

Jeremiah

Lessons from Jeremiah

Lesson #13 for December 26, 2015

Scriptures: Jeremiah 2:13; 6:20; 7:1-10; 10:1-15; 23:1-8; Matthew 9:12; Deuteronomy 6:5.

1. In this lesson we will try to summarize what we have learned from the book of Jeremiah. There are large sections of the book such as the prophecies against the nations (Jeremiah 46-51) that we have not touched at all. The Septuagint leaves out one-eighth of the book. We will depart somewhat from the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* to include some very important questions that we believe should be addressed as we consider our conclusions to the book of Jeremiah.
2. Does Jeremiah contribute significantly to our understanding of God? If not to *our* understanding, how about the understanding of the citizens of the universe looking on? In what ways is Jeremiah outstanding compared to other books in the Bible? Are there some things uniquely emphasized in Jeremiah? What about the new covenant described in Jeremiah 31:31-34? What were the circumstances under which Jeremiah wrote? What was Jeremiah's position in society?
3. Jeremiah, known in Hebrew as *Yirmeyahu* or *Yirmeyah* and in Greek as *Ieremias*, has a name that probably means "Yahweh establishes" or "Yahweh casts." Most of his writing was actually done by his "secretary," Baruch (See Jeremiah 36:4,27-28,32.) who has an apocryphal book named after him. Jeremiah 52, like Deuteronomy 34, is a historical summary of events—some of which took place after Jeremiah's death. Jeremiah came from the priestly family of Eli and Abiathar who was deposed from the high priesthood by David and Solomon. (See 1 Kings 1:7; 2:26-27.) Thus, he grew up in Anathoth, about 2½ miles (4 km) northeast of Jerusalem. His ministry began in 628/627 B.C. and continued until at least 586 B.C. when Jerusalem fell the final time to Nebuchadnezzar.

If the book of Jeremiah were organized chronologically and compared with the reigns of the kings of Judah, it would look something like this:

Manasseh (696/695-642 B.C.): Jeremiah born about 645 B.C.

Amon (642–640 B.C.): Jeremiah still a child.

Josiah (640-609 B.C.): *Jeremiah 1-6; 14-16.*

Jehoahaz (609 B.C.): Reigned only three months.

Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.): *Jeremiah 17; 7-11; 26; 35; 22:1-19; 25; 18-20; 36:1-4; 45; 36:5-32; 12.*

Jehoiachin (598-597 B.C.): *Jeremiah 22:20-30; 13; 23.*

Zedekiah (597-586 B.C.): *Jeremiah 24; 29-31; 46-51; 27; 28; 21; 34; 32; 33; 37-39.*

After the fall of Jerusalem: *Jeremiah 40-44; 52.*

Jeremiah's Death: Sometime around 580 B.C. (Adapted from *SDA Bible Dictionary*)

Jeremiah and Baruch had to rewrite the entire book at one point. See Jeremiah 36:23-28.

4. During the ministry of Jeremiah, major world events took place as well. **Babylon** rose to world dominance by conquering **Assyria** at Nineveh in 612 B.C. and, later, defeating **Egypt** at Carchemish in 605 B.C. Jerusalem was conquered twice and then, finally, was besieged for 30 months and completely destroyed in July of 586 B.C.

5. Jeremiah's circumstances were radically different from ours; but, some of the same issues were there as in our day. Can you name some of them?

Such as faithfulness to God and obedience to His commandments. Such as true religion, a religion of the heart, as opposed to empty and dead rituals that can leave people in a false state of complacency. Such as the people's willingness to listen to correction, even when it cuts across what they want to hear. Such as true revival and reformation. Such as trusting in the Lord and His promises instead of the arm of flesh. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sabbath, December 19.)

6. When did the children of Israel behave as well as suggested in Jeremiah 2:1-3? (Compare Jeremiah 31:18-20; Ezekiel 20:4-26; Hosea 11:1.) Or, was God just being very gracious and generous as recorded in that text? Didn't that whole generation who passed through the wilderness have to die because of their rebellion? They were apparently faithful to God during the time they were working on the building of the tent/tabernacle at the foot of Mount Sinai.

