in God; then you find strength and life and perseverance (v 8). Note the contrast: the sinful are like shrubs in a desert—struggling and dying to keep alive. The righteous are like trees planted by the water (cf Ps 1). They thrive and bear fruit. Sin sucks the life out of people—righteousness makes us fruitful.

v 8 we usually see this translated, “The heart is deceitful above all things.” The Hebrew here is actually the verb form of the word from which we get the name, “Jacob.” Originally it meant “to grab the heel” (which is what Jacob did—grabbing the heel of his twin brother as they are born, Genesis 25:26). Jacob’s life certainly includes deceitfulness, but even more his life is the story of a man constantly battling to grab things for himself—the birthright from his brother, his wife from his father-in-law Laban, wealth from his master, and then a blessing from God. We might translate this verse, “The heart is desperately needy—grasping and corrupt. Who can understand it?”

That is the question—who can understand what the heart wants? We want things and when we get them we find ourselves surprisingly unsatisfied.

James talks about this in his epistle:

James 1:14-16 (NRSV)

¹⁴ But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it;

¹⁵ then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death.

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved.

This grasping desire creates conflict and misery in our lives. To quote James again:

James 4:1-3 (NRSV)

¹ Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you?

² You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not

have, because you do not ask.

³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

v 10 The cure for this self-deception is God's own searching of the human mind and heart by his spirit. He gives "to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings." That is, God builds into life judgment and consequences for our actions, so that we are not allowed to think that our actions are righteous when they are not. We are allowed to suffer for our mistakes so that we recognize them as mistakes. This is part of God's mercy. If we did not have consequences for our actions, we would never stop them.

v 11 The example is a thief or anyone who gets rich by crooked ways. By the end of life most of these will be caught and will lose what they had gained.

v 13 Those who forsake the Lord will be put to shame. Again, judgment is part of God's mercy. Because God loves us he allows us to suffer when we do wrong. Otherwise, we would simply go further and further from him and from the true source of life. Because the wrong we do *is* wrong, God allows us to experience the hurt of sin so that we will seek correction.

How does Jeremiah define "sin"?

Sin is first a break with our relationship with God. We turn away from God's goodness and seek our own. We break covenant with God.

Sin is based on deceit. We believe the lie that God does not love us or care for us. We believe that we can find life in things that are “not-God”—unrighteous and unholy. We trade the power of God for the emptiness and brokenness of other things.

Sin comes from our needy hearts. We want to grasp and be in charge of our own happiness and life. We struggle to get what we want and against the God who love us.

Sin corrupts our lives. Sin empties us of power and life. Sin brings humiliation and judgment.

Is this too much?

Fortunately, God gives Jeremiah an answer for the problem. Along with a promise to return the people to Jerusalem (which we see in the next chapter), God also promises new leadership for Israel and a new heart for the people. God promises to bring a new covenant that not only will change the way God deals with the people, but even more, the way people relate to God. In the end God sees that the problem of sin cannot be solved by punishing the people and exiling them—they cannot simply work harder and do better. A more profound change is needed—and we will see that in lesson 8.

Jeremiah, Lesson 7

The Return of Israel after 70 Years

Read Jeremiah 29:1-14

These verses begin a series of prophecies that look past the exile to a time when God will bring back his people and renew his covenant with them.

In what context was the prophecy of captivity given?

Jeremiah was moved with compassion for those who had already been carried away into captivity. He sent a letter to Babylon to encourage those who had been taken away, but instead of speaking words of his own, he shared the words of God (Jere. 29:4-23). In this letter the prophecy of 70 years of captivity is revealed.

V1 Jeremiah writes a letter to the exiles

V2 The letter passes to the exiles through King Zedekiah whom Babylon had installed as their king in Judah.

V4-7 The exiles are told to settle down for an extended stay. They should go about the normal business of life, marrying and building houses. They should work to help their captive nation thrive. Jeremiah wants no guerilla movement, but extensive cooperation.

There is a sense that working with the Babylonians and accepting their lot as exiles shows a willingness to accept God's discipline.

V8-9 They should not listen to anyone who claims to be a prophet and says differently. Prophets and others claiming to speak for God live among the exiles—but none of them truly speak for God. Only Jeremiah speaks for God at this point. (Obviously, later Ezekiel is accepted as a prophet among the exiles, but Ezekiel is consistent with Jeremiah in message).

Who were the people of the exile?

