
Day 212 - July 31

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

Jeremiah Rebukes an Unfaithful Nation

Readings: *Jeremiah 15:10-21, 16:1-21; 17:1-18*

Reflections:

- This section opens up with Jeremiah being very depressed. Everyone is basically mad at him all the time, even though he is not indebted to anyone and no one is indebted to him. God promises Jeremiah that this will all turn around and even those who are attacking him will one day be pleading with him for help. But Jeremiah is still not satisfied. He still complains. There is an interesting image here that is repeated at different times within the prophetic ministry: "When your words came, I ate them: they were my joy and my heart's delight." (See Ezekiel 3:3 and Revelations 10:9,10) This image is a physical description of someone hearing God speak to them a message that deeply resonates with them and brings them incredible peace and delight that they have definitely heard God. The challenge then is learning to walk by faith when the going gets tough. At first it feels great to hear God speak, but when it is weeks or months later and it doesn't look like God is going to do anything, it is easy to get discouraged. Look at what Jeremiah says: "Will you be like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails?" Here he is asking God if he has been deceived or misled by God. God doesn't reject Jeremiah for his lack of faith but he does call him to repent for what he is saying: "If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy not worthless words..." God then promises to make him unshakably strong as his spokesperson and to rescue him from all attacks. This section reminds us that even God's greatest leaders have seasons of weakness and doubt. God wants us to grow through these times and to learn what it means to trust him by faith as we align our lives not with what we see but with what he says.
- Jeremiah is then commanded to withdraw from participating in community: No marriage, no having children, no attending funerals, and no attending weddings. Why? Because disaster is coming and the people are under judgment. Such harsh restrictive words. God is saying that the people must visibly see that life cannot keep going on as normal. They must be visually confronted with the stark reality that even the most important events in life now have no meaning. Just as a city that is about to be bombed to oblivion, those within that city would be fools to say, "Well, this is our wedding day. I guess we should run to the bomb shelters after we have this wedding because we have been planning it for over a year." Why again

are these people under judgment? God makes it clear. It is a matter of the heart: "See how each of you is following the stubbornness of his evil heart instead of obeying me." Although deliverance likened to their salvation from Egypt is promised, God warns: "My eyes are on all their ways, they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes." "...this time I will teach them with my power and my might. Then they will know that my name is the Lord." God's name again represents his true identity. He desires for people to truly know him and understand his heart of hearts.

- As difficult as Jeremiah's calling is, it shows that God trusts and honors Jeremiah as a faithful servant that is capable of handling such a challenge.
- In Jeremiah 17, we see a section of his prophecy that is an expansion of Psalm 1. The listener is warned of trusting in people rather than trusting in God. But those who trust in the Lord are blessed: "Blessed is the man or woman who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream (unseen dependence in the hidden places). It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." This is a powerful image for anyone who has to wait for God to fulfill his promises during a very difficult season.
- Jeremiah 17:9-10 again makes it clear that what really matters to God is the human heart. The problem is labeled clearly: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure (humanly speaking). Who can understand it? (the answer is then given) I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." We see in this passage a number of key insights: 1) The real problem of humanity is our hearts; 2) God works from the inside out in examining the true condition of each person – from the heart (the place of the will – are they surrendered and humble or not); the mind (what are the thoughts or rationalizations that have been formed in response to the person's heart position); what then are the actions that have followed. It makes sense that Paul would write in Romans 12:1-3 this kind of progression – complete surrender to God as living sacrifices, renew your mind, discover the perfect will of God for your life; 3) God remains the ultimate judge of humanity – God doesn't judge according to appearances but he considers the totality of who we are and judges righteously. Praise God that through his Spirit we are offered a new heart and a new mind (Ezekiel 11:19).
- Jeremiah 17 ends with a beautiful prayer of dependence by Jeremiah. He is obviously humbled after complaining about his calling. "Heal me and I will be healed, save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise. They keep saying to me, 'Where is the word of the Lord? Let it now be fulfilled. I have not run away from being your shepherd....what passes my lips is open before you.'" For anyone who has struggled with walking by faith through a difficult season, being true to the words God has given and his calling on his or her life, this passage is very encouraging and affirming. It feels good to know someone else has been through it and that God has been faithful!