
Day 210 - July 29

Judah after Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE)

Jeremiah Rebukes an Unfaithful Nation

Readings: *Jeremiah 10:1-25; 11:1-23; 12:1-17*

Reflections:

- Jeremiah 10 opens with a comparison of God to idols. Two key differences are highlighted. God speaks with wisdom. God acts with power. We see in both of these the clear focus on actually having a relationship with God. Idols are completely non-relational. God desires to actually talk with us and act on our behalf to meet our needs.
- The chapter ends with a prophecy of the coming captivity and judgment of God. Key verse: "I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own, it is not for man to direct his steps. Correct me, Lord, but only with justice..." Here Jeremiah pauses to submit himself again to God in the midst of speaking out a word of judgment. He is obviously struggling with what he is saying. He is affirming again, "God, I only want what you want. Please guide me and direct me." When we are faced with a difficult task from God, it brings out our deepest vulnerabilities. Either we run away from the task or we turn to God, like Jeremiah, and surrender again and again to God in deep dependence.
- In Jeremiah 11, we see God be very clear again about the story of Israel and their complete inability to keep the law. This passage is a very close parallel in content to Deuteronomy 31 where the Law was given through Moses and God comes to Moses and clearly states that the people won't actually keep the Law. When the Law was given, the people strongly affirmed that they wanted to be under covenant obligations with God. They wanted the Law. They wanted the Promised Land. They wanted the threat of punishment if they didn't keep the Law. They wanted the rules and the accountability and the promise of blessing. They wanted divine "behavior therapy". God says at the end of this to Moses, in essence, "None of this is going to work." Here we see in Jeremiah, God is now once again going to pour out judgment as he had declared would happen, and is at the same time making it clear that it doesn't actually work. What is the problem once again? "...the stubbornness of their evil hearts." The reason divine behavior therapy (rules, reward and punishment) doesn't work is because our hearts are fundamentally self-centered and no amount of accountability or self-will can ultimately undo our self-centeredness. Only a new heart, being changed from the inside out, will work. Once again we see that the story of Israel is the story of "what doesn't work" as

we await the arrival of the Messiah with the beginning of the new story, “What does work!”

- Jeremiah is told again: “Do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them, because I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their distress.” This again shows Jeremiah’s heart, that he would probably have pleaded for mercy. Yet, under God’s sovereign will, God has chosen to hold back Jeremiah from praying for mercy.
- In Jeremiah 11:18-23 we see Jeremiah’s hometown people gather together to plot to kill him. Jeremiah is blindsided by this and admits his own naiveté in not seeing this coming. Just as Jesus will one day almost be thrown over a cliff by his hometown, so Jeremiah’s life is threatened by those whom he grew up with. God rescues Jeremiah and pronounces judgment on those who attempted this. Yet, we are reminded that sometimes those closest to us may ultimately be those who turn on us and attack us at our most vulnerable moments, if their hearts are not fully surrendered to God. Our natural family and our hometown friends are not ultimately our true family or community. Jesus said, “Those who do the will of God are my brothers and sisters and mother.” (Mark 3:35)
- Jeremiah responds with a lot of anger about this incident and seems to have a venting session in Jeremiah 12:1-4. God responds with declaring again his judgment but he also has an interesting verse for Jeremiah, “If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country (level ground), how will you manage the thickets by the Jordan?” God seems to be lovingly challenging Jeremiah even as he is warning him not to trust his own family: “Do not trust them, though they speak well of you.” God calls Jeremiah to live out of divine strength in the midst of battle. The only way a person can run with horses is through the divine power of God, like Elijah running before the horses. (1 Kings 18:46) Even though things were very difficult for Jeremiah, God wanted him to draw more deeply on the divine power God had for him to be able to endure this difficulty. Paul understood this when he realized that “God’s power is perfected in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9) He was then able to endure incredible suffering and difficulties because he was able to experience and live out of God’s power in his life.
- Jeremiah 12 ends with the sad warning of judgment for Israel but then two simple words of hope: “I will have compassion on them and will bring each of them back his own inheritance and his own country.” God promises redemption from captivity. “If they (the nations) learn well the ways of my people... then they will be established among my people.” Here we see that God desires to see even the nations who take Israel into captivity to learn about him and ultimately come into relationship with him. Even in judgment, God’s heart for relationship is present. The issue though, is will people listen to him and humble themselves before him? “But if any nation will not listen, I will completely uproot and destroy it.” Praise God that through Jesus we are no

longer objects of wrath, as Paul writes to the Ephesians. We have been made alive with Christ! (Ephesians 2:1-9).