



SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

Discipleship Plan

Year Seven
Jeremiah Lessons
Part 1

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Lesson 1: God's Calling: A Comfort and A Challenge (Jeremiah 1)

Primary Verse: "Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, 'Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.' (Jeremiah 1:9-10)

Teaching Text: Jeremiah 1

Supporting Texts: Exodus 3:1-4:17, Joshua 21:17-18, 1 Kings 2:26, Jeremiah 11:21-23, Psalm 139:13-16

A Prophet Like Moses? As we have already seen in earlier exercises and readings, the impact of God's word through Moses on the ministry of Jeremiah is immense and far-reaching. Some scholars have mistakenly concluded that Jeremiah saw himself as "a prophet like Moses" (Deut. 18:15-19). As great as this error is, it is somewhat warranted, if not at least understandable, given the colossal challenges each faced and the similar reluctance with which they faced their respective assignments.

Moses had to deliver a message from an invisible God to a visible man regarded by millions as a god. The message itself was a threat to the one who would speak it, a renegade-fugitive guilty of murder who dared to face Pharaoh. Imagine how laughable his message must have sounded to a pagan ruler. Pharaoh must have reasoned, "Why would I respect a so-called "god" who is so weak that I and pharaohs before me have enslaved for centuries?" No wonder he asked, "Who is the LORD that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? (Exodus 5:1-2).

Similarly, Jeremiah was commissioned to communicate the wrath of the same God. But, this time, against His own people! Remarkably and regrettably, his audience proved to be just as stubborn as the Pharaoh of Egypt. God's warnings, therefore, whether to heathens or His people, must always be heeded. He is sure to bring the calamity our sins deserve or the blessings He freely bestows on they that repent and put their trust in Him.

Questions to Consider: What is your general attitude about the cities and geographic regions revealed in Scripture? Do you skip over them in a hurry, assuming they mean little? Or do you long to know more about them? Why are they mentioned, and do they have any significance for modern readers? Jeremiah's call is complex in that it is a cocktail of comforts combined with challenges. How does God inspire confidence and reassurance by speaking to Jeremiah? What statements from God contain dark and foreboding aspects to this prophetic call? We have read the call narratives of several prophets in our study of the Old Testament. Can you identify echoes of earlier accounts of the call to prophetic ministry (besides Moses)? Examine the use of the first-person singular pronoun used in 1:4-5. Who is the "I"? What is the "I" described as doing? To whom or for whom is the "I" doing these actions? WHEN is the "I" performing these activities? Can we draw any conclusions about the relationship of that "I" with persons in general or does this only apply to the individuals in this chapter? What supports your reasoning?

Challenging the Class: The prophet Jeremiah has been dubbed, "the gloom and doom prophet" by some, "the weeping prophet" by others. However, while these titles fit, they only half-fit him. A simple reading of Jeremiah 1 demonstrates, with clarity, Jeremiah's message and ministry are rich with both "destruction and building," both "overthrowing" and "planting." Many are well-intentioned when criticizing "soft" preaching/teaching by pointing out that God is not only a God of love, but a God of judgment and wrath. That's a true statement. But we should avoid an over-correction that creates a new problem: a God who favors wrath over grace. No, but the God we meet in the Bible is perfect in all His ways (Psalm 18:30). He is perfectly balanced. May God grant grace that we may represent Him in all His perfections.

Lesson 2: When God Accuses—The Case Against Judah (Jeremiah 2)

Primary Verse: “Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” (Jeremiah 2:11-13)

Teaching Text: Jeremiah 2

Supporting Texts: Psalm 115:1-8, Isaiah 44:9-20, Hosea 2:14-16, Romans 1:18-27, Revelation 2:4

The prophets and their prophetic office are directly connected to the covenant of grace that God made with his people, with Israel. One scholar calls them, "God's covenant prosecutors." They are like lawyers, attorneys whom God contracts with to represent his covenantal interest with his people, Israel. So, they are prosecuting attorneys. That's why they're so polemical and sometimes even accusatory. Dr. Michael Ross

The Kitchen Sink: Desperate times call for desperate measures. When calamity draws near and the midnight hour is upon us, we feel the weight and pressure to act decisively. Sensing that he is the prophet who will witness the definitive act of divine justice carried out on his people, Jeremiah knows he must “cry out and spare not” (Isaiah 58:1). In a last-ditch effort to warn the Southern Kingdom of Judah that their window of repentance is ending, the prophet illustrates, with borrowed imagery, the depth of the people’s sin against God. Employing the proverbial “kitchen sink,” Jeremiah unleashes a tirade of accusations designed to display the heart of God and to drive Judah back into His arms before it’s too late.

The Punisher: The *true* prophets were generally an unpopular bunch even if they were somewhat feared and, at times, respected. Since the message entrusted to them was heard primarily by their voices (or at times by their pen), the people lashed out against them as if the prophets were the ones inflicting punishment for the sins of the people. It is clear, however, that Yahweh is the One Who is bringing the indictment (Jeremiah 2:9). Still, there are verses that point to a different punisher inflicting the just desserts due to the unfaithful (Jeremiah 2:17-19). How terrible for the nation that is not only punished by God but plays an active role in its own demise!

