

In Preparation for Sunday, March 16

God, the Jilted Lover

**“Return, faithless people,’ declares the Lord, ‘for I am your husband.”
Jeremiah 3:14**

Read: Jeremiah 2:1-6:30

Like the movie previews we see in the theaters, this entire section is made up of clips from various messages that Jeremiah delivered over decades of prophetic ministry. While the timing of the messages may range from Josiah’s rule (627) to the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar’s army (597), the place where these messages were delivered is firmly established in Jerusalem. We are reminded throughout the book that Jeremiah’s calling was focused: “Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem” (2:1). In this section alone, Jerusalem is referred to fourteen times. Like Jesus who “resolutely set out for Jerusalem” (Lk 9:51), Jeremiah’s ministry was centered in Jerusalem.

By the time we get to Jeremiah, Jerusalem has become ground zero. In the days of Elijah and Elisha in the ninth century, and Hosea, Amos, and Jonah in the eighth century, the focus was on apostasy in the northern kingdom (Israel). Isaiah and Micah, contemporaries of Amos, focused on the southern kingdom (Judah), but it was left to Jeremiah in the seventh century to bring the message home to Jerusalem in the decades leading up to the exile. For forty years Jeremiah was stationed in a single spiritual war zone. He walked the same streets, saw the same people, and delivered the same message. Jeremiah lived an incredibly focused life. He was not only consecrated (1:5), his ministry focus was concentrated! It is notable that a ministry confined to a few square miles should have such a lasting and far reaching impact.

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1. As you read through this section begin to list the metaphors and images Jeremiah used to communicate the Lord’s message (an unfaithful bride, idolaters, broken cisterns, prisoners of war, rebellious servants, a prostitute, a wild donkey, adulterers, et al.). Do you think the people saw themselves as the Lord saw them? Do we see ourselves as the Lord sees us?

2. Like a symphony repeating a musical theme, Jeremiah returns again and again to the imagery of infidelity and adultery to capture the spiritual apostasy that was destroying the people of God (2:2, 20, 33; 3:1-2, 6-10, 20; 4:30; 5:7-8). Is the pervasiveness of pre-marital sex, adultery, abuse, and divorce among Christians any indication that the church today is like the people of Jerusalem in Jeremiah’s day?

3. Another reoccurring theme in Jeremiah’s message was the failure of leadership. How did the priests and the officials forsake their responsibility (2:8, 13, 26; 5:5, 12-13, 31; 6:13-15)? What should our leaders do today to fulfill their responsibility?

4. How did Jeremiah emphasize the inexcusable and foolish nature of the people’s rebellious ways (2:5-7, 11, 31-32; 5:7)? List the various sins that Jeremiah identifies, everything from idolatry and ritual prostitution to oppressing the poor and taking advantage of the orphan. How does this list illustrate the nature of evil? What sins do you think make us especially vulnerable? What are some of the worthless idols (2:3) that compete for our attention? How are we tempted to rely on alternative sources of “wisdom” and “security” (“broken cisterns” such as Egypt and Assyria)?

5. In what sense does Jeremiah's metaphor of the "yoke" (2:20; 5:5) parallel Jesus' use of the yoke in Matthew 11:28?

6. What was Jeremiah's counsel for reversing this sorry state of apostasy and disobedience (3:12-14, 22; 4:1-4; 6:16)? Jeremiah even gave them the words to say, but still they did not repent (3:22-25).

7. Do you think Jeremiah felt that his message was getting through to the people (5:12-13; 6:10-11, 13-15, 20)?

8. What does it mean for the Church in the 21st century to follow Jeremiah's spiritual direction: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls" (6:16)?

9. There is a kind of seamless development in Jeremiah's message that refrains from noting dates and circumstances. At the beginning of this section, Jeremiah describes Jerusalem's spiritual and moral condition, whereas at the end (6:1-30), he vividly describes Jerusalem's judgment which he contends is imminent. Is the closing picture of Jeremiah as a "metal tester" positive or negative? What is the end product of the refining process?