

The Prophets Speak – Lesson 2

Welcome! It's great to see so many new faces and such a blessing to see the familiar ones. We heard from Carol in the first week that one of the things we're not going to do in this study is to spend a lot of time taking the prophecies we're going to read and apply them to today's world events. We can go "Peter Cotton Tail" and hop down a vast number of bunny trails of speculation and discussion, but, while that may be at times fun and even a little thrilling, it diverts us from the true focus of this Bible study –getting to know the true character of God and applying these truths to our lives for the purpose of Him changing us into the image of His only begotten Son, Jesus, and thereby living our lives to glorify Him.

Most of us have heard the phrase, 'history repeats itself', and though the actual events and characters will change, the core issues that lead to personal suffering, conflict, and the rise and fall of nations and empires have never changed. I believe that is why the Bible has remained so relevant since its inception to this very day. Our tendency is to point to various political players, military leaders, and even religious leaders as "the cause or causes of the problems" for the day, but they are not the core issue. The centerpiece of every issue in history has been the conflict between man's understanding of the truth of who God is and the lies of who He is **not** which are relentlessly presented to us by Satan and his evil forces.

The evidence is without exception – when people and ultimately enough people that comprise a material representation of a nation or a country believe Satan's lies and move away from God – meaning denying the truth of who God is, then the future of those people as individuals and the nation or country they live in is in serious peril of demise and destruction. It is for this very reason that it is impossible for us not to see what we're reading in Jeremiah that happened roughly

2,700 years ago is transpiring before our very eyes today in our nation and in this world. I understand what I am saying here is not terribly comforting – I’m just giving you the facts. However, and this is very important folks, my statement does not end here. There is hope, but hope only exists with God.

For those of you who have heard me lecture before, I typically like to go line by line and provide insights and commentaries as we go through the reading. There are 6 chapters and 168 verses to cover, so that would mean we would have to get through 5 verses/minute to get finished in 30 minutes. Since I’ve already been blustering for a few minutes, there’s no way all of the reading can be covered in this manner. As I read these 6 chapters, I found a progression of themes that I believe are fully applicable and relevant to our lives today. They are:

1. The truths of the spiritual condition of the people
2. A critical question from God
3. God’s answer to the question
4. The truths of Who God is
5. Key warnings from God
6. What is God looking for in us today and how do we respond?

As I go through this progression, I’ll be referencing mostly Scriptures from our reading, and I’ll provide additional support from other Scripture. For those of you who are taking notes, don’t freak out if I’m going too fast – the lecture will be up on my website tomorrow morning – I’ll provide the address of it at the end of the lecture. Fair enough? Let’s get started.

I. The Condition of the People

Throughout the six chapters God offers a detailed and broad indictment to the spiritual condition of the people of Judah. There are no less than 20 verses that provide pointed statements, so I've attempted to categorize them into 7 areas.

1. Stubborn

- a. 5:3c: refused correction and refused to repent
- b. 5:23: rebellious
- c. 6:16: won't walk in old ways
- d. 7:24: won't listen or pay attention
- e. 7:26: stiff necked

2. Rich and covetous

- a. 5:8: well fed lusty stallions
- b. 5:27: rich and powerful; full of deceit
- c. 8:10: greedy of gain

3. Foolish and senseless

- a. 5:21
- b. 9:8
- c. 9:14: without knowledge

4. Wicked – seeking evil

- a. 5:26

5. Practicing idolatry

- a. 7:18
- b. 7:30
- c. 7:31: burning sons and daughters

6. Liars

- a. 7:9: trusting in deceptive words
- b. 9:3-4: don't acknowledge God; slanderers
- c. 9:6

7. Utterly unfaithful

- a. 5:11

Not a pretty picture is it? As I said earlier, as we examine the true spiritual condition of the people as presented by God from 2,700 years ago, it is impossible for us not to see parallels of the spiritual condition of our society today, right? Here's a confession - I see myself guilty as charged - ***in my flesh*** - of each and every one of these areas. I've got some tough news for each of you – so are you.

HOWEVER, please remember that I said it was the *flesh* that was guilty. I'll get back to this point in a few minutes.

II. A critical question from God

Frankly, it's a little depressing reading all of these truths of the people's condition. Imagine what it does to God? Well, He offers an important question that all of us must consider for ourselves in chapter 8 verse 5a:

“Why have these people turned away?”

I don't know about you, but I have turned away from God far more times than I would like to admit. I spent the more than the first half of my life oblivious to the existence of God, although now that I look back on my life – or at least what I can remember – I can see His presence and involvement providing mercy and grace. Even after I received the gift of salvation, I have turned away from God – especially when the heat was on or I was in pain. Some of you may not like this next statement, but sometimes I think it's almost worse being a Christian when you're suffering because you know God has the power to heal and deliver you. When He doesn't respond quickly, we wonder if He's really there, or if He is, why doesn't He care enough to eliminate our pain and suffering? Have you ever turned away from God? Have you thought about why?

