

Lessons From Jeremiah



SABBATH—DECEMBER 19

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Jeremiah 2:13; Jeremiah 6:20; Jeremiah 7:1–10; Matthew 9:12; Deuteronomy 6:5; Jeremiah 10:1–15; Jeremiah 23:1–8.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘A new day is coming,’ announces the LORD. ‘At that time I will raise up from David’s royal line a true and rightful Branch [Jesus]. He will be a King who will rule wisely. He will do what is fair and right in the land’ ” (Jeremiah 23:5, NIV).

WE ARE NOW AT THE END OF OUR STUDY OF JEREMIAH.

A lot of action, emotion (strong feeling), and energy has taken place in the story of our prophet (special messenger).

In many ways, Jeremiah’s situation was very different from ours and from those of many other generations. But the principles (important rules) in his book are the same for God’s people in every generation.

Principles such as faithfulness to God and obedience to His commandments. Principles such as true religion, a religion of the heart, as opposed to empty and dead rituals (services) that can leave people with a false sense of peace and happiness. Principles such as listening to correction, even when you do not want to hear it. Principles such as true revival (new spiritual life) and reformation (change for the better). Principles such as trusting in the Lord. Principles such as . . .

The list goes on. This week, let us study some of the many lessons we can learn from the book of Jeremiah, which teaches us God’s love for His people as He warns them about where their disobedient actions will lead.

JEREMIAH'S LORD (Jeremiah 31:3)

Seventh-day Adventists understand that at the center of the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan) is a very important issue: What is the character (thoughts; feelings; actions) of God? What is God really like? Is He the strict tyrant that Satan makes Him out to be? Or is He a loving and caring Father who wants only the best for us? These questions really are the most important questions in the entire universe. After all, what would our situation be if God were not kind and loving but mean and unfair? We would be better off if there were no God than to have one like that.

So, the questions are very important. Thankfully, we have the answers. These answers are best seen at the Cross.

“It will never be forgotten that Jesus’ power created and supported the countless worlds throughout the huge universe. He was the Beloved of God, the Majesty [King] of heaven, angels adored [worshiped] Him. He humbled Himself to uplift fallen man. He accepted the guilt and shame of sin, and the hiding of His Father’s face. The woes [great grief] of a lost world broke His heart, and crushed out His life on Calvary’s cross. The Maker of all worlds and the Ruler of all fates [future ends] was willing to put aside His glory [great honor and praise] and humble Himself out of His love for man. His sacrifice will always excite the wonder and worship of the universe.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 651.

How is the nature and character of God taught in the following verses in Jeremiah? What do Jeremiah 2:13; Jeremiah 5:22; Jeremiah 11:22; Jeremiah 31:3; and Jeremiah 3:7 tell us about Him?

These are just a few of the many examples and explanations used in the book that teach us something of the nature and character of our God. He is the Beginner of life, the powerful Creator, a God of judgment, a God who loves us and calls us, again and again, to repent of (feel sorrow for) our sins and to turn away from the paths that will lead to our destruction.

What proof of God’s loving character have you experienced during your lifetime?



At the heart of the great controversy is a question: What is God really like?

**RITUALS (FALSE SERVICES) AND SIN
(Jeremiah 6:20)**

“There is a document that records [shows] God’s endless, dispiriting [hopeless] struggle with organized religion. This is known as the Bible.”—Adapted from Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution [Change]: Reflections on the God Debate [Argument]*, Kindle edition, page 8.

Not really! That is because the religion of the Bible, the religion that God has given to man, has always been an “organized religion.”

But there is no doubt that the book of Jeremiah tells us about the Lord trying to get people away from the cold, dead, but very organized rituals. These rituals controlled the people’s faith. They believed that doing these rituals covered their sins or took them away.

A large part of Jeremiah’s struggles was with leaders and priests and people who believed that they were the chosen ones of God and the children of Abraham. Because of this, they believed they were just fine with the Lord. What a sad lie. We are also of Abraham’s seed (Galatians 3:29). We also need to watch out for this lie.

What is the message in Jeremiah 6:20 and Jeremiah 7:1–10? Most important, how can we use these principles in our own walk with the Lord?

Read Jeremiah 7:9, 10. If one ever wanted to find an example of “cheap grace [forgiveness and mercy],” it is in these verses. The people do all these sinful things. Then they come back to the temple and “worship” the true God and claim forgiveness for their sins. God does not like people to make fun of Him. If these people do not change their ways, they are going to face rough judgment.

What a lie they believe in. They believe that they can claim God’s forgiveness and go on doing what they want without regard to the conditions of the covenant so that they can continue on in those sins!

What is the difference between what Jeremiah is warning about and what Jesus said in Matthew 9:12? Why is it important to know that difference?