No one knows the total number of captives taken to Babylon. The second deportation in 597 is definite: 10,000, which included 7,000 men of might, and 1,000 craftsmen (2 Kings 24:14-16). The third deportation in 586 included "all but the poor of the land" (2 Kings 25:11, 12, 21). No doubt many thousands were taken, judging by the number of those returning at the end of the exile: 42,360 (Ezra 2:64).

Daniel was the most noteworthy exile taken to Babylon along with three other friends in 605 BC. The idea was to educate these choice young men for leadership. After three years, Daniel was promoted to an important position because of his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2:1-45). Evidently he served as "master of the magicians" for an extended period of time, but change had come for Daniel by the time of Belshazzar or probably Nabonidus. During Persian rule Daniel, who had to be no less than 80 years old, served as tri-regent over Persia's 120 provinces (Dan. 6:1-2). He probably exerted major influence over Cyrus' decree to return the Judeans to their homeland.

Ezekiel was also a major influence as God's prophet among the exiles. He was respected and sought after for his words from the Lord. During the years of exile, the people changed favorably in their outlook toward God.

What was life like in Babylon?

Evidence shows that life for the captive Judeans was very favorable for a conquered people. They were able to maintain their own institutions of elders, prophets, and priests (Jer. 29:1). There was relative freedom of movement. Ezekiel had his own home, and the elders came there to visit him (Ezek. 8:1). There were correspondent privileges and employment opportunities. Tablets from the time reveal that the captives were actively engaged in renting, buying, and selling property. They were permitted to live on fertile land which was good for farming. Still, there was humiliation in captivity, and freedom to return home was not granted until Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians.

Read Jeremiah 29:10-14 (NRSV)

¹⁰ For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.

¹¹ For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

¹² Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you.

¹³ When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart,

¹⁴ I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

What do these verses promise?

V10 in 70 years God will bring them back from Babylon

V11 the long stay in exile does not mean God has forgotten them. On the contrary God still has a good plan for his people.

V12 The day will come when God again hears and answers their prayers

V13 The day will come when they will seek God and find God—if they seek with their whole heart.

V14 God will restore their fortunes and gather them from the nations and bring them back.

This is not a new prophecy. We see a similar prophecy in Jeremiah 23—

Jeremiah 23:3-5 (NRSV)

³ Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.

⁴ I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD.

⁵ The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

We don't have a solid date for chapter 23, but it seems preliminary to Chapter 29. The promise to gather the people "from all the nations where I have scattered them" is repeated in chapters 31 and 32.

A similar prophecy can be found in Chapter 46:

Jeremiah 46:27-28 (ESV)

²⁷ **"But fear not, O Jacob my servant, nor be dismayed, O Israel, for behold, I will save you from far away, and your offspring from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease, and none shall make him afraid.**

²⁸ **Fear not, O Jacob my servant, declares the LORD, for I am with you. I will make a full end of all the nations to which I have driven you, but of you I will not make a full end. I will discipline you in just measure, and I will by no means leave you unpunished."**

This prophecy occurs at the end of a chapter of prophecies against Egypt placed in the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign or about 605 BC, just before Babylon turns to Jerusalem. It looks like an independent prophecy and may or may not be from that date.

As God has scattered the people to foreign nations in judgment, God promises to bring the people back. Chapter 29 emphasizes that their exile will be 70 years long. We may ask, "Why so long?" No specific answer is given, but 70 years gives time for the entire generation of the exile to pass away—those who have sinned in Judea will not be allowed to return, but their children or grandchildren will.

Secondly, in the 70 years period we will see the end of the Babylonian empire and the beginning of the Persian empire. The nation that destroyed Jerusalem will itself be destroyed and supplanted. In 538 BCE Cyrus the first Persian King will allow the Jews to

begin to return. (See the outline for the Babylonian history given at the end of the lesson) Babylon is allowed to function as an instrument of God's judgment, but a new nation is used to deliver God's salvation.

Finally, the number "70" has spiritual significance. The numbers "7" and "10" both symbolic value—indicating completion and perfection. So, in Ezekiel's vision the new Temple the sanctuary will be 70 feet long (Ez 41:2). The first offerings in the tabernacle included 70 shekels of silver (Number 7). "70" as "7 x 10" would be the perfect time for the completion of God's holy leadership.

Whatever the exact reason, the 70 period required the Jews in exile to be patient and wait and trust God—which may be the main reason for the time period.

When did the exiles return to Judah?

The first return was shortly after Cyrus' decree in 538 or 537 BC. This return included 42,360 people plus 7,337 servants (Ezra 2:64-65). They were led by Sheshbazzar.

