



SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

Discipleship Plan

Year Seven
Jeremiah Lessons
Part 2

Deacon Jerome Yorkshire, Sr., Sunday School Superintendent
Deacon Eric Dolce, Director of Discipleship
Reverend Patrick J. Walker, Senior Pastor

Lesson 5: The Soul of a Prophet—Vexed but Vindicated (Jeremiah 12)	Page 3
Lesson 6: The Life of a Prophet—Marked by Prayer (Jeremiah 15)	Page 4
Lesson 7: The Prophet's Passion-- Faithful Proclamation (Jeremiah 20)	Page 5
Lesson 8: The Prophet's Warfare—Confronting Falsehood (Jeremiah 23)	Page 6
Article: Jeremiah 29:11 by Kevin D. Gardner	Page 7
Article: Out with the Old and in with the New by Richard L. Pratt, Jr.	Page 9

Lesson 5: The Soul of a Prophet—Vexed but Vindicated (Jeremiah 12)

Primary Verse: “But you, O LORD, know me; you see me and test my heart toward you. Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter and set them apart for the day of slaughter. How long will the land mourn and the grass of every field wither? For the evil of those who dwell in it the beasts and the birds are swept away, because they said, He will not see our latter end.” (Jeremiah 12:3-4)

Teaching Text: Jeremiah 12

Supporting Texts: Jeremiah 11, Psalm 44, Romans 8:31-38

“It is as if a man were caught between two giant grinding stones. Jeremiah feels crushed. On the one hand, there is the persistent rebellion of the covenant people—they have turned from God, His covenant, and now, by their desire to silence or circumvent the appropriate warnings, they refuse to listen to the preaching. On the other hand, there is the tenacious righteousness of God. His holiness is offended, and He demands and insists on the faithfulness that is due to both Him and His covenant. Then there’s the prophet, hard-pressed between the two!”—Dr. Don Carson

Remember Jeremiah is fulfilling a double-role as both priest and prophet. After the divine pronouncement of the evil regarding Judah’s failure to keep covenant, God had forbidden him to do the one thing that, as a priest, would have been a natural duty - to pray (Jeremiah 11:9-14). As if that were not enough, imagine his shock and sadness to learn of the plot against his life in his hometown (11:18)! It is in the backdrop of these dual disappointments that Jeremiah dares to seek an audience with the One Who has commissioned him for a seemingly impossible task.

We can be grateful for Jeremiah’s question in 12:1 because he makes it plain that one can ask God why His saintly sovereignty doesn’t appear to root out the wicked without questioning His character. We would do well to remember that God is “always righteous” when it appears, from our limited view, that He is not acting to correct the *openly* unrighteous.

God does not rebuke the prophet for asking, but stunningly warns him there’s worse to come. The third disappointment is, as evidenced in 12:5, the troubles yet to befall Jeremiah are so severe they make the current ones seem pleasant and easy to overcome by comparison. So, the saying is proved true, “God can handle your questions, but can you handle His answers?”

Questions to Consider: Are Christians generally encouraged to engage with God in the way Jeremiah did or not? Explain your answer/observation fully. Why is it important to respect the line between asking God questions and “questioning” God? Explain this concept as if you were trying to convince an unbeliever. Why didn’t God choose to comfort Jeremiah in verses 5 and 6? What was His purpose(s) for answering as harshly as He did? Are Christians trained to expect God to answer us in prayer? Discuss the pros/cons of your answer. How does God finally answer Jeremiah’s question about divine justice toward the wicked? Is it a comfort to the kingdom of Judah?

Challenging the Class: There is evidence in this passage (as in other OT passages) the mission to reach the Gentiles is not only considered under the New Covenant. Jeremiah 12:14-17 reveals God’s mission to establish Israel as a base of operations and stage for the messianic drama to play out was never intended to exclude non-Israelites. God was never immorally partial towards a group, but rather has always sought obedient worshippers (John 4:21-24). Will **you** be counted in that number?