III. God's answer to the question

God, being God, knows our frailties and limitations, so He's kind enough to give us an answer to His question of why these people turned away from Him – why *we* turn away from Him at the end of chapter 8 verse 5:

“They cling to deceit”

In reviewing these chapters, I found no less than 17 references to lying and deceit. One of the greatest gifts God gives to us is the freedom to choose – or free will. We all want the privilege to choose. However, what we don't like about free will is that with our choices, consequences follow them. Our choices typically reflect what we believe to be true and what we believe **not** to be true. More often than not, but **not always**, when we make good choices, good things, or consequences develop. On the other hand, when we make poor choices we ultimately will suffer adverse and painful consequences.

The centerpiece choice each human being must confront, is whether or not we choose to receive and believe the truth of Who God is as described in the Bible. He gives us a choice because when we choose to believe Jesus is Who He is, what He did for us on the cross, and, therefore, pursue an intimate relationship with Him the potential for that relationship is greatly enhanced because we choose to love Him as opposed to being forced into the relationship. It's no accident that we as believers are viewed in Scripture as the "Bride of Christ". Jesus is the bridegroom, and we are His beloved and betrothed. In other words, an arranged marriage – absent of choice by the bride and groom-to-be offers nowhere near the potential for realizing the love and intimacy that God designed for a marriage by choice.

When we choose to not believe the **truths** of God, we, by definition, are accepting and believing in lies about God. This is what God is saying about why the people have turned away from Him – they cling to deceit, or the lies that Satan has convinced them of. Jesus provides the true description of who Satan is in John 8:44: You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there

is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

So how do we escape clinging to the lies and deceit so endlessly presented to us by Satan and his evil forces? By doing what we're doing here – studying the Word of God, which is the truth. Again, Jesus enforces this foundational fact about Himself – the Word of God – in John 14:6: Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” He continues this message in his reply to Pilate in His fateful meeting with him in John 18:37b: In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” So how do we either avoid or respond to Satan’s lies and deceptions about God?

IV. The truths of Who God is

Throughout our reading, God presents us no less than 28 verses that speak to the truth of His character, His love, and His mercy and grace. As I did with the condition of the people’s spiritual condition, I’m going to condense these verses into several key truths about Who God truly is:

A. God is the creator, and He is to be feared

- a. 5:22

B. God sees all things (El Roi)

- a. 6:2: He sees in our original design; Daughter Zion
- b. 7:11

C. God does not comprehend evil thoughts

- a. 7:31

D. God restrains the enemy

- a. 5:6: he holds back those who are seeking to attack us

E. God is merciful

- a. 5:10: he leaves a remnant

- b. 6:11-12: difficult verses about God pouring out wrath on children, young men, and wives

F. God forgives

- a. 5:1
- b. 5:7

G. God disciplines those He loves out of His goodness for their good

- a. 5:3

H. God is just and will respond to injustice

- a. 5:9
- b. 8:14

I. God is in control of all things

- a. 5:24: he controls the weather

J. God knows what is best for us

- a. 7:19: “are they not harming themselves?”

K. God is persistent in His love for us

- a. 7:13: “I spoke to you again and again”

L. God wants all to repent and be spared from sin’s consequences

- a. 6:21: he puts up obstacles to going down the wrong path
- b. 7:5-7: “if you....., then I will let you live in this place”
- c. 2 Peter 3:9: The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

M. God gives and takes away

- a. 8:13
- b. Job 1:21: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.”

N. God listens

- a. 8:6: He listens intently; searches the heart
- b. 1 Samuel 16:7b: The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

A good summary verse of who God is comes from chapter 9 verse 24: but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD.

We MUST be vigilant in our pursuit of not just studying the truths of Who God is, but believing and living these truths. We are either blatantly or subliminally confronted with relentless lies about God's perfect and complete love for us. We are living in a constant battle for possession – God created us for His good pleasure, but Satan is seeking to steal us away from God. We cannot be ignorant of this ongoing battle, which, in my opinion, is intensifying by the moment.

V. Key warnings from God

Out of God's love, mercy, and kindness, He offers some important warnings to these spiritually bankrupt people. Once again, I'll focus on the key ones and provide Scripture references to support.

A. There is judgment to those who will reject God; He will take action

- a. 5:6:
- b. 6:1; 6:22: Babylonian Empire invasion and captivity
- c. 10:22

B. Prophecy will be fulfilled

- a. 5:15: Babylonian Empire invasion and captivity

C. Sin deprives us of goodness

- a. 5:25

D. We are to heed God's Word

- a. 6:1: "Flee"
- b. 6:17: "Listen to the sound of the trumpet"

E. God will turn away for good at a certain point

- a. 6:8
- b. 7:16: "So do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you."
- c. 8:20: "The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved."

F. God is not interested in religious acts

- a. 6:20: What do I care about incense from Sheba or sweet calamus from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable; your sacrifices do not please me.

G. God will test our faith

- a. 5:3: “You struck...You crushed”
- b. 6:29: “The bellows blow fiercely to burn away the lead with fire”

H. God will respond positively to true repentance

- a. 7:5-7: “if you....., then I will let you live in this place”

I. God will send multiple warnings in advance of judgment

- a. 7:13: “I spoke to you again and again”
- b. 7:25: “again and again I sent you my servants and prophets”

J. God will consent to our decision to follow our fleshly desires

- a. 8:1-2
- b. Romans 1:24-32

K. Be aware of false prophets

- a. 8:11: They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. “Peace, peace,” they say, when there is no peace.
- b. 1 John 2:22: Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son.