The second return came 80 years later in the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus in 458 BC (Ezra 7:7). Ezra led this return, which included 1,500 men. When no Levites initially offered to join the group, the journey was delayed until Ezra could persuade 38 Levites (Ezra 7:9; 8:31).

Nehemiah led the third return, thirteen years after the second, in the 20th year of Artaxerxes Longimanus (444 BC).

The return of Judah to Jerusalem will not, however, put everything to rest. The “seventy years” prophecy gets up again and again in the Bible. Note this passage in

Daniel 9:

Daniel 9:1-4, 17-19 (NRSV)

¹ **In the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus, by birth a Mede, who became king over the realm of the Chaldeans—**

² **in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to the prophet Jeremiah, must be fulfilled for the devastation of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.**

³ **Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.**

⁴ **I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments,**

¹⁷ **Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his supplication, and for your own sake, Lord, let your face shine upon your desolated sanctuary.**

¹⁸ **Incline your ear, O my God, and hear. Open your eyes and look at our desolation and the city that bears your name. We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies.**

¹⁹ **O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and act and do not delay! For your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people bear your name!"**

Daniel finds the seventy year prophecy in Jeremiah, and seeing that it 522 BCE, the first year of Dairus I’s reign, he prays to God asking when the return will happen. The time is getting close (depending on which deportation one measures from).

God answers Daniel’s prayer. But the angel’s answer is not what we might think:

Daniel 9:24 (NRSV)

²⁴ **"Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city: to finish the**

transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.

The people will return to Jerusalem, but the time will continued to be troubled. Jerusalem will again face war and for a time the sacrifices in the sanctuary will stop. Scholars and students of the Bible have argued about the meaning of Daniel 9 and the import of the “70 weeks”—most think it means that the seventy years will be followed by 490 more years of trouble and difficulty. Simply returning to Jerusalem will not solve Judah’s problem of sin and disobedience.

Note what the angel tells Daniel is the purpose for this new period of time: “To put an end to sin, to atone for iniquity, to bring everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet and to anoint a most holy place.” In other words the sin problem still remains and must be addressed. The function of priest/prophet to both connect the people with God and to correct them has not yet been fulfilled and must be completed. The “holy place” is yet to sanctified.

A brief note on Jeremiah 29:11.

You may have at some point memorized Jeremiah 29:11—

Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV)

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Is this verse a general promise that God plans for our good, or is it something else?

We should not cut Jeremiah 29:11 off from its context.

First, who is the “you” for which God has plans and future? The answer is Israel in general and the exiles as part of Israel. God is speaking first to the people who have just suffered a traumatic defeat and an equally traumatic exile. These people are hundreds of miles away from their homes, totally dependent on the conquerors for food and housing and essentially living in slavery. Naturally, they ask, “where is God now?”

To hear that the nation will return in 70 years is not exactly good news. This means almost all of them will die in exile, far from home and under the power of their enemies. The natural question is, “Why would God take so long.”

God first tells us the 70-year period is not given because God wants to do evil. God’s plans for Israel are always plan for their good. God wants them to know that despite their circumstances and despite the length of time it is going to take for those circumstances to change, God both knows their suffering and is working for their good. In the end their exile, the time spent in Babylon and the long wait to go home will be a good thing, not a bad thing, in God’s working.

Does this have anything to say to us? It does although we should read the prophecy as first and foremost applying to the people to whom it was given.

But, we can see that this is in general the kind of God we serve. Jeremiah 29:11 is not just a promise that God has a good plan for our lives—it is even more a revelation of the character of God. God is the type of God who, even when disciplining us, cares for us. God is the type of God who, even when it seems like things are going bad and taking forever to change, is still working a good plan for the people. Jeremiah 29:11 does not say that only good things will happen to us. It does say that God’s plan is good even when the particular circumstances we face are not good. And even when things are not turning around, we can trust where God is ultimately taking us. We should not take this as a particular statement to us that God has “a wonderful plan for our lives” as if every detail is wonderful. God’s plan for Judah was to return them to Jerusalem, but God had a bigger plan than that, as we shall see next week. And that good plan certainly includes us.