Lesson 6: The Life of a Prophet—Marked by Prayer (Jeremiah 15)

Primary Verse: "You understand, O LORD; remember me and care for me. Avenge me on my persecutors. You are long-suffering--do not take me away; think of how I suffer reproach for your sake. When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty. I never sat in the company of revelers, never made merry with them; I sat alone because your hand was on me and you had filled me with indignation. (Jeremiah 15:15-17)

Teaching Text: Jeremiah 14-15

Supporting Texts: Jeremiah 13, Psalm 1, Psalm 119:129-136

The prophetic books have been miraculously preserved such that, as Jesus promised (Luke 21:33), we have God's word in its entirety; nothing is missing. His word is sufficient in all things concerning salvation and godly living (Deuteronomy 29:29 and 2 Timothy 3:15-17). The same scriptures are of divine, not human, origin, inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21), though penned by men. Though the texts themselves primarily spotlight God and His work, we occasionally receive glimpses into the lives of the men through whom God's word comes.

The private lives of Hosea, Daniel, and others are detailed for us in the Bible. In Jeremiah's case, we have interesting, if not curiously peculiar, stories which become mini-sermons or parables (13:1-11); the most private being Jeremiah's prayer life displayed before us. In some instances, there is a model prayer - spectacular examples of faithfulness expressed in heartfelt communication with the Lord. Other times, Jeremiah's authentic and heartfelt prayers are rebuked he possesses the wrong emphasis or focus. We are blessed to have both prayers recorded and should recognize the benefit of following the one and receiving the intended warnings against praying recklessly (Ecclesiastes 5:1-3).

Questions to Consider: Jeremiah 14:1-6 gives a detailed description of a local drought. What is the extent of the drought? How should we understand the words in 14:7-9? What kind of speech is it? Are there any problems with this type of talk? How are these brief verses connected to 14:1-11? Recall Jeremiah 7:16 and 11:14. Considering these two verses from earlier dialogues between the Lord and Jeremiah, is Jeremiah wrong for continuing to pray for Judah? What evidence do you have to support your view? What must a nation or ethnic group do for God to be as angry as He is in 15:1-9? Is 15:19 addressing Jeremiah or Judah? How are we certain? What is the cause for this rebuke?

Challenging the Class: Many individuals claim to be enamored and touched by the soulful expressions found in the book of Psalms. However, in a moment of self-examination, we should ask ourselves, "How much do the words of scripture inform, shape, and give voice to our prayers?" There is evidence in the teaching text and other scriptures that Jeremiah was deeply influenced by the Psalms, which was revealed in his messages and prayer life (compare Jeremiah 15:17 and 17:7-8 with Psalm 1). Why shouldn't the same be true of Christians today?

Lesson 7: The Prophet's Passion-- Faithful Proclamation (Jeremiah 20)

Primary Verse: “O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So, the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, ‘I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,’ his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.” (Jeremiah 20:7-9)

Teaching Text: Jeremiah 20

Supporting Texts: Jeremiah 18-19

The supporting texts for this lesson contain the essential background for understanding Jeremiah 20. Jeremiah's visit to the potter's house was an act of obedience to the Lord that yielded an astounding revelation: the absolute sovereignty of Israel's God over all persons and all nations, in all places, always (18:1-2, 5-10). The theme and imagery of “potter and clay” were immediately revisited by Jeremiah after leaving the potter's house and was dramatically put on display for Jeremiah's next sermon (19:10-12). Ironically, the divine oracle of God's supremacy over all things was source of Jeremiah's humiliation, at the hands of men. detailed in chapter 20.

The words from Jeremiah in chapter 20, however, don't indicate a man who has been humbled by his humiliations. This quotation by the 17th-century theologian, John Owen, sums up the prophet's passion:

“Jeremiah teaches us by his own example that our firmness ought not to be weakened though the world overwhelms us with reproaches. For Jeremiah, when he came out of prison, spoke more boldly than before entering prison, nor was he beyond the reach of danger! God's servants ought not to feel shame, nor grow soft, nor be disheartened, when the world treats them with indignity, nor ought they to fear any dangers, but advance courageously in the discharge of their office.”

For sure, courage and boldness are not the only feelings exhibited by the prophet in this chapter. Jeremiah is on an emotional rollercoaster, demonstrating the full range of sentiments one should expect from anyone in such a circumstance.

