

Bible Challenge 2018

Week 28-29a: July 8-20

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Jeremiah 46-51: Judgement against the Enemies of Israel
Jeremiah 52: Historical Postlude

Jeremiah is oftentimes referred to as "The Weeping Prophet" due to his prophecies and laments. Yet, given the context in which he lives, one must excuse him regarding the sorrow he feels. He is called as a young man, but would spend the next 40 years speaking to a people whose hearts were hardened and who refused to listen.

The 40 years of Josiah's ministry begin during the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign. Josiah was 8 years old when he began to rule (2 Chronicles 34:1), began to make reforms in his eighth year as king (2 Chronicles 34:3) and the book of the Law was found in the eighteenth year of his kingship (when Josiah was 26 years old — 2 Chronicles 34:8). So, here is a young man, serving alongside of the Priests in Anathoth during a time of great reform in the land. He witnessed firsthand (and likely participated in) the tearing down of the high places and pagan altars of worship and likely had come face to face with the idolaters in his land.

Sadly though, this means that the prophecies of Jeremiah were being uttered in a context where repentance and reform were taking place... or at least it seemed to be. Yet as is often the case, the reforms of this era were such were more surface-dressing than anything else. This is perhaps exemplified best in Jeremiah 4:3-4, where he proclaims:

"Break up your fallow ground and do not sow amongst the thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord; remove the foreskin from your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire and burn with none to quench it, because of your evil deeds."

How does one reconcile words like these in the midst of a reform unless the reform in outward and not one of the heart?

By the end of Josiah's ministry, Jerusalem has fallen and he has been taken by refugees to Egypt, the land to which the people of Israel were not to return for help.

Jeremiah's Call

This is one of the better known sections of Jeremiah. We have not only his historical context (the kings under whom he prophesies), but we also have the familiar words of "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before I consecrated you, I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Note: not only is this a good passage to support God's sovereignty over the life of people but it too is a reminder that a babe in the womb is fully human in the eyes of God. We also find the purpose of Jeremiah's call uttered with devastating clarity...God is raising him up to oppose the kings and those of the land who have offered sacrifices to pagan gods.

Judah's rebellion and God's Judgment

The chapters that follow Jeremiah's call should sound to us very much like the words of a prosecuting attorney. You have done this and you have done that — two evils (Jeremiah 2:13 speaks of): forsaking the source of living water and trying to dig wells of their own. How these words can be said to echo through history as a testimony against God's people in both the Old Testament age and in the church age until today. When we try and

make our own righteousness or trust in our own works, we deny the power and authority of our God and King. It is indeed, idolatry...and indeed, they refuse to be ashamed (Jeremiah 3:3).

Jeremiah's call to Repentance and the People's Rejection

Though pronouncing judgment, we must remember that our God is a merciful God and always extends a promise of hope. God calls on the people to amend their ways and heed his voice. Yet, as God pronounces in Jeremiah 8:5, they are in a perpetual backslide.

A Plea to Keep the Sabbath

How, as Christians, we often make excuses for ourselves when it comes to the Sabbath — we say things like, "Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath..." and that is indeed true and taught by our Lord, but it does not mean what we usually employ it to mean. What it means is that if we get legalistic about what we do or do not do on the Sabbath we are missing the point. It does not mean we should ignore the Sabbath or only practice a Sabbath when convenient to our schedules.

Here we find Jeremiah pleading with the people. They will not repent, so he tries a new tactic and essentially says, keep the Sabbath and God will bless you. He goes on to say in 17:21 that we ought keep the Sabbath for the sake of our very lives. Without it we will weary and diminish.

The Righteous Branch

Along with prophetic language of judgment and captivity, there is language that God will send a "righteous branch" to shepherd the people. This, of course, is a foretelling of Christ who will come and reign as a king, dealing wisely with the people and executing justice and righteousness.

Seventy Years of Captivity

Jeremiah prophesies in chapter 25 the precise length of the Babylonian exile. Seventy years will be spent in captivity before he will bring a redeemer to send the people back into the land — a mark of grace even in the midst of judgment.

Hope

The language of these chapters is perhaps some of the most well-known and beloved language in the book of Jeremiah. Here there is a promise not only of a restoration, but also of a new Covenant and a promise of a new heart in the lives of God's own. This language not only looks forward to the first coming of Christ, but it also anticipates a second coming where creation will be restored from the effects of the fall and we will dwell in harmony with God. And, as an assurance that this will begin taking place in the return of people from exile, Jeremiah is instructed to go and buy a field as a reminder to the people that one day such will take place in the land once again.