Neo-Babylonian Empire 605-539 BC

- I. Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC)
 - A. First deportation from Judah (605)
 - B. The siege of Tyre, which lasted about 12 years (605-592)
 - C. Major rebellion and campaign against Colle-Syria, Moab, Ammon, and the second deportation from Judah (582)
 - D. Invasion of Egypt (568)

- II. Amel-Marduke, Son of Nebuchadnezzar (562-560 BC)
 - A. Known as Evil-Merodack in the Bible
 - B. Released Johoiachin from prison to promote him to a prominent position in Babylon
(2 Kings 25:27-30; Jeremiah 52:31-34).
 - C. Murdered by his brother-in-law, who succeeded him to the throne of Babylon.

III. Labashi-Marduk (556 BC)

Assassinated a few months later by Nabonidus who succeeded him

IV. Nabonidus (556 BC)

- A. Most capable leader since Nebuchadnezzar
- B. Devoted to the moon god "Sin"
- C. Moved residence to Tema for religious reasons; left his son, Belshazzar, as co-regent in Babylon.
- D. Belshazzar disrupts further the Marduk priesthood and causes further unrest while Nabonidus is away.
- E. In 539 BC, Nabonidus returns to Babylon, which is in a state of revolution.

The Persian Period

I. Cyrus the Great (559-530 BC)

- A. Son of Cambyses I from Anshan in Elam
- B. Achaemenians rose in power and Cyrus assumed his father's throne
- C. Added Parsua (Persia as province)
- D. Nabonidus sought as allies against Astyages of Media
- E. Cyrus dethrones Astyages (550)
- F. Nabonidus allies with Lydia and Egypt against Cyrus (560-546 BC).
- G. Cyrus attacked and conquered Lydia (547-546 BC).
- H. Cyrus expands eastern border to India.
- I. Battle of Opis on the Tigris (539); Cyrus defeats main Babylonian forces.
- J. The feast of Belshazzar and the empty offer of a third of the kingdom to Daniel
- K. Nabonidus already had fled Babylon.
- L. General Ugbaru "liberates" Babylon and Cyrus enters as a hero, celebrated by the priests of Marduk.
- M. Cyrus decrees Jews may return to Judah (538 BC).
- N. Cyrus fatally wounded in far northern battle (530 BC) after successfully expanding western borders to the Aegean Sea and to the east as far as India.

II. Cambyses (530-522 BC)

- A. Cyrus succeeded by his son, Cambyses II.
- B. Murdered his brother Smerdis (Bardiya)
- C. Conquered Egypt in 525.

D. While en route home from Egypt, Cambyses received word that Guamata had seized his throne, masquerading as his murdered brother, Smerdis. Upon that news, Cambyses committed suicide.

III. Darius Hystaspes (522-486 BC)

- A. Direct descendant of Cyrus and officer under Cambyses
- B. Known as Darius I
- C. Marched back to Persia and seized throne
- D. One of Persia's most capable rulers
- E. Began circuit courts and intricate postal system ("Neither rain . . . shall hinder delivery of mail" originated with Darius I).
- F. Darius defeated at Marathon by Greeks (490 BC)
- G. Died 486 BC before he could execute plans to retaliate against the Greeks

IV. Xerxes I (486-465 BC)

- A. Known as Ahasuerus in the book of Esther
- B. Returned to Sishan after being defeated by the Greeks at Salamis and Plataen, thus failing in the attempt to avenge his father's earlier loss at Marathon (483)
- C. Story of Esther takes place. Queen Vashti did not stand a chance with her capricious behavior, especially after Xerxes had suffered a huge loss in his military campaign.

V. Artaxerxes Longimanus (465-425 BC)

- A. Last Persian ruler of note
- B. Succeeds throne after Xerxes' assassination
- C. Neither Xerxes or Artaxerxes achieved the power and leadership of Darius.

Jeremiah, Lesson 8

Messiah and Future Salvation

Jeremiah not only prophesied the judgment of God, the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of the nation to Babylon, he further believed that God would restore Judah to its homeland move toward a new or renewed relationship with the people.

Naturally questions remained about what this meant. How, for example, did God's judgment square with the promise that God made to David (to keep a member of his family on the throne of Israel)? And what would God do to solve the problems that led to sin and the exile in the first place?

The answer to the first question is that God intends to renew the Davidic covenant after the exile with a new king who will fulfill the intentions of the original Davidic covenant—namely to be a righteous King who leads a righteous people.

There are two key passages that talk about this leader in Jeremiah: chapters 23 and 34.

Read Jeremiah 23: 1-8.

Who does Jeremiah address here? Who is the 'righteous Branch'? What will he do?