L. Don’t be deceived

- a. 9:4

There’s that word again – deceived. The essence of God is love, and out of His incredible love for us, He’s honest with us.

- He reveals the **truth** of Satan’s endless attempts to convince us of lies about God
- He reveals the **truth** of Who He is which, if we choose to believe it, is life changing
- He warns us of the **truth** of the pain and suffering it causes both Him and us when we choose to believe the lies and not repent and turn to God.

VI. What is God looking for in us today and how do we respond?

We cannot deny that man’s spiritual condition today is no better than it was 2,700 years ago – one might argue it’s worse – we haven’t changed. The good news, neither does God. Our reading provides some verses of what God was looking for back then in His people. Notably, He’s looking for the same things in us today.

Let’s go over a few of them:

5:1b: If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city.

This means to us God is looking for people who are genuinely, sincerely, and honestly seeking Him. If we do this and acknowledge Him for Who He is and what His Son did for us, He will forgive us.

5:28b: They do not promote the case of the fatherless; they do not defend the just cause of the poor.

Jesus told us that for those who have been given much, more will be required. If we are brutally honest with ourselves, God has given us an abundance – living in this country, living in this area of the world, our freedom to worship Him.... we could go on and on. Please know I'm not trying to guilt or shame any of you into doing something with what you have. All I ask is that you present your thanks to God for what He has provided you and ask Him if there's something you can do for those who are less fortunate. That's between you and God, but you need to have that conversation.

6:16a: This is what the LORD says: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.

In other words, “the good old days”, in God's mind, are the days when we first fell in love with Jesus and were fired up about living our lives for Him. Today's world looks at the old days of higher moral standards and little or no resistance to those who want to honor God publically as if this was a less developed type of thinking – today's world wants to be progressive and let anything be acceptable – except for the things that I just mentioned that amounted to the foundation of what built

this country into what it is – or at least was. God pleaded for the people to come back to Him 2,700 years ago, and He’s doing the same today.

7:5-7: ⁵ **If** you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, ⁶ **if** you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and **if** you do not follow other gods to your own harm, ⁷ **then** I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever.

God is referencing the people’s false hope in the “temple” – instead of Him. His point was their religious practices of offerings and sacrifices being performed at the temple meant nothing to Him because He knew their hearts were not in the right place. God does not want religion – He wants relationship. He wants it real, He wants it raw, and He wants it honest. God isn’t mocked, folks, He knows every single thing that is in you and in me that needs cleansing and forgiveness. He’s just waiting for us to own it, confess it, and give Him permission to clean it up. Remember, He started the process of a loving relationship – while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

7:23b: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in obedience to all I command you, that it may go well with you.

While salvation is by grace, not of works, we are accountable for our actions as Christians. Christian means “little Christ”, so we are to be reflections of the Lord to those around us. The way we go about doing this is doing what the Lord asks of us in conducting our lives in loving God and loving others. If we are truly and sacrificially loving God and others, then we are obeying His commandments.

Final Comments

For those of you still awake, you may remember I confessed that my flesh and your flesh were guilty of the things that God said the people were guilty of 2,700 years ago. What I'm about to say is not only important for this lecture, but also for this entire study. Jesus willingly went to the cross to sacrifice Himself for the punishment of my sins and your sins. His resurrection was the stamp of approval from the Father that His Son's sacrifice was ***totally sufficient*** to meet His judgment for the past, present, and future sins to those who would come to believe in the truth of Who Jesus is and what He did for us. That old self in us – the flesh serving self – the guilty as charged flesh - died with Jesus on the cross.

Romans 6:6 confirms this, “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.” In other words our faith in Jesus' atoning work makes us a new creation that is “not guilty” of our sin – we are *completely* forgiven. It is with this truth that we can find peace – the peace that passes all understanding – with God and with life. The judgments and consequences that we have been and will read about through this year's study do not apply to those who confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior. I strongly encourage you to remember this as you go through this study and offer thanks and praise to God for the gift of Jesus.

Today's reading revealed that for a very long time there's been a raging war against mankind engineered by Satan, and his primary weapon is deception. The only defense against deceit and lies is the truth. My prayer for each of you here is that you have chosen to believe the truth of who God is. I encourage you each to ask God to reveal the lies you've been holding onto about Him, His love, and His desire to heal you with the truths of Who He really is. As this happens, may we each develop a heart like Jeremiah that truly cares about the lost. The truth is the lost have been deceived and believed the lie. It may be painful for them to hear the

truth of their spiritual condition - the truth hurts for those who aren't living in the truth. But you must at the same time tell them the truth of who God is, the love He has for them, and how His love has changed each of you. Then, it comes down to their choice – to believe the truth or to believe the lie. If they believe the truth, as Jesus said Himself, the truth will set them free. Amen? Let's pray.