7. Jeremiah spent a great deal of time discussing the worship of different "gods" and how the people had left the true God to go after other so-called gods. (Jeremiah 2:11; 3:13; 7:16-19) **Can you think of any other nation that changed its god(s)?** Was Israel irreligious during that period? When God complained that they had changed gods, were they aware that they had done that? Or, was it that in their minds, they had changed their picture of God, even adding other gods? Were they just trying to get along with their neighbors? Or, just wanting to be politically correct? Although at least some of them paid tithe, worshiped on the Sabbath, and observed all the ceremonial requirements, did they really know God? What could possibly have been so attractive in those heathen religions? Why did—and does—God have such a hard time holding His people and getting them to worship Him? Doesn't He have the power? Through the use of power and force, can God produce what He wants most? How could God have lost one-third of the angels? (Revelation 12:4)

8. Some Seventh-day Adventists have been taught that the central issue in the great controversy is the character and government of God. What do we learn from the book of Jeremiah about that core issue? Does God seem to be arbitrary? Exacting? Vengeful? Unforgiving? And severe, even despotic, as He is described in the book of Jeremiah?

9. If God could accomplish what He wants most by the use of force or power, the great controversy would have been over as soon as it began! God could have destroyed Lucifer, or simply taken away his freedom! God has never lacked power. (James 2:19) But, He chooses to limit His power in order to allow us freedom. "Go where one might, no nation could be found as wicked as Israel who had forsaken the living and true God in exchange for gross idolatry." (*King James Version Study Bible*) "The only nation whose god was truly God, was at the same time the only nation that exchanged its God for others." (*Nelson Study Bible*) It is important to note that Judah was not *irreligious* during this time. They believed that they were *worshipping* their other gods as they went about their immorality. But, they also professed to worship *Yahweh* at the same time. Do you think you could

move back and forth between fertility cult worship and the worship of *Yahweh*?

10. What does it do to one's mind to worship a "glued-together god"? (1 Samuel 5:1-5) Or, a "piece-of-firewood god"? (Isaiah 44:9-20; Jeremiah 2:27; 3:9; 10:2-16) What do you think the children of Israel were thinking when they worshiped the Baals and then rushed to the temple? (Jeremiah 7:1-11) Did they think two gods were better than one—like having extra insurance? They wanted a god they could move around and manipulate! (1 Samuel 4) Did they not recognize the incompatibility of those other religions with their true religion? What difference did they see in their two gods? What does it mean to worship a god? Can you truly worship two different gods at the same time? Do we? (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13)
11. There is no way to compare the God we worship with any of those false gods. He finally actually came down to this earth and demonstrated what kind of God is real—what He is really like!

Never will it be forgotten that He whose power created and upheld the unnumbered worlds through the vast realms of space, the Beloved of God, the Majesty of heaven, He whom cherub and shining seraph delighted to adore—humbled Himself to uplift fallen man; that He bore the guilt and shame of sin, and the hiding of His Father's face, till the woes of a lost world broke His heart, and crushed out His life on Calvary's cross. That the Maker of all worlds, the Arbiter of all destinies, should lay aside His glory and humiliate Himself from love to man will ever excite the wonder and adoration of the universe.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 651.2.

