

Adult Teaching Resources

September 15, 2019



Season After Pentecost (June 16-November 24)

On the Road with Jesus

Luke 14:1-14 (RCL 1, 7-14) – “A Way to the Top”

Choices That Matter

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 – “Make the Right Choice!”

Jeremiah 4:11-28 (RCL 11-12, 22-28) – “Delay and You’ll Pay”

Jeremiah 8:18-9:3 (RCL 8:18-9:1) – “Go on and Grieve”

Jeremiah 32:1-15 (RCL 32:1-3a, 6-15) – “Never Give Up”

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Delay and You'll Pay

Jeremiah 4:11-28 (RCL 11-12, 22-28)

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

*"O Jerusalem, wash your heart clean of wickedness
so that you may be saved.*

How long shall your evil schemes lodge within you?" Jeremiah 4:14

Some lessons we learn from reading, and we remember them pretty well. Some lessons we learn from being told what to do, and we remember them a little better. Some lessons we learn from experience, and we rarely forget those.

Today's passage is a prophetic word from Jeremiah, who told God's people what they would experience, because of their idolatrous behavior. He warned them what would happen even though it was inevitable. Will we have ears to hear this prophetic word and change our ways?

Opening

In the large group, ask everyone to think of an important life lesson they learned by enduring a difficult, painful experience. Silently, have everyone think through these questions:

What was the lesson?

What was the difficult, painful experience?

How was the difficult, painful experience necessary for the lesson to be learned?

Looking back, was there any other way for the lesson to be learned? If so, how?

Give everyone time to think. Then, ask for volunteers to share their insights into the questions. Encourage everyone to share, but don't force it. Some lessons might be too powerful to share in a large group setting.

Reading the Bible

Our passage today is a challenging prophetic word from Jeremiah. To help your group understand these words better, instead of asking questions about the text, ask your group to explain their understanding of the passage.

Write the following verse numbers on the board for everyone to see:

11-12; 13-15; 16-17; 18; 19; 20; 21; 22; 23-26; 27.

Let each person pick a verse, or verses. Make sure every verse is taken—some people might have to take more than one verse. Give everyone time to read the passage, and time to focus on their verse(s). Have them rewrite their verse(s) in a way that makes better sense for contemporary ears.

When everyone is ready, begin with the person who has verses 11-12, and have your class read the rewritten prophecy out loud. At the end of the reading, ask questions like these for better understanding:

After hearing the rewritten passage, what do you think this passage is about?

What were your verse(s) about and how did those words contribute to the overall meaning of the passage?

What does this passage say about God's people?

What does this passage say about God?

Making Connections

How do you handle criticism? When do you find it constructive? When do you find it destructive? What do you do with criticism?

When you do something wrong, are you more likely to: a) admit your mistake and prepare for the consequences; b) blame someone, or something else, for the situation going bad; c) ignore it and hope it goes away?

When have you been “guilty by association?” What was the situation? What did others do? What did you do?

When has punishment come and it was deserved? What did you do? What was the punishment? When has punishment come and it was not deserved? What did you do? What was the punishment? What did you learn from each situation?

Our Lesson Writer shares this emotional response from Jeremiah, “Jeremiah shared with God a sharp sense of distress over the fate of the people, crying ‘My anguish! My anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart!’” (v. 19a). The deep sorrow Jeremiah felt came from the pit of his stomach: a literal translation would be ‘My bowels! My bowels!’” When have you experienced a similar physical response to a situation?

Making Connections *continued*

Have you ever had a “vision” or a “knowing” of what was going to happen? What did you see? Did you try to warn anyone? How was your message received? What ultimately happened?

With punishment and judgment, how much is enough? How much do we have to endure before we learn our lesson and return to the right way?

So What?

Move to the board and ask everyone to think about our current situation in relating to, and following God. If Jeremiah were going to write to us today, what would he tell us?

Give everyone time to think and then ask for suggestions on what Jeremiah would say. As folks share, write their ideas on the board. Don't edit. Write everything down.

