

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Discussion Guide

Background

The Book of Jeremiah is a compilation of writings and stories detailing the life and ministry of the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah was called to serve the Southern Kingdom of Israel (known as Judah) during the final years leading up to the Babylonian exile from 597-583 BC. The book is written to the remnant of believers living in Babylon, and it serves to explain the events of the exile, and to provide encouragement and hope for the future.

In the Old Testament, there is a long, slow build up to the events described in Jeremiah. God's people were uniquely called to be in relationship with Him, and to live in holiness and obedience. Throughout Israel's history, however, they repeatedly fall into sin and idolatry, disregarding the law and worshipping false idols.

Over time, God raises up prophets who call the people to repent (literally "turn around") and restore their relationship with God. These prophets are met with varying levels of resistance, and over the years Israel falls further and further away from God. God responds by warning the people that their land will be taken away, and that they will be conquered by foreign armies, but even this enormous consequence does not get their attention.

Eventually, the Northern Kingdom of Israel is overtaken by the Assyrians in 722. Afterwards, Judah is given the opportunity to turn back to God, and avoid Israel's fate, but they fail to listen to the warnings of the prophets.

Thus, Jeremiah's ministry is very difficult, and seems to have little impact on the fate of the Israelites. The book makes clear that Jeremiah speaks for God ("I have put my words in your mouth" (1:9)), and so the rejection Jeremiah experiences is a rejection of Yahweh himself. The book of Jeremiah tries to help the exiles and the generations after to understand how God allowed this to happen to His beloved people. It was not for lack of effort, or a failure to warn and give many chances.

In verse 10, God tells Jeremiah that He is going to "uproot and tear down, destroy and overthrow, build and plant." These verbs will show up repeatedly in Jeremiah as a way of explaining the exile. Although it is a deeply painful experience for God's people, it is meant to be redemptive. By humbling His people and finally getting their attention, God is able to "rebuild" His relationship with them, and point them to the coming Messiah. One day, Jesus will cleanse their hearts of sin once and for all, and lead them into the spiritual "promised land." While this act of "tearing down" is hard to endure, it is for the purpose of building something new, and drawing them into the life they were always meant to live.

Read Jeremiah 1:4-10

Discussion Questions

- 1) Why didn't Israel listen to the prophets and warnings from God?
- 2) How do you think Jeremiah felt receiving this call from God?
- 3) How does Jeremiah's story fit with our normal definition of "success?"
- 4) Why would the Exile be an act of grace?
- 5) What is God trying to "remodel" in your life during this Lent season?
- 6) How can you partner with God in the remodeling work He wants to do?

Prayer Exercise

Either on your own or with others (as you feel comfortable), answer these five questions, and use them as a jumping off point for prayer.

What am I grateful for this week?

What do I need to confess this week?

What do I need to lament this week?

What do I want to see God do this week?

What does God want me to do this week?