12. Is God angry when we worship other gods? Or, do we just lose by becoming like them? (Jeremiah 2:5,19; 7:19; Isaiah 44:9-20; Hosea 9:10; Romans 1:18-31) How many different gods were they worshipping? (Jeremiah 2:32-33; 3:9,12-13,23-24; 10:14; **11:13**) (See also Psalms 115 and 121.) Were they praying to Baal and Ashtoreth to save them from Nebuchadnezzar?
13. God repeatedly pleaded with them to come back to Him and admit that:
Jeremiah 3:23-24: ²³ "We were not helped at all by our pagan worship on the hilltops. Help for Israel comes only from the Lord our God. ²⁴ But the worship of Baal, the god of shame, has made us lose flocks and herds, sons and daughters—everything that our ancestors have worked for since ancient times." (GNB)
14. Look at some of the images that are mentioned in Jeremiah to describe our God: Jeremiah 2:13; 3:7; 5:22; 11:22; 31:3. Why would the people of Judah turn away from such a God to those worthless idols? Are we in any way like them? We are so surrounded by sin that we hardly notice that it is going on. Do we even have any true idea of what it is doing to us? **In my opinion, one of the biggest gaps in the Bible is that there is so little discussion of what sin actually does to people? Adam and Eve could walk comfortably in God's presence. If we saw God in His glory today, it would consume us instantly. (Exodus 33:20) What has changed? If we understood better what sin does to us, maybe we would not be so comfortable with it!**
15. What do you think of a God who would tell you not even to pray for your friends and family who had been taken into captivity? (Jeremiah 7:16; 11:14; 1 John 5:16) Does it do any good to pray for someone who is blatantly misbehaving and who has no intention of changing? (Jeremiah 14:19-15:2) Why would God not want to forgive? Will such a thing ever happen again? (See Revelation 22:11-12.) Is forgiveness all they will need and all we

need? The *unpardonable sin* means that we are running away from God and telling Him again and again to leave us alone.

16. Did the darkened minds of the people really comprehend what Jeremiah was saying to them? (Jeremiah 7:27-28) Did they really understand that they were at the end of their options? (Jeremiah 15:1-9; 23:1-8) In retrospect, did they understand the reason for their captivity? (See Daniel 9:1-21.) When God said that they should acknowledge their “rebellion,” what specifically was He talking about? (Jeremiah 3:13)
17. What were the real messages of Jeremiah? What was God saying about Judah and about Himself in these passages? Jeremiah 3:11-18; (Compare John 13:34-35.) 7:23-28; **9:23-26**; (Compare Romans 1:16-17.) 14:7,21; **31:31-34**. Have you ever gloried that you understand and know God? Is the gospel primarily about “God’s plan to save you and me”? Or, “The truth about God’s character and His government”? What divided the universe in the beginning? Are we surprised to find such insights about God in the *Old Testament*? What was the actual covenant that God wanted to have with His people? Was God asking for something more than a ceremonial religion? What does it mean *to know the Lord* or *to be His people*? (Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:38-41) If we really understand what kind of religion God wants, we will realize that the most natural thing of all is to grow up, both intellectually and spiritually. Then, we will begin doing what is right because it is right!

There is a document that records God’s endless, dispiriting struggle with organized religion, known as the Bible.—Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (Yale University Press, 2010), Kindle Edition, p. 8.

18. God asks of us a very simple thing. He asks us to make Him the number one Thing in our lives. He asks us to keep Him constantly in view, in our thoughts, and in our desires. He asks us to study the Bible to learn what kind of a Person He is. If we are willing to put aside our selfishness and prejudice and really come to know our heavenly Father, we will gradually come to be like Him. (John 17:3) This works by the natural laws of the mind. Just as small children grow to be like their parents by observing and copying in every way they can, God asks us to “observe” and “copy” Him. We cannot do that on our own. It is completely beyond our power. But, God will do it for us if we simply give Him the opportunity by doing our best to “observe” and “copy.” When this takes place, our lives and minds and hearts are transformed into His likeness. See 2 Corinthians 3:18. If we focus on God, we will gradually grow to be like Him.

It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence. Man will never rise higher than his standard of purity or goodness or truth. If self is his loftiest ideal, he will never attain to anything more exalted. Rather, he will constantly sink lower and lower. The grace of God alone has power to exalt man. Left to himself, his course must inevitably be downward.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* 555.1.