Then, when no more suggestions come, focus everyone's attention to the board and ask the group to summarize what we're doing wrong. Then, ask the group to list what we need to do to get it right. Write the solutions on the board, too.

How can we, as people of faith, remain faithful to God in challenging times?

How can we, as people of faith, keep our focus on God and not on idolatrous, “sparkly” gods?

How can we, as people of faith, change our ways to live more faithfully?

The Challenge

This week, take one of the ideas about living more faithfully and incorporate that into your life. Be intentional and focus on God instead of the gods in our lives.

Prayer

Loving God, you give us some difficult words to digest. Even though Jeremiah's words were written a long time ago, they resonate with us today. Help us to recognize where we have gone wrong and made mistakes. Help us to understand what it is you want us to do so that we can live more faithfully with you. Help us to have the courage to do it all. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

The text—The Revised Common Lectionary text skips from Jer. 4:11-12 to 4:22-28, but for a clearer picture of the oracle we will include the intervening, if difficult, verses. Our text will be Jer. 4:11-28.

Jeremiah—The book of Jeremiah is often confusing because it includes both first person accounts in which Jeremiah speaks, along with third person accounts that describe Jeremiah’s activities. God also speaks in the book of Jeremiah, and sometimes it is difficult to determine whether the author intends for us to understand whether God or Jeremiah is speaking. Jeremiah also speaks in behalf of the people or its kings, often as a means of criticizing their actions – but not always with clear attribution.

Jeremiah often speaks in poetry: the first half of the book is dominated by poetic oracles, though some narrative exists to put them in context. The latter half of the book is primarily in the form of narrative, more frequently describing the prophet’s actions. Many scholars assume that Baruch, who is specifically described as the scribe who wrote at Jeremiah’s dictation, is responsible for much of the narrative that describes Jeremiah and his various activities.

There is a strong likelihood that the Jeremiah materials continued to grow in the hands of later editors and religious leaders who expanded on the prophet’s work, emphasizing his prophetic role and applying many of his sayings to the needs of their particular context. This may explain some of the many doublets in Jeremiah, places in which the same speech or content is repeated, but in different contexts. More than 50 doublets have been identified in the book of Jeremiah. Some samples are 6:13-15=8:10-12; 10:12-16=51:15-19; 11:20=20:12; 16:14-16=23:7-8; 23:5-6=33:14-16; 30:10-11=46:27-28; and 49:19-21=50:44-46.

Evidence for the continued growth of the Jeremiah traditions is seen most clearly in a study of the differences between the text of Jeremiah as preserved in the traditionally accepted Hebrew text (the Masoretic Text, or MT), and in the ancient Greek translation of Jeremiah, as preserved in the Septuagint (LXX). The LXX version is about one-seventh shorter than the Hebrew form. Omissions range from single words to longer sections of several verses, such as 33:14-26. The LXX also preserves a different order: the “foreign prophesies” of Jer. 46-51 (MT) are inserted between Jer. 25:13 and 25:15 in the LXX, with 25:14 being omitted.

As a rule, the LXX tends to amplify the text it is translating, rather than abbreviating it. Thus, the shorter LXX text of Jeremiah suggests that the Greek translation was made from an early version of the book, when the corpus of the Jeremiah materials was still growing in the hands of later editors and theologians. Some have suggested that it was translated

Digging Deeper *continued*

from an early Hebrew version that was preserved in Egypt, and thus does not reflect the editorial expansions presumed to have occurred in Babylon.

As further evidence for the expansion of the Jeremiah scroll, note that Jeremiah is called a prophet only four times in the (older?) LXX. The MT, perhaps reflecting a development in the tradents' appreciation for Jeremiah, calls him a prophet 30 times. Similarly, expressions such as "oracle of the Lord," designed to emphasize that a word came from God, occur much more often in the MT.