RELIGION OF THE HEART (Romans 14:12)

“So we will all have to explain to God the things we have done” (Romans 14:12, NirV).

So much of the book of Jeremiah is directed toward the nation as a group. Time and again Jeremiah talked about Israel and Judah both as God’s “choice vine” (Jeremiah 2:21, NIV), the “beloved” of the Lord (Jeremiah 11:15; Jeremiah 12:7), God’s own “heritage”¹ (Jeremiah 12:7–9), His “vineyard” (Jeremiah 12:10), and His “flock” (Jeremiah 13:17).

Of course, it is the same in the New Testament. Often the church is understood as a group (read Ephesians 1:22; Ephesians 3:10; Ephesians 5:27).

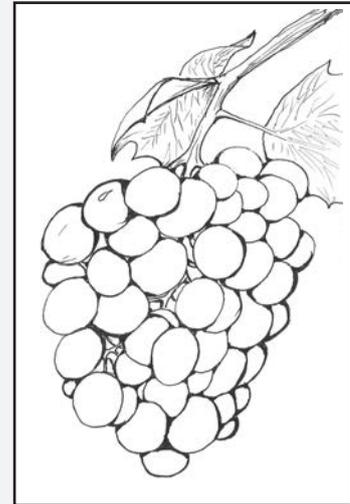
But salvation is personal, not a group issue. We are not saved as a group. As with the New Testament church, the nation of Judah was composed of separate persons. At the level of each person, the real important issues arise. The famous verse in Deuteronomy 6:5, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (NKJV), is spoken to the nation as a group. But it is written to “you” as one person. That means God is talking to each person. In the end, each one of us will have to give a report of ourselves as a person to God.

We find that same thing in Jeremiah too.

What do Jeremiah 17:7; Jeremiah 17:10; Jeremiah 29:13; and Jeremiah 9:23, 24 say about the importance of a person’s walk with the Lord?

Both Testaments of the Bible talk about God’s church as a group. But true faith is a matter of each person, himself or herself. Each person needs to make a daily surrender to the Lord, a personal choice to walk in faith and obedience.

There is no question that each one of us is responsible for our own souls as a person. But how can we make sure that we are doing everything we can to uplift and encourage others? Who can you give some kind of encouraging words to right now?



Jeremiah often said that Israel was God’s choice vine.

DEFINITIONS

1. heritage—something a person naturally owns as a result of his or her right by birth.

FALSE IDOLS (Jeremiah 10:1–15)

What was one of the great sins that the people did that Jeremiah had to deal with continuously? Read Jeremiah 10:1–15.

Yes, Jeremiah teaches us that the idols are useless and silly. But what is interesting in these verses is the way that he also teaches how the idols are different from the living God. These idols are powerless, useless, empty, and false. What a big difference they are from the Lord, who made the heavens and earth. The Lord lasts forever, while these idols will not. So, should we worship what is false, vain, and powerless? Or should we worship the Lord, whose power and might are so great that He created and supports the universe? Of course, the answer is very clear.

Even though the answer is very clear, we are in danger of falling into idol worship today. We might not worship the same kind of idols that those in Jeremiah's time did. But our modern life is full of false gods. These modern idols can be anything that we love more than God. Whatever we "worship" (and worship does not always mean singing and praying) becomes our god. And then we are guilty of idol worship.



Should we not worship the One who made the universe?

What are some of the things that we can be in danger of making into idols? What about things such as TV, computers, cars, money, fame, even other people? Make a list of what these possible idols are, and then ask yourself: In the end, what real salvation do they offer?

Of course, we know very well that none of these things is worthy of worship. We know that in the end, nothing that this world offers us, nothing that we make into idols, can fully satisfy our souls. And certainly they do not save us. We know all these things. But if we are not careful or fail to keep Jesus first in our lives, we can so easily be swept up in a modern form of idol worship. Idol worship is what Jeremiah was so much against.

THE REMNANT² (Jeremiah 23:1–8)

“In the closing years of Judah’s backsliding the warnings of the prophets failed. The armies of the Babylonians came for the third and last time to attack Jerusalem. Hope fled from every heart. And Jeremiah prophesied [foretold] total ruin. Because of his continual and strong warning that the people should surrender to the enemy, Jeremiah was finally thrown into prison. But God did not forget the faithful remnant who were still in the city. Even while Jeremiah was kept under close watch by those who hated his messages, there came to him fresh prophecies [messages from God] about Heaven’s willingness to forgive and to save. These visions have been an unfailing source of comfort to the church of God from that day to this.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 466.

Even among the backsliding and doom, God always had a small group of faithful people. Many of the prophets, and Jeremiah, too, always pointed out backsliding and unfaithfulness because the Lord wanted to save His people. But throughout all Bible history, the Lord had a faithful remnant. Of course, this will continue down until the end of time (read Revelation 12:17).