Jeremiah 23 begins with the words, “Woe to you shepherds”—but he is not complaining about shepherders. The word “shepherd” denotes the leadership of Israel—and the word tells us what they should be doing. As “Shepherds” they should be leading and caring for the flock of Israel. But they are failing in their role. Sin in Judah starts at the top and permeates the culture. The kings and rulers are corrupt; the prophets prophesy for gain and not for God; the priests are no longer loyal to God. Verses 1-4 warn the “false shepherds” who are supposed to be leading the flock of Judah. Notice what Jeremiah says about them:

v 1 They destroy and scatter the sheep (shepherds are supposed to keep the flock together for protection).

v 2 They have not attended the sheep. They have not encouraged loyalty and obedience to God. Instead they have encouraged disobedience.

v 3 After judgment God will re-gather the people from the far country of exile and bring them back. Then they will be fruitful and multiply. Like a true shepherd God will gather the flock together. Note the reference back to Genesis 1:28 and God's original command to Adam and Eve. In short the re-gathering of Judah will be like a re-creation in which God's original will for humanity will be carried out.

v 4 Israel's real shepherd is God, but the Lord will raise up good shepherds to take care of the sheep. Then no one will be lost because of poor leadership or the failure of the priests/teachers/leaders of the people as in the past.

v 5 The term "branch" reflects the fact that the Messiah will be from the house of David--the hereditary house of the kings of Judah. He will be "righteous" and will "execute justice and righteousness" and "deal wisely." That is, he will truly be a King who reflects the character of the King of Heaven. It is possible that Jeremiah is taking a dig here at Zedekiah: The word "branch" or "shoot" in Hebrew, *tsemach* sounds somewhat like *tsedek*, the base word in Zedekiah's name. In this sense Jeremiah is contrasting the "righteous" branch that God will raise up to rule his kingdom with the failure of Zedekiah,

whose name means "Yahweh [the LORD] is righteous." Zedekiah shows himself to be anything but righteous in final fall of Jerusalem.

v 6 Judah will only be truly "saved" when she is ruled by God's righteous king.

Security comes only with godly leadership over a godly people. Again, there is probably a sharp dig here: what is the name of this king? Not Zedekiah = "Yahweh is righteous," but "Jahweh-zedekenu" = "Yahweh is our righteousness."

What is the promise that Jeremiah gives to the people in vv 7-8?

The promise is that God is going to save his people. Indeed, the salvation ahead of Israel is so great that it will eclipse the Exodus. No longer will people look back on the liberation from Egypt as the one great saving event. Instead, they will refer to the return from exile as the great proof of God's saving power.

It is not that God cannot save Judah from the Babylonians. It is rather that God is going to save them in a way different from what the people want. Nevertheless, salvation is coming.

What does this have to do with the Messiah?

In the main the text is arguing more about (1) the lack of true righteousness and godliness of the present leadership of Israel, and (2) the superior leadership which God will raise up in His coming salvation. In particular the new King which God will raise up will reflect the character of the new salvation. Not much more is really said about the

character and mission of the Messiah other than to contrast him with the present failure of leadership.

The NT does not quote Jeremiah specifically in terms of these prophecies. It is important for the gospels that Jesus is in fact the physical “Son of David”—he is “of the house and lineage of David.” But the NT understands that he is much more. Mark 12 quoting Ps 110 shows that the Messiah will not be just an heir of David, but one whom David himself calls, “Lord.” We see further echoes of these prophecies in passages such as John 10 where Jesus is portrayed as the “The Good Shepherd”. Jesus is now the “good shepherd” who gives his life for the sheep—much more than even Jeremiah predicted. Jesus is called, “The Christ” (“Messiah” in Greek) because he does indeed fulfill the expectations of the OT for a new leader/king. But we shall see that God sees clearly that more than a new King is needed—a new Kingdom with a different kind of citizen is also needed.

Jeremiah has much more to say about the future God intends—in particular he imagines a new covenant between Israel and God.

Jeremiah 30:5-22; 31:1-20; 31:31-34

The New Covenant of the Messiah is first introduced in Isaiah, then in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The theme of the New Covenant is completed with the coming of Messiah.

For what time is Jeremiah 30:1-22 intended?

This is part of a set of prophecies sent from Jerusalem to the exiles in Babylon.

What does Jeremiah tell the exiles?

Vv1-7 Though people are panicked and in distress Jeremiah tells them “Yet he (Jacob/Judah) shall be saved out of it. They should not see exile as the last word in their lives.

V8 God will redeem Israel from bondage

V9 God will save them and bring them back to the land

V10ff The exile is a time of punishment and discipline for Israel

V16 eventually God will also punish their enemies

V17 God will restore and heal Israel

V21 They will be ruled by their own Prince

V22 God will save them.