Among the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered at Qumram, Hebrew text fragments representing both textual traditions were found. This suggests that, as late as the first century B.C., there was no universally accepted text of Jeremiah.

Outline—The Book of Jeremiah occasionally includes specific information about the date and occasion of an oracle. These few chronological notes are sufficient to show that the *book is not arranged in chronological order*, which will leave many readers confused. For example, chapters 7 and 26 date to 608 B.C.E., but 21:1-2 is dated to about 588 B.C.E., while 24:1 is from a period nine years earlier (597), and the next chapter goes even further back: 25:1 is dated to 605 B.C.E.

While the book defies any clear elucidation of structure, some thematic arrangements are evident. Jeremiah's call is described in chapter 1, and chapters 2-24 deal mainly with prophecies directed toward Judah/Jerusalem, along with personal laments and confessions of the prophet, with 25:1-14 serving as a summary for the first half of the book. The latter half of chapter 25 (vv. 15-38) addresses other nations, anticipating Jeremiah's prophecies against the foreign nations in chapters 46-51. In the LXX, these appear between 25:13 and 25:15, with 25:14 being omitted.

Chapters 26-45 largely consist of biographical narratives about Jeremiah, though not in chronological sequence: they are like a series of vignettes collected with little regard for chronology. Sandwiched within the biographical narratives we find what is often called "the Book of Consolation" (chapters. 30-33, though some argue for 30-31 alone). These chapters contain most of Jeremiah's hopeful prophecies.

The final chapter of Jeremiah (52) is a historical appendix that repeats material in chapter 39 and is identical, except for minor textual variants, to 2 Kings 24:18-25:21. Thus, one may suggest a thematic outline for the book as we have it:

- I. The call of Jeremiah (1:1-19))
- II. Prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem (2:1-24:10)
 - A. Early sermons (2:1-4:4)
 - B. The enemy from the North (4:5-6:30)
 - C. The temple sermon (7:1-8:3)
 - D. Collected oracles, prayers, and confessions (8:4-24:10).
- III. Prophecies against foreign nations (25:1-38)

Digging Deeper *continued*

IV. Oracles and stories from Jeremiah's life (26:1-35:19)

- A. The temple sermon (again, 26:1-24 [cp. 7:1-8:3])
- B. The struggle with false prophets (27:1-29:32)
- C. The "Book of Consolation" (30:1-33:1-26)
 - 1. A new covenant (30:1-31:40)
 - 2. Jeremiah's symbolic purchase of a field (32:1-44)
 - 3. Judah's future glory (33:1-26)
- D. Jerusalem under siege (34:1-22)
- E. Jeremiah and the Rechabites (35:1-19)

V. Historical narratives, Jeremiah's suffering (36:1-45:5)

- A. A scroll read, destroyed, and rewritten (36:1-32)
- B. The fall of Jerusalem (37:1-40:6)
- C. The rule of Gedaliah (40:7-41:18)
- D. Jeremiah's flight to Egypt (42:1-43:7)
- E. Prophecies in Egypt (43:8-44:30)
- F. Sorrow and pain (45:1-5)

VI. Oracles against foreign nations (46:1-51:64)

VII. Historical appendix (52:1-34 [cp. 2 Kings 23-25])

Judah and Jerusalem—Jeremiah was active during the latter part of the seventh century and the first part of the sixth: Jer. 1:1-3 says that he was active from the 13th year of Josiah's reign until the 11th year of Zedekiah's reign, roughly 627-586 BCE.

The united kingdom ruled by David divided after his son Solomon died, and the northern kingdom (which retained the name "Israel") was conquered and dispersed by the Assyrians in 722 BCE, leaving only the southern kingdom of Judah, with its capital in Jerusalem, as the home of the Hebrews.

Jeremiah prophesied during the latter years of Judah's existence as an independent state, continuing after the Babylonians conquered it in 597 BCE and put Zedekiah on the throne as an appointed king. Zedekiah later rebelled, leading to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. Royalty and other leading families were forced into exile, with the first wave in 597, a second large deportation in 587, and yet another in 582 BCE.