Questions to Consider: How many sins are laid out as specific reasons for God’s judgment? If your list includes more than two sins, how can we explain Jeremiah 2:13? One reoccurring theme in God’s complaint through Jeremiah is that his people have not profited/prospered. How many verses in chapter two speak to this failure? What is the source of the problem? What role did those in authority and positions of influence play in Israel’s unfaithfulness? Why does the picture of a wife-turned-harlot persist in this chapter?

Challenging the Class: Though we are quick to turn away from it, we are confronted with the benefits of experiencing shame in this chapter. Embarrassment over sin and the desire to have its reproach removed from us is a good thing. Like the painful sensation in our hands that tells us a fire is hot and we ought to move our hands, without shame, we are in danger of burning in flames without knowing it. Clearly, it is possible to be “shamed” yet fail to repent (Jeremiah 2:26). Without being governed by it, how can we profit from shame? Consider the role of leadership in producing healthy shame or avoiding it (Jeremiah 2:8).

Lesson 3: Repentance and Reconciliation—Offered but Refused (Jeremiah 4-5)

Primary Verse: “For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: ‘Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds.’” Jeremiah 4:3-4)

Teaching Text: Jeremiah 4-5

Supporting Texts: Deuteronomy 6:4-6 and 32:1-29, Jeremiah 3,

If You Return: The NIV, ESV, KJV, and NKJV all agree on the construction of Jeremiah 4:1. A careful reading of the verse reveals that turning away from sin is not enough. When God demands rightful living, He does not merely require a change of behavior. He says, “If you return, return to Me!” It is not enough to vow against sinful practices and overcome them. Repentance is not repentance until we turn away *from* sin and turn to God.

This point is a crucial as it is often neglected in our conversations on church membership, evangelism, and any topic where we are challenged to discuss distinctions between those who truly belong to God and those who do not. Jeremiah 4:1-2 clearly illustrates the distinct possibility of false repentance. When we sin against God, we don’t have the right to determine the conditions of reconciliation. We are only right with Him when we are right on His terms, not our own. Renouncing adulterous relations without truly renewing love with one’s spouse is not true fidelity. The man who decides he will no longer steal from his employer is still a thief so long as he keeps his ill-gotten gain. In the same way, turning away from idolatry means nothing unless we also turn to true worship of God. Partial repentance is not enough because no man can stand, even under partial judgment.

Destruction Decreed: Jeremiah 4:23-27 contains a fascinating and creative inversion of the creation story. While the prophet is not directly indicating by what means, it is clear the land will be desolate in the days to come. In Jeremiah 5:14-17, it becomes clear God has chosen His agent of wrath and judgment against His people. Though he has not named the agent clearly, he identifies it as a “nation from afar” (v. 15). Earlier, a more cryptic description is given that could imply a neighboring nation from the north or one that travels through the Fertile Crescent might be in view (5:6, also 4:5-6). God’s determination to destroy also seems connected to Judah’s unfounded confidence that God will do nothing and the prophets are merely blowing hot air (5:12-13). This insulting attitude is nothing less than treachery against the Lord and their covenant with Him (5:11).

Questions to Consider: What was the value of circumcision to an Israelite or Jew? What scripture would you cite to make your point about both the importance and the meaning of circumcision? What would it mean to circumcise one’s own heart? How does 4:3-4 control or steer our understanding the following verses: 4:8, 4:14, 4:27, 5:1, 5:28-30? How should we understand God’s willingness to forgive despite His knowledge that the nation will not repent? Is such an offer of repentance valid? Why or why not?

Challenging the Class: Does Jeremiah 5:1 sound familiar? Though Judah has become a cesspool of severe spiritual decline, the Lord makes an offer that is ten times better than the one offered to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. God is asking—not for ten righteous persons—but for only one. It’s one thing to curse the darkness around us, but what does personal evaluation reflect for yourself? What would it take to be “the one” the Lord is looking for so that the city or even the nation could be spared?

Lesson 4: Shiloh's Long Shadow in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 7)

Primary Verse: “Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel. And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name an in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim [Israel].” (Jeremiah 7:12-15)

Teaching Text: Jeremiah 7

Supporting Texts: Joshua 18:1, 1 Samuel 4, Psalm 78:50-62, Jeremiah 6,

“From bygone times [God’s people] knew that it was not necessary to trust in a place that was formerly holy at one time. For a place is holy because of the Word of God which is heard in the place, and by which the place is sanctified; when the word goes away from there, the place is no longer holy of itself. Thus, the land is holy where God spoke to Moses from the burning bush. So, the place Bethel is holy; it is the house of God and a gate of heaven because God spoke to Jacob... Indeed, people are sanctified through the Word, so that God dwells in them. Therefore, no land or building therein is holy except that land or building has the Word of God in truth and in fullness.”—Johannes Bugenhagen

The argument laid out above is solidly built on evidence from several texts of the Scriptures and cannot be overthrown. It is God’s word that sanctifies the place, it is *never* the other way around. The prophet Jeremiah saw the need to remind the people of this obvious truth made explicit in the very history of the nation (see supporting texts). In obedience to God, he stood in what was at once the most obvious place to deliver such a message and where it was likely to be the worst received - in the gate of Solomon’s Temple.

