

BIBLE CHALLENGE

An 8 day study of the book of Jeremiah

The story so far: We continue our look at the prophets preaching to Judah in its last days. Jeremiah, perhaps the most passionate of the prophets, voices God's complaints against Judah: The people refuse to connect their religious practice with the manner in which they live their lives, and they prostitute themselves both through their worship of idols and their alliances with other nations.

Monday:

Read Jeremiah 1:1-10

What to look for:

- We turn now to Jeremiah, along with Isaiah, one of the key Old Testament prophets. The introduction in vs.1 places Jeremiah in about 627 BC.
- These first verses give us the story of Jeremiah's Call. Like Moses and others before him, Jeremiah protests God's Call on his life, to which God responds, "I want you to go and prophesy anyway." Jeremiah is often thought of as God's most unhappy prophet for he frequently agonizes over what he must say to the people.

Tuesday:

Read Jeremiah 7:1-15

What to look for:

- In a refrain familiar from the message of other prophets, Jeremiah denounces the people's habit of disconnecting their faith from their life. Jeremiah indicts the people for trying to buy off God with their sacrifices so that they can return to a life of unjust and harsh treatment of others. (vs.9) The people are operating under the false assumption that God would never allow something bad to happen to them no matter how much they sin (vs. 4)
- See Matthew 21:13, Mark 11:17, and Luke 19:46 for the way in which Jesus quotes this verse. Jeremiah is not saying that people are coming into the temple to rob or cheat. He's saying that they treat people unjustly every place else and then come to the temple thinking that by going to church they will make everything right. The temple has become their hideout which they think will protect them in spite of their sin.
- Vs. 12-15 is a warning of the coming destruction of the temple whose presence the people think will somehow, as if by magic, keep them safe.

Wednesday:

Read Jeremiah 8:18-9:1, 15:10, 15-18

What to look for:

- Jeremiah doesn't like being a prophet, as these verses attest. His words often reflect a deep pain and grief for his people and a certain resentment at being the one who has been called to deliver such a harsh message.
- Jeremiah is often called the "weeping prophet", one who weeps for his people (and for himself at the price he has to pay for his faithfulness to God's Call) even as he brings a word of judgment.

Thursday:

Read Jeremiah 18:1-6, 19:1-6, 10-13

What to look for:

- Jeremiah often used object lessons to make his point. In these passages Jeremiah points to a potter and his pots to demonstrate what God would do with Judah.
- 18:1-6 – Just as a potter works with clay to shape and mold it but sometimes the clay does not respond well to the potter's hands and so the potter needs to flatten it and start again, so God is a potter and his people are his clay. Depending on how the clay responds the potter will need to flatten it and remold it.
- 19:1-6, 10-13 – But a pot the potter has created can also be completely destroyed. Certain practices (such as child sacrifice, which took place in the spot where Jeremiah is teaching his object lesson) were so abhorrent they simply needed to be abolished. What God was about to do, said Jeremiah, was not reshape Judah, but to smash it in so many pieces it could never again be restored.

Friday:

Read Jeremiah 20:7-12

What to look for:

- Once again we get one of Jeremiah's personal complaints against God. Jeremiah is struggling over what it means to be faithful and what benefits that faithfulness offers versus the costs it requires.
- Jeremiah is unhappy because speaking God's word brings him no honor, only trouble (vs. 7-8). Yet as terrible as it is to speak, it's harder still to say nothing at all (vs. 9). So, Jeremiah is compelled to speak even though life would be so much easier if he did not.
- Note the movement in these verses. Jeremiah moves from despair at his own situation to ultimate hope in God. In himself Jeremiah has no resources, but in God Jeremiah can have confidence.
- In what ways does Jeremiah's complaint ring true for you?

Monday:

Read Jeremiah 39:1-10

What to look for:

- The year is 587 BC, more than 400 years after David first came to the throne.
- Zedekiah is the final king in the Davidic line. The Davidic monarchy is now ended in the total destruction of both Jerusalem and the temple.
- Most of the people are deported to Babylon; however a remnant of the poor and powerless are left in the land and given vineyards and fields to secure their loyalty.

Tuesday:

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34

What to look for:

- This passage is, perhaps, Jeremiah's most enduring message.
- The southern kingdom has ended and with it David's royal line, but that does not mean it is the end of all hope. The kingdom may have fallen but God has not abandoned his people.
- Note that this new covenant is for "the house of Israel and the house of Judah". It is a promise that in this new covenant the people of God will be reunited once again.
- What does it mean for you to "know God" (vs.34)?

Wednesday:

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 (again)

What to look for:

- These are key verses in the Old Testament that foreshadow what will happen in the New. We're reading them again today because of their significance for what lies ahead. You should have these verses clearly marked in your Bible.
- Note how these verses are picked up by the New Testament (another word for *covenant* is *testament*) writers and echoed by Jesus himself. "The time is coming when I will make a new covenant...I will write it on their hearts...For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." Compare this to Jesus' words in Luke 22:14-20, Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, and the author of Hebrews words in Hebrews 8 and in Hebrews 10:15-18. The promise of God to Jeremiah echoes in our ears each time we approach the altar for Holy Communion: "This is the new covenant in my blood shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin."