

Week 34: The Last King of Judah
Jeremiah 52 / Deuteronomy 28
August 24/25

Summary & Goal:

We are in the midst of our Captivity Era in our Chronological Bible series, and this week, we'll be looking at the last chapter of Jeremiah, the lamenting prophet. The book of Jeremiah is one of several books in the Major Prophets, a collection of books in the Old Testament that groups together the prophetic books that are substantially lengthier than other prophetic books. While the book of Jeremiah contains many stories and prophecies during the Divided Kingdom, we'll be particularly examining how the nation of Judah comes to an end under the oppression of the Babylonian Empire, which leads to the Captivity Era. In the following Scripture, we'll see a story of Judah's prophetic downfall, judgment for sin, and last resort of hope. And through Judah's story, we'll see how God relates to us, and why that infuses us with a lasting hope in the midst of our sin and circumstances as well.

Main Passages:

Jeremiah 52
Deuteronomy 28

Session Outline:

1. Prophecy (Jer. 52:1-23)
2. Judgment (Jer. 52:24-30)
3. Hope (Jer. 52:31-34)

Session in a Sentence:

No matter how much sin you've invited into your life, and no matter how far you've run from God, He will keep pursuing you in love and grace because of his promise in Jesus Christ.

Kingdom Connection:

Even though Jeremiah 52 recounts the downfall of Judah and its last king, the text communicates something powerful to us; namely, that this 'kingdom' is primarily *not* one of human dimension, such as territory, resource, leadership, or military power. Rather, it is a kingdom founded on the eternal promise of how God relates to his people in the True King, Jesus Christ.

Mission Connection:

Jeremiah 52 showcases a God who is inflexible regarding justice over sin, yet is unconditional regarding his love for the hurting, broken, and lost. In spite of the Israelite's sin and rebellion, God nevertheless keeps pursuing them in grace and truth—as we'll see in the last several verses of chapter 52. Dwelling on God's heart for us when we were lost should empower us to live on mission for others who hurting, broken, and lost as well—simply as a response to the grace and love we've experienced ourselves.

Introduction

Over the past several weeks, we have traced the historical development of Israel's nation state; namely, how it progressed from a unified nation into two divided kingdoms, the Southern Kingdom (tribes of Judah and Benjamin) and the Northern Kingdom (the ten other tribes). Both the Northern and Southern Kingdom fell; and today, we continue our study of Israel's Captivity Era (which happened in waves) by observing the ultimate fall of the Southern Kingdom's sovereignty under the Babylonian Empire.

Jeremiah 52, the last chapter in the book of Jeremiah, recounts what happens to the Israelites as their nation state dissolves; highlights Moses' prophecies from over 1000 years ago about this very situation; yet, also casts a glimmer of God's hope and redemption into the Israelite's setting of circumstantial darkness and spiritual judgment. The majority of this passage communicates a sobering sentiment, warning people about sin and its consequences, and likewise, about judgment and its effects. The texts overall plays in the minor key of distress; however, its last four verses allow the book to resolve on the major note of hope.

In the following lesson, we will see several main themes that surface in Jeremiah 52, which not only resonate with the Israelites and their situation, but also speak to us in our situations as well. The three themes I particularly want to discuss are prophecy, judgment, and hope. I will be up front, this not exactly a particularly 'happy, go-lucky, feel-good' passage. Rather, it cuts deep exposing our sin and what that means for real life; however, thankfully, we see a God who cuts not tortuously, but surgically—so that we can experience true freedom and future grace from our current sins and present bondage.

Context

Chapter 52 opens by communicating the present political context and spiritual climate of the Southern Kingdom, and ultimately, what's about to befall the nation.

¹Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. ²He also did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. ³For because of the anger of the LORD this happened in Jerusalem and Judah, till He finally cast them out from His presence. Then Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

In light of Zedekiah's rebellion against God and the king of Babylon, he invoked the anger of them both. And what happens next is a slew of judgments from both kings, which were previously prophesied about 1000 years ago by Moses in Deuteronomy 28.

Prophecy

In Deuteronomy 28, Moses prophesied that the Lord will bring a nation of fierce countenance from afar (28:49-50); no respect will be shown to the elderly (28:50); no compassion will be given to the young (28:50); the enemy will totally consume all crops and livestock (28:51); no high and fortified wall will protect them (28:52); out of dire hunger, people will eat their own children (28:54-55); extraordinary diseases will plague and destroy many until few remain; and they shall be exiled from the land of promise (28:63).

And as such, the nation state itself experiences the fulfillment of Moses' prophesy, which is described in Jeremiah 52. The siege upon their nation will last 23 months (52:4); the famine will be so severe that there is no food (52:6); the city walls are broken through (52:7); fire consumes the temple, the king's house, and all other great houses (52:12); the walls around Jerusalem are torn down (52:14); very few men are taken to the King of Babylon (52:27).

Although these prophecies seem like God is beset against his own people, these were simply the natural consequences of their rejection of God's authority and moral will. In fact, God raised up the prophet Jeremiah to warn the Israelites about the consequences of their disobedience and sinful living. However, Jeremiah is considered the 'lamenting prophet' because he would be the prophet whose words would fall upon hard hearts.

Application: When has God put people in your life who have warned you, out of love and grace, to avoid sin or to consider wisdom? What was your immediate response to them? What happened as a result of your response?

And let's flip the script, too. When have you been the person who's encouraged someone else from taking a different course of action because you knew they were walking into sin and destruction? How did you approach the situation? How did that person respond to your words of exhortation and admonition? How did your heart feel when they turned away from your advice?

All of us have likely been the person who received exhortation or the person who has given exhortation. Both situations are sobering because both situations involve the potential of sin and destruction to affect another person, which is always heartbreaking to see. And perhaps, it's even more heartbreaking when the person who falls into sin doesn't see how that sin will wreak havoc in their lives, and potentially into the lives of others around them.

With any submission to sin, judgment necessarily follows—not because God is a cruel God who's waiting to bear his gavel, but because he's a good God who must uphold justice and goodness for the sake of righteousness, holiness and ultimate human flourishing. This leads to the next main theme of this text: Judgment. Let's explore the nature of judgment and the natural consequences of indulging into self-authority and sin.

Judgment

When you live outside of the authority of God, your life will suffer. Why? Because he's a King of utter goodness, love, power, and life. He's the Source of all true goodness. He's a King who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. So, if you live in your own autonomy and self-authority, then you necessarily reject the source of all goodness. You will reap the consequences of sowing to something else that is not true goodness.

The Israelites' circumstantial lives would serve as a metaphor of spiritual vitality. Meaning, when they would honor God and live in faith, their lives would be circumstantially prosperous. And any time they would reject God, their lives would be circumstantially endangered with exile, oppression, loss, and tragedy. The purpose is to communicate a picture of how obedience

leads to life and blessing ~~and~~ compared to how disobedience leads to death and cursing. Sin leads to destruction. Many times, the judgment for our sin can oftentimes be experiencing the very consequences of it.

Our culture loves the notion of ‘karma’ whereby the good you do, will come back and do good to you; and the bad you do, will come back and do bad to you. Although this is a rather simplistic way to approach religious (religion?) in particular, it does nevertheless communicate biblical sentiment in ~~particular~~ a very generic fashion; namely, the concept of reaping and sowing, which we see all throughout the Bible. The judgment of God is never a blindside; it always comes with warning.

Galatians 6:7-9

⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

The dynamic relationship of sowing and reaping is a law that is weaved into the very fabric of the universe. I’ve heard it said that the law of sowing-reaping has its own two laws as well: The Law of Greater and The Law of Later.¹

The Law of Greater communicates the notion that you will always reap a greater sum amount than what you sowed. Think about our ‘seed’ sown unto sin or unto righteousness much like an acorn sown unto the ground. One acorn planted and watered in the ground can become a massive oak tree, which produces thousands of acorns.

The Law of Later, on the other hand, communicates the idea that you will reap much later than when you sowed. Think about the relationship of sowing and reaping much like the development of a snowball rolling downhill—gaining more momentum and more accumulation—over time if it continues in its same course. The same is true of sowing unto sin or righteousness as well if the course continues. The final result of your sowing will always be come much, much later; and it will certainly come about greater proportions. Stephen R. Covey famously said, “Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.”

Negatively, this is immensely sobering and humbling; and so, we shouldn’t take sin lightly, nor should we think that its scope only affects what happens in the moment; rather, it will yield compounding effects outside of our own lives and timetables.

Positively, however, this is immensely humbling and encouraging; as such, we should feel empowered that every good deed and work of faith will always have compounding interest, affecting more people than just ourselves and rippling into other dimensions of time.

¹ I heard from a JD Greear sermon one time.

It is true that God does forgive sin. But what's sobering is the understanding that God does not take away our free will or the consequences of it. God does forgive us of the *penalty* of sin; however, forgiveness does not mean God takes away the *consequences* of sin.

For example, if I were to punch my brother in the face, he might forgive me. But his forgiveness does not remove the pain on his broken nose or the pain of my broken wrist. Or, perhaps a more serious example: if I were to engage in sexual immorality with someone, God will forgive me and maybe the other person would forgive me—but the consequences of that action are not immediately removed. Sure, forgiveness can and will certainly make navigating those consequences more manageable. However, forgiveness itself does not affect the consequence of an unexpected pregnancy, relational drama, or emotional baggage for itself.

Forgiveness means we are no longer defined by our sin, nor does our sin have the final say in our life. But forgiveness doesn't mean our sin no longer affects our lives.

And when there is forgiveness, there is always hope.

Hope

The entire chapter, although wrought with destitution, disarray, and devolution, nevertheless ends on a peculiar, interesting note of hopefulness. Although we only saw seeds sown to sin and reaped to judgment, we actually get to see—quite miraculously—one seed that shoots up and blossoms right in the middle of the lifelessness of ashes and cinder.

Chapter 52 ends on the following note:

³¹ Now it came to pass in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth day of the month, that Evil-Merodach king of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah and brought him out of prison. ³² And he spoke kindly to him and gave him a more prominent seat than those of the kings who were with him in Babylon. ³³ So Jehoiachin changed from his prison garments, and he ate bread regularly before the king all the days of his life. ³⁴ And as for his provisions, there was a regular ration given him by the king of Babylon, a portion for each day until the day of his death, all the days of his life.

What is this seed of grace that is sown to hope? Namely, it's the bewildering reality that the extraordinary evil King of Babylon shows incredible, unreasonable favor towards his long-standing enemy and captive, King Jehoiachin. Biblical commentators don't know why exactly he shows such favor and kindness to this Jehoiachin. But in the midst of Israel's worst exile, God is nevertheless showing unmerited favor to his people and preserving them in miraculous ways.

I'm reminded of Proverbs 21:1, which reads, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will." As hard and evil as Evil-Merodach was, his heart is a stream of water in God's hands, and God can direct it wherever he pleases in accordance to his good purposes.

While God cannot condone sin and must enact justice due to his goodness and righteousness, his heart does not stop ever-flowing with love and compassion towards his people, Israel. Lamentations says, “For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men” (3:31-33). Even the psalmist reinforces this view of God, “For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5).

Even the prophecies of God’s judgment to Israel nevertheless point to a greater Promise of redemption and hope. For example:

- The famine was so severe; but true spiritual nourishment, the Bread of Life, would come soon.
- The temple will be no more; but an even greater One will be built in the near future.
- The walls were broken in our nation; but now the kingdom of God extends to both the Jew and Gentile.
- The national wealth would be depleted; but now the whole world will see Israel’s true wealth that will bless the entire world, a King who rules with utter goodness and power.