How is the idea of the remnant explained in Jeremiah 23:1–8? How is this used in New Testament times? Read also Jeremiah 33:14–18.

In Jeremiah 23:5–7, Bible teachers have long understood a prophecy about the Messiah (Chosen One), a prophecy of salvation for God’s faithful people. After the Babylonian slavery, a remnant returned. And it was not a glorious return. But God’s purposes were fulfilled in David’s family line through Jesus, who will one day rule as King over all.

This prophecy was fulfilled in part with the first coming of Jesus (read Matthew 1:1; Matthew 21:7–9; and John 12:13). It will have its total fulfillment in the Second Coming (read Daniel 7:13, 14), when all of God’s faithful people (His true remnant) will live forever in peace and safety. The redemption (salvation and freedom) is first symbolized by the Exodus from Egypt. But it will be final, complete, and eternal.

In what are you putting your hopes? How can you learn to trust more and more in the promises of God and their total fulfillment in your own life? What else do you have that is more important?



God’s purposes will be fulfilled in Jesus, who will one day rule over all.

DEFINITIONS

2. remnant—a small group of people always faithful to the Lord.

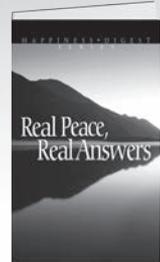
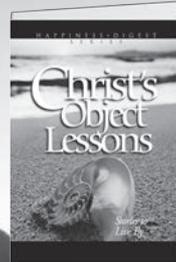
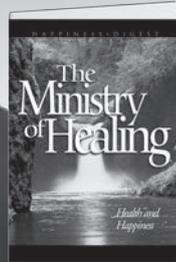
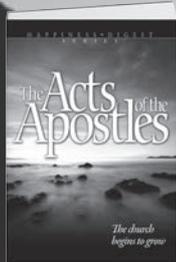
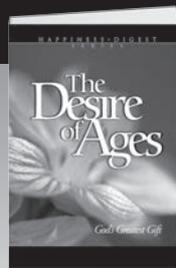
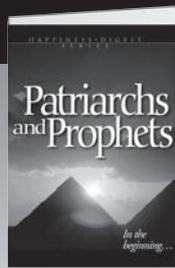
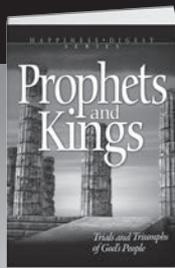
ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Many years ago a Seventh-day Adventist minister named W. D. Frazee preached a sermon called “Winners and Losers.” In it he went through the lives of different Bible characters (individuals; people). He examined their work and ministry (work done for God). Then he asked the question about each one: Was he a winner or a loser?

For example, he talked about John the Baptist, who lived a lonely life in the wilderness. John had a small group of followers. But it never added up to much. And certainly it was not what Jesus, who came later, had. John lived out his last days in a dark and wet prison where he was troubled by doubts. Finally, he got his head chopped off (Matthew 14). After telling John’s story, Elder Frazee asked: “Was John a winner or a loser?”

What about Jeremiah the prophet? How successful was his life? He suffered a great deal. And he was not afraid to complain and moan about it either. The priests, prophets, kings, and common people did not like what Jeremiah had to say. They were upset by it. Jeremiah was even thought of as a traitor to his own people. In the end, the destruction and doom that he spent his life warning about came. Time and again the people refused to accept his words. They threw him into a muddy pit, hoping he would die there. Jeremiah lived to see his nation go into slavery while Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. As we humans understand it, not much went well for Jeremiah. You could even argue that Jeremiah had a very unpleasant life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Was Jeremiah a winner or a loser? What are the reasons for the choice you make? If you say he was a winner, what does that tell us about how important it is that we not judge Jeremiah’s life by the world’s standards? What standards are we to use to try to understand what is right and wrong, good and evil, success and failure?
- ② In what ways do we find the life and ministry of Jesus explained in the life and work of Jeremiah? How are their lives and ministries the same?
- ③ Earlier this week we learned that going on with religious worship without a change of heart is a false belief. What is true instead?



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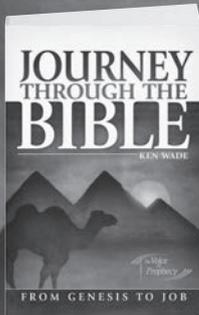
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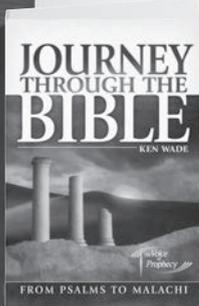
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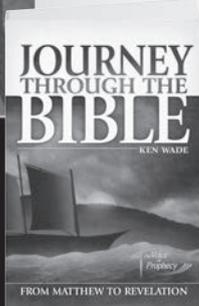
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