The passage overall stresses that the exile is the punishment for the sins of Judah and a time of discipline, but God intends to turn this around, restore Judah, punish their enemies, and bring them back to the land and their own King.

Jeremiah, however, in these verses is given a vision of a future—and it will take more than the physical return of the people to fulfill this vision.

What elements in Jeremiah 30:1-22 may not have been fulfilled in the time span of 538 BC - 70 AD?

1. Fortunes of Israel and Judah restored (v 3).
2. Strangers shall no longer make them slaves (v 8).
3. The relationship of their ruler to God (v 21).

This tells us that more is intended for the people of God than simple political restoration.

What is the key message for the exiles in Jeremiah 31:1-20?

"There is hope for your future" (v 17).

The prophet speaks both to Israel (vv1-22) and Judah (vv23-30) promising to return the two nations to their homes and bless them.

In God's call to Jeremiah, God promised that both judgment and restoration lay ahead—and Jeremiah repeats these words as a promise that as God has disciplined the nation, so now God will also heal:

Jeremiah 31:28-30 (ESV)

²⁸ And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring harm, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, declares the LORD.

²⁹ In those days they shall no longer say: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."

³⁰ But everyone shall die for his own iniquity. Each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.

Note the images in v28 go back Jeremiah's call. From the beginning God told

Jeremiah that his work would be both positive and negative: God would be tearing down

and building up, plucking and planting. After the time of judgment and discipline, God intends to build something new in the people.

But merely bringing people back to the land will not solve the problems that caused the exile in the first place. God has a further plan for the people:

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (ESV)

³¹ **“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,**

³² **not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.**

³³ **For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.**

³⁴ **And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”**

What new ideas do we see in these verses?

v31 a “new” covenant

V32 this covenant is not like the Sinai covenant that the people broke and which led to the exile

V33 This covenant will be written on the heart so that they will now truly be God’s people

V34 They will “know” the law in a deeper and more personal way. This will bring about a real forgiveness.

The problem with the old covenant is implicitly explained in these verses—the Old Covenant gave the law, but did not make people want to do the law (this is Pauls’ point in Romans 7). The New Covenant goes further—creating a new kind of people. Jeremiah foresees a time when people know God in such a way that they want to follow the law. At that point teaching will be superfluous because the righteousness of God will be personally ingrained in every life.

This becomes a key concept for the New Testament.

The book of Hebrews quotes Jeremiah 31 in both chapters 8 (verses 8-12) and 10 (16-17).

Read Hebrews 8:6-8 (ESV)

⁶ But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.

⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

⁸ For he finds fault with them when he says: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

And then goes on to quote more of Jeremiah 31.

Again in chapter 10 Hebrew returns to quote Jeremiah 31:

Read Hebrews 10:14-18 (ESV)

¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

¹⁵ And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,

¹⁶ “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,”

¹⁷ then he adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”

¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

How does Jesus fulfill this prophecy according to Hebrews?

Hebrews sees that the death/resurrection of Jesus establishes this new and better covenant (Hebrews 7:23; 8:6) that enables Christian to live what Jeremiah foresaw.

Jeremiah's prophecy is almost certainly behind the words of Jesus in the initiation of the Lord's Supper:

Read Matthew 26:27-28 (ESV)

²⁷ **And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you,**

²⁸ **for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.**

What kind of covenant is Jesus establish here?

The New Testament sees that in the death and resurrection of Jesus a new relationship is made possible between God and people. The Old covenant is taken up and fulfilled in the New. God does in the death of Jesus what was the OT sacrificial system did in a surface fashion—God satisfies the justice demanded in sin.

But more than that, God creates a new life in those who believe—people who now want to know and follow God with all that they have. The major tenets of Jesus were matters of the heart. "Whatever a man thinks in his heart, so is he," etc. Similarly Paul in

Romans stresses that the “true Jew” is a matter of the circumcision of the heart and not merely following the law (Romans 2:29).

Jeremiah sees the need for a spiritual and personal change in people—a change that creates in them a desire to know and follow God. This will be a “new covenant”, not because the desire of God has changed, but the desire of the people for God changes.

In the NT this is connected with the life and death and resurrection Jesus. In the death of Jesus God creates a forgiveness of sin that fulfills the hopes of the old covenant. The expectation of a new age of the Spirit that we find in Ezekiel and Joel are connected with the new covenant in the NT to complete the idea.