Questions to Consider: Is Jeremiah accusing God of lying and deception in 20:7? How could or should this verse be understood in context? How does Jeremiah view the message and the source of its content? Use verses 8 and 9 for your answer but support your view with the larger passage. How does a prophet transition from praise and exultation of God to self-pity and depression (20:12-18?)

Challenging the Class: Have you heard of Meriam Yahia Ibrahim from Sudan? Or Asia Bibi from Pakistan? Or Andrew Brunson in Turkey? These are persons who, like Jeremiah, were imprisoned for their faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The only difference is these persons are from our modern-day and have been released from prison in the last five years. The persecution of God's people continues to this day and Christians are the most persecuted minority in the world. Are you informed and praying for your persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ?

Lesson 8: The Prophet's Warfare—Confronting Falsehood (Jeremiah 23)

Primary Verse: "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, 'It shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No disaster shall come upon you'". (Jeremiah 23:16-17)

Teaching Text: Jeremiah 23

Supporting Texts: Jeremiah 21-22

Jeremiah's desire to be a faithful proclaimer of God's message to the Kingdom of Judah cannot be denied or questioned at this point. Despite obvious human frailties common to all, even while experiencing them internally, Jeremiah courageously prosecuted the Lord's case against Judah. In the face of external threat, including imprisonment, corporal punishment, and public humiliation of being a prophet/priest essentially charged as a blasphemer/heretic (trials familiar to any New Testament believer), Jeremiah did not waver nor edit the Lord's message.

By the time we reach chapter 23, so much of what was predicted at Jeremiah's initial calling into the office of prophet has been fulfilled. Indeed, in Jeremiah 1:18-19, God promised to make him a bronze wall and an iron pillar to stand against:

- ✓ **The kings of Judah**—Jeremiah boldly proclaimed to King Zedekiah that the only escape from total ruin was to humbly exit the city and surrender to the Babylonians (Jeremiah 21:3-10)
- ✓ **The officials and priests**—We've examined the details of the injustice and cruelty of the priests (no doubt in league with legal authorities and officials) against Jeremiah by his false imprisonment and beating (Jeremiah 20:1-2)
- ✓ **The people of the land**—Far from being merely a preacher who spoke truth to the powers of his day, Jeremiah committed to be a candle burned at both ends. His famous temple sermon proved he was not only bold in proclamations against the cultural, religious, and political leaders, but was equally direct in bringing God's case against the common citizenry.

Having confronted these groups, Jeremiah wields the Sword of the Spirit against a set of foes he has long since indicated a desire to contend with: the false prophets of his day (Jeremiah 14:13).

Questions to Consider: How would you describe the turn of phrase in 23:2? Is the term "shepherd" or "pastor" in this verse only for the religious/spiritual minister? Consider the image and description found in verses 5-6 before you answer one way or the other. How do verses 18-22 explain verses 9-15? Make a list of ministry and personal characteristics that define the false prophet. How many can you find in this chapter? Is there a character trait which ultimately captures the entire list? If so, what is it?

Challenging the Class: As uncomfortable as it may be, faithfulness to God's message is not restricted to saying what is true but also includes exposing what is in error. But let all truth be spoken in loving concern for both the hapless hearer and the deceivers, lest both should perish!

Jeremiah 29:11

by Kevin D. Gardner

Jeremiah 29:11 contains a precious promise held dear by Christians the world over. It is also likely one of the most misapplied verses in all of Scripture. In this verse, Jeremiah affirms that God is in control, and moreover, He has good things in store: “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.”

Comforting words, to be sure. But what does Jeremiah mean? Some have taken this verse and applied it to themselves and others in an unqualified way. “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,” they say. “He has mapped out the course of your life, and you only have to be obedient to Him to step into His blessing.”

Some go further and say that this verse promises earthly prosperity. Health and wealth are the lot of Christians. We are not to settle for second best, for we are children of the King. In this view, suffering and deprivation signal a lack of faith.

The context of Jeremiah 29:11 indicates that it is not meant as a blanket promise of worldly blessing.

They say that the three most important factors when it comes to buying real estate are “location, location, location.” Similarly, the three most important factors when it comes to understanding a given passage in the Bible are “context, context, context.” When texts are isolated, they can be made to mean almost anything. But when they are read in context, their intended meaning becomes clear.