Though we might occasionally refer to "Israel" in this study, it is in the generic sense in which the people of Judah were descended from Jacob, who was renamed Israel, and among the "twelve tribes of Israel." Though the name of their country was Judah, they were still the people of Israel, or Israelites.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Oracles—The basic prophetic unit is the oracle, a brief poetic declaration that is introduced and/or followed by a formula that identifies it as a message from God, for example, “Thus says Yahweh,” or “Oracle of Yahweh.”

An oracle uses first person speech that is proclaimed as the word of God. Oracles may offer assurance or comfort as well as declaring judgment toward an individual or a nation. Oracles may call for repentance for sins such as idolatry or oppression of the poor, and may be directed toward Israel’s enemies or toward God’s own covenant people.

Some prophetic books consist almost entirely of oracles: Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah are examples. Others contain both oracles and prose sections such as biographical narrative, discourse, or historical material: Jeremiah would be a good example of this.

Prophetic books generally contain only as much biography as necessary: the emphasis is not on the prophet, but on his message, proclaimed as a word from God.

Baruch—Some years ago a seal impression appeared on the antiquities market. Since it was not found in a controlled excavation, its authenticity cannot be assured, but it appears to be from the personal seal of Jeremiah’s friend and scribe, Baruch.

The seal, in the Canaanite script used during that period, reads “Belonging to Barukiyahu son of Neriyahu, the scribe.” Baruch was known as the son of Neriah (Jer. 32:12, 16; 36:4, 8, 14, 32; 43:3, 6; 45:1; 51:59). “Barukiyahu” and “Neriyahu” are full spellings of the commonly abbreviated names “Baruch” and “Neriah.”

Daughter of my people—The Hebrew term *bat ‘ammi* is rendered multiple ways in the NRSV: “my beloved people” (Isa. 22:4), “wound of my people” (Jer. 8:11), “my sinful people” (Jer. 9:7), “daughter of my people” (Jer. 14:17) “destruction of my people” (Lam. 3:48), “my people” (Lam. 4:3, 6, 10). However, the most frequent NRSV rendering of this term is “my poor people” (Jer. 4:11; 6:26; 8:19, 21, 22; 9:1). The location of these occurrences in lament material, despite multiple renderings of the Hebrew phrase into English, accents the vulnerability of the people. The phrase is a genitive that functions appositively, “my fair people.”

From *Feasting on the Word, Year C*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 4 of Accordance electronic ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), paragraph 19242.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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Does v. 27 suggest hope for the people?

With the exception of v. 14, which appeals for repentance and thus may harbor the hope that suitable cleansing could lead to a changed verdict, the passage is all doom and gloom. Jeremiah appears to be saying the die is cast and it's too late to expect God to turn back the coming punishment.

Most translations find a bit of hope in v. 27, but there are two important questions to be raised. First, does this verse reflect Jeremiah's thought? Note how it completely interrupts the flow of vv. 23-28, which read much more smoothly without it. For this reason, the text is widely judged to be a later insertion, and we have noted in the "Digging Deeper" section that the Hebrew Masoretic text shows clear signs of expansion.

The second question is how the verse should be interpreted, because it isn't straightforward. The NRSV renders it "For thus says the LORD: 'The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end.'" The NET has a similar translation: "The whole land will be desolate, however, I will not completely destroy it." Here the object "it" is not in the text, but supplied by the translators.

Another reading is quite possible, if not more probable. A literal reading is "All the earth will be a desolation, and/but an end I will not make."

Is the writer saying that Yahweh will not make a full end to the earth (hence the hope), or that Yahweh will not bring an end to the ongoing desolation?

The latter reading is more in keeping with the next verse: "Because of this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above grow black; for I have spoken, I have purposed; I have not relented, nor will I turn back" (v. 28).

Jeremiah would eventually find a place of hope, but this may not be it.