The Temple of the Lord: Nature abhors a vacuum and so do our souls. If we are devoid of God’s truth, our souls will not hold vacancy indefinitely. A lie of some sort, from some source will soon take up residence. In the case of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, it is quite possible their failure to promote and esteem the Word of God led them to being influenced by pagan thought and beliefs.

Scholars who study the Ancient Near East (ANE) anthropology have uncovered an ideology known as the “inviolability of the temple.” This idea is closely tied to the Mesopotamian concept of a city’s patron deity where a city would dedicate itself to a god/goddess. If there was an earthly abode for the deity in a given city, the city had special protection from that god/goddess. The deity “enjoyed” the worship and special attentive detail to their house (temple). The city where any such temple stood was understood to be “inviolable” or “untouchable” so long as the temple was well-kept. This belief would explain how Israel and Judah could claim Yahweh as their God, while continuing in their treachery against Him. “He lives here, right?” they reasoned. “Why would He allow the destruction of His own house?”

Question to Consider: Does Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon announce final destruction or is there a way out? Use Scripture from these first seven chapters to support your answer.

Challenging the Class: The inviolability of the temple has been used to explain Yahweh’s deliverance during the time of Sennacherib’s attack (Isaiah chapters 36-37). As we saw in our last lesson, King Hezekiah was “the one,” a faithful believer who feared the LORD and prayed, putting his trust in the true and living God. It was not the doctrine of pagans that availed much, it was God Who acted powerfully to honor the prayers of the righteous! What cultural ideas is the church currently in danger of believing? What part will you play in helping fortify believers against the lies of the culture?

Jeremiah the Weeping Prophet

“The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign” (vv. 1–2).

- Jeremiah 1:1–8

Despite brief revivals under kings such as Asa, Hezekiah, and Josiah, division and decline marked the history of God’s old covenant people after David (1 Kings 15:9–15; 2 Kings 18:1–8; 22:1–23:25). Following Solomon’s death, the one nation of Israel was split in two—the northern kingdom, Israel, and the southern kingdom, Judah (1 Kings 12:1–24). God sent prophets to both nations to warn them of the judgment they faced if they would not turn from their idolatry, and both nations refused to repent of their apostasy. Finally, the Lord executed the covenant curse of exile upon both nations. Assyria conquered Samaria, Israel’s capital, in 722 B.C., and Babylon conquered Jerusalem, Judah’s capital, in 586 B.C. (Deut. 28:58–68; 2 Kings 17:6–23; 25:1–21).

About forty years before Jerusalem fell to Babylon, God raised up the prophet Jeremiah to plead with the people for their repentance. Ministering during the waning days of Judah, Jeremiah prophesied during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, which encompassed the years 627–586 B.C. This was a tumultuous time for the covenant community. Internationally, Assyria was weakening rapidly, and it fell to the Babylonian Empire in 612 B.C. At home, Judah’s relationship with God initially seemed to be improving. Good king Josiah was spearheading a return to the pure worship of Yahweh by removing idols and celebrating a grand Passover (2 Kings 22:1–23:25). Yet this was short-lived, and the people returned to their sins after Josiah died in 609 B.C. Judah became a political football, with Egypt and Babylon both laying claim to the country’s treasure (2 Kings 23:28–24:1a). The Chaldeans (Babylon) and other peoples—Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites—attacked Judah, and Babylon invaded Jerusalem several times. The city finally fell to Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 24:1b–25:21). Through tears, Jeremiah warned the Judahites repeatedly to repent during this period, but they refused, and Josiah’s successors opposed the prophet bitterly (Jer. 32:1–3; 36).

In today’s passage, Jeremiah describes his call to ministry, which occurred when he was just a young man (Jer. 1:6–8). Yet the Lord determined to issue this call long before Jeremiah was born, even before he was an idea in his parents’ mind. When God formed the prophet in His mother’s womb, He had already purposed to send forth His word through Jeremiah (vv. 4–5). Jeremiah’s ministry was ordained in eternity past.

Coram Deo

Jeremiah 1:1-8 has much to say to us theologically. First, that God formed Jeremiah in the womb affirms that human beings are made in the Lord's image from the earliest stages of development and worthy of protection from conception onward. Jeremiah's call also helps establish our doctrine of vocation. If the prophet's calling was established before he was born, surely it is not a stretch to assume that our sovereign Lord has established a calling for all of His people before their births.

Passages for Further Study

1 Kings 19:9-21

Amos 7:14-15

Matthew 4:18-22

Galatians 1:11-24

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