The context of Jeremiah 29:11 indicates that it is not meant as a blanket promise of worldly blessing. Jeremiah the prophet ministered before and during the Babylonian exile, when the southern kingdom of Judah suffered the covenant curse of expulsion from the promised land for its continued unfaithfulness to the Lord (Deut. 28:36; 2 Chron. 36:15-21). Jeremiah had warned the Judahites that punishment was coming, and he pleaded with them to repent of their idolatry and evildoing. When they did not, he prophesied that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, would conquer Judah and Jerusalem and carry off the people into exile (Jer. 25:1-11).

Even in the midst of this prophecy of punishment, there was a sliver of hope: the exile would be long, but it would not be permanent. God purposed to chasten His people, but He would not destroy them utterly. He would in fact bring them back to their land—after seventy years (v. 11).

Moreover, the Lord promised to bless the people during their exile. This promised blessing is the subject matter of chapter 29, which conveys the contents of a letter that the

prophet sent to the people in exile (29:1). God encourages the people to build houses, to marry and give their children in marriage, to plant vineyards, and to “seek the welfare of the city” (vv. 5–7). These blessings are a reversal or suspension of the covenant curses in Deuteronomy 28:30–34.

From Ligonier Ministries and R.C. Sproul. © Tabletalk magazine. Website: www.ligonier.org/tabletalk.

Email: tabletalk@ligonier.org. Toll free: 1-800-435-4343

<https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2019/08/jeremiah-2911/>

Out with the Old and in with the New

by Richard L. Pratt Jr.

Followers of Christ repeat Jesus' words "this cup is the new covenant" every time they observe the Lord's Supper. All over the world, local churches include the words *new covenant* in their names. But if you ask most Christians the question, "What is the new covenant?" you get about as many answers as the number of people you ask. What, then, is the new covenant? What is new about it? How is it fulfilled in Christ?

WHAT IS THE NEW COVENANT?

The foretelling of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31–34 begins in this way:

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.

To understand this prophecy properly, we should ask how it fits with other Old Testament expectations for the future. The opening words "the days are coming" (v. 31) may appear rather vague to you and me, but the immediate context of this prophecy helps us see that Jeremiah's words were actually rather precise.

The prediction of a new covenant is part of a larger segment of the book of Jeremiah that extends from 30:1 through 31:40. This section is often called the Book of Restoration because it gives several descriptions of Israel's hardships during the exile and the blessings that were to come after the exile. The expression "the days are coming" also appears in 30:3, where it is explicitly associated with God's promise, "I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it."

So, the expression "the days are coming" in 31:31 also refers to the time when the exile would be finished and God's people would return to the Promised Land. Isaiah 54:10, as well as Ezekiel 34:25 and 37:26, describe this covenant as a "covenant of peace." From the perspective of Old Testament prophecy, God would establish this covenant at the end of Israel's exile with the arrival of the Messiah and the worldwide kingdom of God.

HOW IS THE NEW COVENANT NEW?

There is so much confusion over what makes the new covenant "new" that we have to be careful not to go to extremes. On the one hand, many Christians have taken the expression *new covenant* to mean that it is entirely new, or "brand new," as we often put it. However, the word *new* translates the Hebrew term *châdash*, which does not mean "utterly

new,” as passages like Isaiah 61:4; Ezekiel 36:26; and Job 29:20 make clear. Rather, it means “renewed,” “renovated,” “rebuilt,” or “refreshed.” In other words, God did not promise an *entirely new covenant* in Jeremiah 31.

On the other hand, many Christians have also minimized what is “new” about the new covenant to the point that they see very little difference between it and the old covenant. In contrast with this outlook, Jeremiah’s prophecy actually focuses much attention on one of the main ways the new covenant will be different. As God put it in Jeremiah 31:32, the new covenant “will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt.”

Jeremiah’s prophecy focuses on four features of the new covenant that make it different from the covenant that God made with Israel through Moses. First, *the new covenant cannot be broken*. In Jeremiah 31:32, God described the covenant with Moses as “my covenant that they broke.” Generation after generation, the people of Israel so flagrantly violated the law of Moses that God eventually sent them into exile under the tyranny of evil nations and the false gods they served. The promised new covenant, however, would be different because it could never be broken like the covenant through Moses was. But how would this be possible? How would God ensure that the new covenant would never be broken?