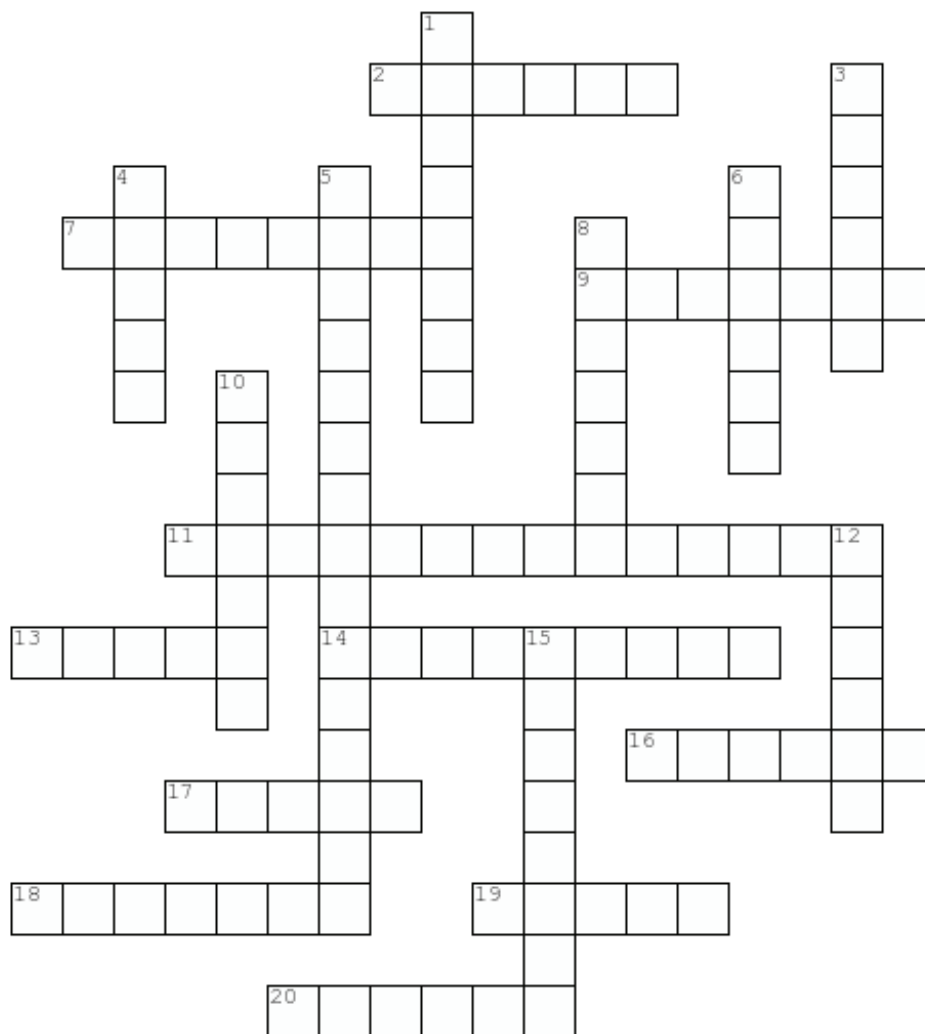
The Rechabites

There is an interesting little story that provides a powerful lesson found here in chapter 35. The Rechabites took an oath not to drink wine or to build houses, but had vowed to be sojourners in the land trusting in the Lord's provision. So, here they are faithful in earthly things. Yet, God commands his people from heaven and the people refuse to do the things that God commands. Indeed, how little things have changed and how often people take their obligations to a civic group or a sports team very seriously but do not take our spiritual vows before God as a serious matter.

Historical Postlude

Jeremiah gives an account of the fall of Jerusalem and we find him taken by fleeing Judeans to Egypt. Jeremiah sends correspondence back to Baruch, his secretary, and Baruch closes this book with an account, once again, of the tragedy of these events.

Week 28-29a: Jeremiah



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Across

2. The name of Jeremiah's Secretary
7. This Judean king was forced to watch the slaughter of his sons and then had his eyes put out.
9. God would punish the people but they refused to be _____.
11. The Babylonian king that overtook Jerusalem.
13. People fleeing Jerusalem took Jeremiah to this country.
14. The people of Israel's history was to try and do what was right, but always they would _____.
16. Jeremiah begins his prophetic work under this King.
17. God says to the people _____ your ways.
18. Jeremiah pleads with the people to at least keep this.
19. While the siege of Jerusalem is taking place, Jeremiah buys this...
20. The Israelites were guilty of sacrificing sons and daughters to _____ in the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom.

Down

1. Jeremiah was cast into a cistern owned by this man.
3. 'O house of Israel, can I not do to you what the _____ has done to the day?'
4. This is deceitful above all things and desperately sick.
5. Jeremiah promises that God will send this person to shepherd his people. (2 words)
6. 'But this covenant I will make with the house of Israel...I will put my law within them; I will write it on their _____.'
8. Jeremiah foretells the fall of this city.
10. Jeremiah predicts the people will be in exile this many years.
12. The sons of this man did not drink wine or build permanent houses.
15. This is a false prophet giving the people false hope.