19. So, what did it do to the people of Judah to run back and forth between Solomon’s Temple and the religious sites of the fertility cult?
20. Jeremiah talks a lot about *knowing* the Lord. (See Jeremiah 2:8; 5:4-5; 8:7; 9:3-4,6,24; 16:21; 22:16; 24:7; 31:34.) What do you think is implied by these expressions? Why do you

think the use of reason and careful use of the mind have been made fun of in religious circles down through the years? Who do you suppose would lose if everyone would critically examine the reasons for his/her faith? It is often suggested that religion is a matter of the heart and not of the mind; but, the heart is really only good for pumping blood. So, what do we mean by these expressions? In Jeremiah's day, the *heart* was thought to be the seat of thinking and reason, and the *bowels* the seat of the emotions. (Jeremiah 4:19; 31:20, *KJV*)

Scripture speaks of "knowing" God as the spiritual person's ideal: namely, the fullness of a faith relationship that brings salvation and eternal life, generating love, hope, obedience, and joy (Ex. 33:13; Jer. 31:34; 8:8-12; Dan. 11:32; John 17:3; Gal. 4:8, 9; Phil. 3:8-11; 2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 8:8-12). **The dimensions of this knowledge are intellectual (knowing the truth about God; Deut. 7:9; Ps. 100:3); volitional (trusting, obeying, and worshiping God); and moral (practicing justice and love; Jer. 22:16; 1 John 4:7-8).** Faith's knowledge focuses on Jesus Christ, the incarnate God and the mediator between God and man. Faith seeks specifically to know Christ and His power (Phil. 3:8-14). The knowledge fostered by God's covenant agreement with us is reciprocal, with affection on both sides: we know God as ours because He knows us as His (John 10:14; Gal. 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:19). (*New Geneva Study Bible*) [Bold type is added.]

21. Have we as Seventh-day Adventists come to the place where we are not of much use to God any more? Is He ready to give us up forever? Will there ever be a time when we could actually say something good and specific about our God? Could we ever specifically say: "God is not the kind of Person His enemies have made Him out to be! He is not even the kind of God that some of His so-called friends have made Him out to be"? What was Israel saying to the nations about their God?

It was in order that *the heavenly universe* might see the conditions of the covenant of redemption that Christ bore the penalty in behalf of the human race. The throne of Justice must be eternally and forever made secure, even tho the race [That is us!] be wiped out, and another creation populate the earth. By the sacrifice Christ was about to make, all doubts would be forever settled, and the human race would be saved if they would return to their allegiance. Christ alone could restore honor to God's government. The cross of Calvary would be looked upon by the unfallen worlds, by the heavenly universe, by Satanic agencies, by the fallen race, and every mouth would be stopped.... Who is able to describe the last scenes of Christ's life on earth, His trial in the judgment hall, His crucifixion? Who witnessed these scenes?-The heavenly universe, God the Father, Satan and his angels.—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, July 12, 1899, par. 2-3; contrast *LHU* 257.3. [Bold type, content in brackets, and italics are supplied.]

22. Now that we have come to where the prophets actually described God letting His people go into captivity, how do you think God felt about that? (Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; 14:19-15:2; 23:1-8; 31:20; **Hosea 11:7-8**)
23. As we approach the end of their kingdom, do you see the picture of God as given by Jeremiah and others getting more and more obscure and confused? Or, more and more clear? Doesn't it seem almost like the darker the background (the general condition of the

people), the brighter the picture of God and His character appears? Jeremiah 9:23-24 suggest that we could even come to the place of boasting about God. What would that mean? Paul knew and understood God very well, and he was proud of it. (Romans 1:16-17) Does our knowledge of God make us feel different—give us an exhilarating sense of freedom? There is no worse loss of freedom than to feel fear. Does your knowledge of God make you afraid? Are you afraid of what God may do to you in the future? (1 John 4:18) Are you afraid of an ever-burning hell?

24. Is it fair for the good to suffer with the bad? Jeremiah suffered even though he was good and had done his best to warn the people of what would come if they did not repent. How honored was Jeremiah in his day? His own family and neighbors wanted to kill him!
25. After having worked with the children of Israel for approximately 800 years before the time of Jeremiah (from 1400 to 600 B.C.), did God seem to be enjoying a great deal of “success”? What is God trying to work toward? Was the problem that God did not have enough power? Or, even forgiveness? God is Forgiveness Personified!
26. God has worked with Christians for almost 2000 years. He has worked with adventists since the Great Disappointment in 1844 for more than 171 years. Is He getting tired of us? Are we doing our part in getting ready? (2 Peter 3:10-12)

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