

The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations

Lesson 7: The Broken Covenant and Plots Against Jeremiah -- Jeremiah 11:1-12:17

There is a moment when a marriage that has been quietly dying finally has to be named. The promises were made, the vows were spoken, and somewhere along the way one party simply stopped keeping them, while still showing up at the table, still wearing the ring. That is the ache at the center of these chapters. God had bound Himself to Judah in covenant, a sacred bond with blessings for faithfulness and curses for betrayal, and Judah had broken it. "Cursed be the man who does not hear the words of this covenant" (11:3). The words are heavy because the relationship was real.

God sends Jeremiah to preach the old covenant afresh, the covenant He made "in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace" (11:4). The terms were never a secret. God's part was steadfast: "that I may confirm the oath that I swore to your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey" (11:5). Judah's part was simple: "Obey my voice." But generation after generation "did not obey or incline their ear" (11:8). They had run after other gods until they had as many gods as they had cities (11:13). The covenant was not broken by accident. It was broken by a thousand small refusals.

Then the chapter turns personal in a way that takes your breath away. The men of Anathoth, Jeremiah's own hometown, his own neighbors and kin, plot to kill him. "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more" (11:19). And Jeremiah, who did not even know they were scheming against him, says, "I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter." Read that line slowly, because centuries later another faithful Servant would walk that same road, betrayed by His own, "like a lamb that is led to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7), the Lord Jesus Himself.

Out of the wound comes one of the most honest prayers in all the Bible. Jeremiah does not pretend. He asks God the question we are often afraid to ask: "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?" (12:1). And God's answer is not a tidy explanation but a bracing summons: "If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses?" (12:5). The road ahead gets harder, not easier. Yet even here, the chapter ends with mercy reaching past Judah to the nations: if they will learn God's ways, "then they shall be built up in the midst of my people" (12:16). The God of the broken covenant is still the God who builds.

Group Discussion: God held Judah accountable to a covenant whose terms were clear and long-known: "Obey my voice" (11:4, 7). Why do you think it is so easy for people in a long-standing relationship with God to drift from clear commitments they once took seriously, and what helps keep a covenant relationship from slowly eroding?

Personal Reflection: Jeremiah brought his hardest question (“Why does the way of the wicked prosper?”) straight to God in honest prayer (12:1). What is a question or complaint you have been carrying about God’s fairness, and what would it look like to bring it to Him honestly rather than letting it fester in silence?

Read Jeremiah 11:1–12:17

Study Questions

1. Read 11:1–8. God recalls the covenant He made when He brought Israel out of “the iron furnace” of Egypt, with its blessing for obedience and curse for disobedience, and notes that generations “did not obey.” What does this passage reveal about the seriousness of covenant with God, His own faithfulness to His promises, and the real consequences of broken commitments?
2. God’s requirement was simply, “Obey my voice” (11:4), yet Judah “walked... in the stubbornness of their evil hearts.” Where in your walk with God is obedience clear but your heart has grown stubborn or slow?
3. Read 11:9–13. God says Judah “turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers” and had gods “as many as your cities,” and warns that He will not listen to their cry in the day of disaster. What does this reveal about the nature of idolatry, the danger of returning to old sins, and the sobering point at which God’s patience gives way to judgment?
4. Judah had a god for every street corner (11:13), trusting many things to give what only God can give. What are the “many gods” your own heart is tempted to run to for security, comfort, or meaning instead of running to the Lord?

5. Read 11:18–20. The men of Anathoth plot against Jeremiah, who says, “I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter,” and entrusts his cause to God “who judges righteously.” How does Jeremiah’s response to betrayal model trusting God rather than taking revenge, and how does this gentle lamb foreshadow the Lord Jesus (Isaiah 53:7)?

6. Jeremiah was betrayed by his own townspeople and family, yet he committed his cause to God rather than retaliating. Who has wronged you in a way you are tempted to repay, and what would it look like to entrust that situation to the God who judges righteously?

7. Read 12:1–4. Jeremiah honestly asks God, “Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?” What does it teach us that God welcomes this raw, honest wrestling, and how is honest lament before God different from faithless grumbling against Him?

8. Jeremiah brought his confusion about injustice directly to God instead of nursing it in secret. When you are troubled by something God allows, do you tend to take it to Him or to stew on it alone, and what would honest prayer change?

9. Read 12:5–17. God answers Jeremiah not with an easy explanation but with a call to greater endurance (“how will you compete with horses?”), then closes by promising that even the nations, if they learn His ways, will “be built up in the midst of my people.” What does this

reveal about how God grows His servants through hardship, about His sovereignty over the nations, and about the surprising reach of His mercy beyond Judah?

10. Look back across these chapters, from the broken covenant and the plots of Anathoth to the call to run with horses and the mercy offered even to the nations. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is using this passage to deepen your covenant faithfulness and your trust in the God who judges righteously.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Deuteronomy 27:26, the covenant curse Jeremiah echoes, “Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law”; Isaiah 53:7, the suffering Servant “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter”; Psalm 73:1–17, Asaph’s honest wrestling with why the wicked prosper, resolved “until I went into the sanctuary”; Romans 12:19, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord”; Hebrews 12:1–4, running with endurance the race set before us, looking to Jesus.

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