

Aug 13-19

Week 33

The final days of the southern kingdom of Judah are upon us this week, and the readings in day 6 will take us into Act 2, scene 8, “Exile: God Disciplines His People.” The prophecies of Jeremiah are not always in chronological order, the book shifting back and forth between the last kings of the southern kingdom. Notice the successive deportations to Babylon, which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, to be told in the reading in day 1 of next week (week 34).

Jeremiah shared with the other prophets key themes like coming judgment, a call to repentance, and the hope of restoration. Yet because of his time in history and the prophet’s personality, his book is unique. Notice his brutal honesty and his courage as he stood, almost alone, against the political currents of Judah. Also notice passages that speak of a coming restoration and anticipate what God would ultimately do in Christ.

Day 1

Read Jeremiah 17-20

Act 2 - Scene 7 - Reading 32

Watch for the following themes:

1. Curse and blessing in chapter 17 echo an important aspect of the covenant as expressed in the whole of Deuteronomy.
2. The lack of Sabbath observance manifests how lightly the people were taking God's law.
3. The condition of the heart was a key message, with Jeremiah using the image of sin being engraved on the heart in Jeremiah 17:1.

God gave Jeremiah a parable involving pottery (see Jeremiah 18:1-12) and then had Jeremiah act out a message of judgment, shattering a clay jug (see chapter 19).

Continue to recognize the depth of Jeremiah's struggle with his situation. In this section the priest Pashhur had him beaten (see Jeremiah 20:2), and the lament in the remainder of chapter 20 is heart-wrenching.

Choose one of the images from these chapters and meditate on it deeply.

Day 2

Read Jeremiah 21-24

Act 2 - Scene 7 - Reading 33

Today's reading focuses on judgment against the evil leaders of Judah, both kings and priests. Three kings are mentioned: Jehoiakim, who ruled from 609 to 598 BC; his son Coniah, who ruled for a very brief time in 597 BC; and Zedekiah, the king from 597 to 586 BC. Each was killed or deported. Jeremiah powerfully prophesied against these kings because of their lack of justice and righteousness.

Jeremiah also prophesied against prophets and priests, who committed adultery and spoke their own words instead of God's, prophesying peace as if they were communicating the Lord's words. He called these bad leaders evil shepherds who scattered and neglected God's sheep (see Jeremiah 23:1-4). The words bring to mind Jesus's words in Matthew 9:36, in which he described the people of his day as "sheep without a shepherd" (also see Numbers 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17). Jesus is the good shepherd (see John 10:1-21), the coming King, and the Righteous Branch foretold in Jeremiah 23:5-8.

Meditate on Jesus as the good shepherd, who gathers God's people and cares for them. How can leaders today emulate Jesus's leadership in caring for God's people?

Day 3**Read Jeremiah 25-28****Act 2 - Scene 7 - Reading 34**

Notice that these chapters fall into three primary movements.

1. In chapter 25 Jeremiah prophesied judgment on the whole world. When God called Nebuchadnezzar his servant, this didn't suggest that the Babylonian king feared and served Yahweh but rather that God is sovereign over even the most powerful nations.
2. Chapter 26 describes Jeremiah's persecution. Notice that much of this portion of Jeremiah's story parallels the story of Jesus, who also prophesied the coming destruction of the temple. Yet unlike Jesus, Jeremiah was released.
3. In chapters 27–28 Jeremiah put on a yoke, which was normally used when plowing with an animal. Jeremiah used the yoke to act out the need to submit to the king of Babylon. When the false prophet Hananiah broke Jeremiah's yoke, falsely prophesying that the dominion of Babylon would be short-lived, Jeremiah in turn prophesied that the yoke would be of iron (unbreakable) and that Hananiah would die that year.

Who are the false prophets of our day, offering sugarcoated words rather than God's Word?

Day 4

Read Jeremiah 29-32

Act 2 - Scene 7 - Reading 35

There were three main deportations of the Israelites from the land of Judah to Babylon, the final one culminating in the destruction of the city and the temple in 586 BC. Jeremiah, still in Judah, sent a letter to those who had already been exiled, telling them to build homes, raise families, and seek the welfare of the city to which they had been sent by God; the exile was not going to be short-lived, as a false prophecy claimed, giving false hope.

Yet notice that today's reading is permeated with hope. God promised a bright future. He would make a new covenant with people (see Jeremiah 31:31-34) by which people would know God, have God's laws written on their hearts and minds, and be decisively forgiven for every sin they would ever commit. This prophecy foretells the gospel, which Jesus would establish through his death (see Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:7-13).

Praise God for hope, a hope that has the gospel as its foundation. Allow the gospel to speak hope into your life today.

Day 5

Read Jeremiah 33-37

Act 2 - Scene 7 - Reading 36

Today's reading expresses the main messages of the prophets. Jeremiah proclaimed that the people had not followed God's words of covenant (see Jeremiah 34:8-16 about the freeing of Hebrew slaves and the good example of the Rechabites in Jeremiah 35). The people had not listened to the warnings given by the Lord through his prophet; therefore, judgment was coming. Yet God had a plan for restoration, which in part had to do with the Righteous Branch, a King who would come from the line of King David (see Jeremiah 33:1-22). King Jesus would fulfill that prophecy.

Notice the continued persecution of Jeremiah. King Jehoiachin defiantly burned the scroll Jeremiah dictated to Baruch, and while Zedekiah was king, Jeremiah was put in prison.

Meditate on Jeremiah's faithfulness and perseverance in the face of persecution.

Scene 8

Exile: God Disciplines His People

When God sets out to educate his people about the horror of idolatry, he stays at it until the lesson is learned. The moment of reckoning comes when the Babylonians ransack and burn Solomon's temple. The people of Judah and Jerusalem are taken away captive. The dynasty of David no longer rules, although the royal bloodline continues. This scene is the lowest point of Act 2.

During the infamous Babylonian captivity, God continues speaking to his people through prophets such as Ezekiel and Daniel. And wonder of wonders, at last the Israelites learn to be loyal to the one true God.

Day 6

Read Jeremiah 38-40; Psalm 74; 79

Act 2 - Scene 8 - Reading 1

As we move to Act 2, scene 8, we come to a key, infamous moment in the history of God's people: the fall and destruction of Jerusalem.

These chapters portray the continued persecution of the prophet; his final meeting with King Zedekiah; and his ultimate vindication and release by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. Tragically, Jeremiah's words came true.

Psalms 74 and 79 lament the state of God's people. Their land having been invaded and destroyed, they cried out to God for help. This is a good point in the story to think about the consequences of sin. Even covenant people can suffer as a result of their sin against God.

*We need to take sin very seriously and keep our hearts soft before the Lord.
What is the state of your heart today?*

Day 7

Reading Summary for Week 33

Despite beatings and imprisonment, Jeremiah continued foretelling doom. He lived to see his prophecies of Judah's fall come true. He also looked ahead to the time when God would make a new covenant with his people.

Prayer/Meditation

Lord, give me a heart to weep over sin and brokenness as Jeremiah did. And if your plan for me includes suffering, give me strength to bear it as he did. I worship you for promising the new covenant: "I will put my teaching within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33). Thank you that Jesus announced the "new covenant [established] in my blood" (Luke 22:20), and thank you that I share in this new covenant by faith. Amen.
