

Aug 6-12

Week 32

Continuing our journey through Act 2, scene 7, we come to the time just prior to the Babylonian exile, when many of God's people, as consequences of their rejection of God, were deported to Babylon, a nation hundreds of miles from the land of Judah.

This week we will meet the prophets Habakkuk and Joel. Habakkuk carried on a dialogue with God. Joel had a vision of locusts and, among other things, prophesied about the pouring out of God's Spirit.

Next we will meet Jeremiah, known as the Weeping Prophet because of his many laments to the Lord over the destruction of Jerusalem. A priest from the town of Anathoth, Jeremiah started his ministry in 627 BC, during the reign of King Josiah. Yet the vast majority of his prophecies date to a twenty-two-year period after Josiah's death, when Judah was caught up in volatile world politics between Egypt and Babylon.

As you read this week, notice that the main themes of prophetic literature are all here: a call for repentance and faithfulness to the covenant, certain judgment, and restoration. But for Judah it was almost too late to turn back the coming destruction.

Day 1

Read Habakkuk

Act 2 - Scene 7 - Reading 25

Habakkuk was a prophet from about 630 to 605 BC, beginning his ministry just prior to the beginning of Josiah's reforms. In Habakkuk the prophet carried on a dialogue with God. In chapter 1 he wondered why God allowed his people to live so violently and contrary to God's ways. God answered that he was going to bring the Babylonians to judge them. This puzzled Habakkuk. Why would God use an even more corrupt nation to punish his people? In Habakkuk 2:2-5 God answered by pointing to his justice in punishing all sinful people.

Notice the last line of Habakkuk 2:4, a very important verse in the New Testament (see Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). A series of woes on sinners follows. The book ends with a beautiful plea for mercy, a reflection on God's deliverance of his people from Egypt, and a psalm of praise to God regardless of difficult circumstances.

Meditate deeply on Habakkuk 3:17-19. What are difficult circumstances you face today? Praise God in spite of those circumstances.

Day 2

Read Joel

Act 2 - Scene 7 - Reading 26

Since the prophet offers us no historical markers, suggestions on the date of Joel vary widely. However, Joel's treatment of the day of the Lord, understood as both a day of punishment and salvation, is similar to that of Isaiah and Jeremiah. For this reason we have placed the prophet here in our chronological reading of the Old Testament.

Agriculture is central to the message of Joel; a key theme of the book concerns the plague of locusts first mentioned in chapter 1. Locusts were one of the curses promised if God's people abandoned the covenant (see Deuteronomy 28:22, 38-42). Joel 2:1-11 describes locusts as an invading army (Joel's vision is later taken up by John in Revelation 9:3-12). Each of Joel's visions of the locusts is followed by a call to repentance (see Joel 1:13-20; 2:12-17).

The balance of the book promises God's future blessings on his people, including the pouring out of the Spirit (see Joel 2:28-32), which Peter said was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:17-21). So aspects of the blessings would be fulfilled in a time long after the prophet wrote.

If you are a follower of Christ, thank God that his pouring out of his Spirit on you means that he is present with you at all times. If you have yet to commit your life to Christ, seek to understand the good news that God wants to be present in your life.

Day 3

Read Jeremiah 1-4

Act 2 - Scene 7 - Reading 27

In his ministry Jeremiah stood alone against almost all leaders of the land. As you read the first chapters of this intriguing book, watch for several things. The key problem is the nation's abandonment of the Lord. Notice the figurative language that describes this idea. Watch for allusions to God's covenant with his people, along with the blessing of the nations promised to Abraham and the curses on those who abandoned the covenant. Finally, Jeremiah ministered in a very sad time and is called the Weeping Prophet for good reason. Jeremiah 4 records the prophet's lament, an anguished song that suggests the destruction of Judah was like a reversal of God's good creation (see 4:23).

What things in your life draw you away from the Lord like a faithless lover?

Day 4**Read Jeremiah 5-8****Act 2 - Scene 7 - Reading 28**

As you read this passage, sort out the following:

1. How Jeremiah's role is described
2. The pervasiveness of the problem with Jerusalem's people (All of the people and all of their leaders were corrupt, failing to love God and live by his covenant.)
3. Their misplaced trust in deceitful words and empty religious practices
4. The consequence of their sin (God was bringing an awesome nation from the north [Babylon] that would destroy them.)
5. The inevitability of their consequential destruction

When Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem, he alluded to Jeremiah 7:11: "Has this house . . . become a den of robbers?" Jesus was saying the religious leaders of his day were much like those of Jeremiah's day.

Do you know someone who is far from God and stubbornly unrepentant? Pray for that person today.

Day 5**Read Jeremiah 9-12****Act 2 - Scene 7 - Reading 29**

The most dominant theme in the reading today is mourning or lament, in which the prophet honestly poured out his sadness to God. Jeremiah mourned because of the destruction of lives and land, the triumph of the wicked, and betrayal by people in his own town. The Weeping Prophet deeply grieved over the destruction of his people.

In reading lament, we need to enter that grief, recognizing the devastation that sin causes in peoples' lives. We should be deeply sad as we think of people who suffer the consequences of their sin or the sin of others. God calls his people to boast in him alone (see Jeremiah 9:23-24) and to turn back to the covenant (11:1-5). Renewal can come from mourning.

Allow yourself to grieve over the devastation of sin as you pray today. Boast in the Lord and his covenant relationship with his people. Allow lament to lead you back to God.

Day 6**Read Jeremiah 13-16****Act 2 - Scene 7 - Reading 30**

As you read, notice that God's resolve to let the full consequences of his people's rebellion and idolatry was clear and unwavering. There is barely a word of hope here (except in Jeremiah 16:14-15 about the eventual return from exile seventy years later). Also notice two things about Jeremiah's ministry.

1. The prophets at times acted out a message from God, as Jeremiah did with the linen underwear in 13:1-11. He traveled hundreds of miles to do a simple act, foretelling the exile and illustrating how worthless God's people had become.
2. Jeremiah's words are wonderfully, tragically personal. He was so honest with God that he almost went too far, calling God unreliable (see 15:18), and God rebuked him. Jeremiah's ministry was very, very hard. He had to stand fast in the ministry God had given him, and this pitted him against everyone in his world. Faithfulness does not always lead to happiness. Yet there is joy in the Lord and his Word (see 15:16).

What difficult thing has God given you to do? How are you responding to the situation? Is faithfulness to God more important to you than comfort?

Day 7

Reading Summary for Week 32

This week, Habakkuk dialogued with God about why evil often seems to go unpunished—and why God sometimes allows the consequences of one evil (Judah) to come and the hands of an even greater evil (Babylon). We've read Joel, who described a locust swarm that devoured Judah's crops. This foreshadowed "the great and terrible day of the Lord," (Joel 2:31) that would consume unfaithful Judah unless the people repented. We've also read the first part of Jeremiah, a true doomsday prophet. He called for Judah to repent, but his main message was that Judah had fallen under God's curse and was doomed to Babylonian exile because of its refusal to turn from sin.

Prayer/Meditation

I praise you, O God, for raising up Joel who was faithful to your call to deliver your words, although they announced judgment. Thank you also for giving him your promise about the time to come when you would pour out your Spirit on all humanity. Thank you for fulfilling this promise in your church, beginning at Pentecost, even as the apostle Peter proclaimed. Thank you that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21). Amen.