God would not forsake his promise, and he did not. Judgment came for a season, but even the judgment itself would be a means to usher in the redemption and hope of the world, Jesus Christ. And even in the very worst judgment in all of history—the cross of Christ, the judgment for our sin—it nevertheless led to the open tomb of our salvation and hope for all of life and eternity.

Here in the passage, God is showing favor and promise to David’s ‘son;’ therefore, not withholding his promise. And if we are in Christ, we can be sure that God does not withhold his favor from us, either—whether we are eating at the table of an earthly king or starving from hunger. We’re always eating at the True King’s table—even in the presence of our enemies and in the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23). And like Jehoiachin, we can be assured in any future—especially our eternal one—since he holds it.

Even with Jeremiah, the lamenting prophet, God would not let his life end in lament or ultimately be defined as lament. God is the one who defines it; he’s the one who tells the whole story. And while Jeremiah lamented in prophesy of what would come, God wouldn’t allow those tears to be cried in vain; rather, the tears of lament watered the seemingly infertile ground of Israel’s future with the seed of his hope, which would be his Son.

And quite significantly, this is not different from the way we’ve seen God work in other stories in the Bible... Jehoiachin’s release from prison is similar to...

- When the small cloud of rain appeared over the mountains for Elijah after years of drought (1 Kings 18:41-46).²
- When Samson’s hair started growing again when he was in the dungeon, bound with shackles and grinding grain at the treading mill (Judges 16:21-22).

² NIV Application Commentary: Jeremiah. *Bridging Contexts*, “Jeremiah 52:1-34.”

In other words,... even if it looks like it and seems like it... all hope is not gone.³ This is because the LORD is a God full of grace, promise, and redemption.

Conclusion

Maybe you're thinking, "Why the doom and gloom? Why the darkness and message of sin?" This is because God loves us; and sometimes the most loving thing that God can do is to protect you from harm, and that comes by illustrating what happens when we indulge in sin. And like any good father who loves his child, God also exhorts us unto righteous living for our absolute joy and health and welfare. We're reminded in Romans 15 that these 'dark' and 'gloomy' stories are written for our encouragement and hope.

⁴For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

I've heard it said that the worst thing in the world is not for you to experience suffering. But rather, that you'd experience suffering, and not feel it or acknowledge it.

There's a rare disease called, Congenital Insensitivity to Pain and Anhidrosis (CIPA), whereby a person cannot experience pain. They literally cannot feel pain or hurt because their neural receptors simply fail to function as they ought. Now, there are many people who hear about this 'disease' and immediately raise their hands as if it is a desirable to have a 'disease' that doesn't allow them to feel pain. But this perspective is too shortsighted and simplistic. How so?

For example, would it be a blessing or a curse if you had CIPA and put your hand on a hot stove, unable to feel the flames damaging your skin beyond future use? Of course, it would be a curse to not feel pain, because the pain—as hurtful as it feels—nevertheless signals something good in itself; namely, protection and preservation against threat and destruction.

Likewise, when we read these stories of destruction wrought about by sin, as Romans 15 says, it's meant to signal, like a functioning spiritual-neural receptor, something good in itself; namely, our protection and preservation.

When the Israelites of past read of these historical accounts—they were encouraged to do “more than simply acknowledge the judgment of the past. They are invited to be open to a future predicated on God's promises to the Davidic house.”⁴

And so, when we too read these stories, we're also not to see them as judgments of the past; just like we're not to see our sin and our judgment as issues of the past or even as the definitions of our future. Rather, we're invited through the cross of Christ to see them as reference points that

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

extend and connect to the goodness and love of God for us, and his promise to be with us just like he was with Jehoiachin.

This passage, therefore, gives us immense hope precisely because it points to immense grace in an immensely dismal spot of life and sin.

Wherever we are and whoever we are and whatever we've done, God meets us with a grace and promise in Christ that changes everything.