The answer comes in our second point of difference between the old and new covenants, which is that *the new covenant will entail the thorough transformation of God’s people into His faithful servants*. As God put it in Jeremiah 31:33, “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.” Rather than setting aside His commandments, God promised to transform His people so that they would wholeheartedly obey His commands. This kind of inward transformation was not something that had never happened before. Passages like Deuteronomy 10:16 and Jeremiah 4:4 called the people of Israel to move beyond their outward association with God’s covenants to saving faith by circumcising their hearts and writing God’s law on their hearts. Every man, woman, and child in Old Testament history who had saving faith like Abraham did had the law written on their hearts. So, how would the transformation of the new covenant be different from what had already taken place here and there throughout the Old Testament?

The answer, and our third point of difference, is that the inward transformation of the new covenant would *include each person in covenant with God*. As Jeremiah 31:34 puts it, “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.” Many people in Old Testament Israel knew God, but so many did not know Him that the nation as a whole broke Moses’ covenant and fell under the judgment of exile. By contrast, God promised that every person in the new covenant, “from the least of them to the greatest,” would have saving knowledge of Him. And what would be the result of this saving grace shown to every person in the new covenant?

The result is our fourth point of difference: the wondrous expectation that *the sins of God's people will be forgiven forever*. As we read in Jeremiah 31:34, "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Throughout the Old Testament, animal sacrifices made it possible for God's people to experience temporary relief from the judgment of God. By contrast, the new covenant would bring the permanent, eternal forgiveness of sins. It is no wonder, then, that Jeremiah's prophecy about a new covenant was cherished by the faithful in Israel. They longed for the day when their covenant relationship with God would be renewed. They looked forward to the time when all of God's people would be transformed into faithful servants and their sins forgiven forever.

HOW IS THE NEW COVENANT FULFILLED IN CHRIST?

The New Testament plainly teaches in many places that the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 is fulfilled in Christ. Yet, it is obvious that Jesus has not yet fulfilled every facet of this passage. For instance, none of us is perfectly conformed to the law of God in this life. We also know that there are plenty who are counted among God's new covenant people who have never received saving grace. The New Testament teaches us to call each other to know the Lord and to pray for the forgiveness of our sins day after day.

How can this be true if Jesus fulfills Jeremiah's prophecy? The New Testament explains that Jesus fulfills the expectations of a new covenant in the three stages of His messianic kingdom.

First, the inauguration of the new covenant came with Christ's first advent. In this stage of history, Christ fulfilled many—but not all—of the expectations of the new covenant. In His own service to God, Christ fulfilled the requirements of the moral law and paid the penalty for our disobedience by dying on the cross. As a result, everyone who trusts in Christ for salvation is justified and eternally forgiven of sin in the judgment of God's heavenly court. This is the wondrous truth that Jesus emphasized when He said to His disciples, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20).

Second, what we may call the continuation of the new covenant age extends throughout church history as Christ rules from heaven until all of His enemies are put under His feet. During this time, many more—but still not all—of the expectations of the new covenant are fulfilled as the gospel spreads around the world. In Hebrews 9:15, we read that "Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance." As the One who rose to the right hand of the Father, Jesus serves as the mediator of the new covenant. As our new covenant mediator, Jesus ensures that His followers have access to the Father and that we receive His sustaining grace.

Finally, the new covenant age will reach its consummation in Christ's kingdom at His second advent. At this time, every promise associated with the new covenant will be fulfilled. All of God's people throughout the ages will be perfected in faithful service to God. And more than this, we will see the results of our eternal forgiveness in Christ, the "new heavens and earth" (Rev. 21:1) when God will make "everything new" (21:5).

It is no wonder, then, that Christ's followers love to speak of the new covenant. From the time of Christ's earthly ministry, God's people have enjoyed many blessings as a result of this new covenant. And we live every day of our lives with the eager expectation that when Christ returns in glory, we will enjoy the fullness of this new covenant forever.

From Ligonier Ministries and R.C. Sproul. © Tabletalk magazine. Website: www.ligonier.org/tabletalk. Email: tabletalk@ligonier.org. Toll free: 1-800-435-4343 <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/outline-old-and-new/>