

The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations

Lesson 12: Two Baskets of Figs; Seventy Years; the Cup of Wrath -- Jeremiah 24:1–25:38

Picture two baskets sitting in front of the temple. One is filled with figs so ripe and sweet they make your mouth water, the first of the season, the kind you cannot wait to bite into. The other is filled with figs so rotten, so spoiled, that no one would touch them. And then God asks Jeremiah a strange question: “What do you see?” It is a question that cuts to the heart of how God sees, because His way of sorting people is almost always the opposite of ours. The figs everyone would call the losers, the exiles already dragged off to Babylon, God calls the good ones. The figs left behind in Jerusalem, the survivors who congratulate themselves on dodging the disaster, God calls rotten.

We tend to read circumstances as verdicts. The people carried into exile looked cursed; the people still sitting in the temple looked blessed. But God does not measure by comfort or location. He measures by the heart, by whether a person will let suffering soften them toward Him or harden them against Him. “I will set my eyes on them for good,” He says of the exiles, “and I will bring them back... I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD.” The very thing that looked like abandonment was the doorway to restoration.

Then the lens widens. God tells Jeremiah how long the discipline will last: seventy years. Not forever, but not a moment less either. Babylon, the rod in God’s hand, will rise and do its terrible work, and then Babylon itself will be repaid. The same God who hands the cup of wrath to Judah will hand it to the nations, one after another, until even mighty Babylon drinks the dregs. History is not a runaway train. It is held, to the very year, in the hands of a God who is sovereign over empires and over time.

And that cup, the cup of God’s wrath, is the sober center of these chapters. “Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.” One by one the nations are named, and not one escapes. It is a fearful picture, and it is meant to be. For if God will not let persistent sin go unanswered even among the proud empires of the earth, then His holiness is not a sentiment, it is the bedrock of reality. The wonder of the gospel is that there was Another who would one day pray, “Let this cup pass from me,” and then drink it to the bottom in our place.

Group Discussion: God called the exiles, the people whose lives looked ruined, the “good figs,” and the comfortable survivors the “bad figs,” turning the world’s scorecard upside down. Why are we so prone to read outward circumstances as God’s verdict on a person, and how does this vision train us to see ourselves and others the way God does?

Personal Reflection: God promised the exiles, “I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.” Think of a hard season God has used in your life. How did He use that difficulty to soften your heart toward Him, or where do you sense Him doing that work right now?

Read Jeremiah 24:1–25:38

Study Questions

1. Read 24:1–10. God shows Jeremiah two baskets of figs and calls the exiles “good” and those remaining in the land “bad,” the reverse of how people judged them. What does this reveal about how God evaluates people compared with how we judge by circumstances?
2. The exiles looked cursed and the survivors looked blessed, yet God saw it the other way around. Where are you tempted to read your own circumstances, or someone else’s, as God’s final verdict, and how does this vision correct that?
3. Read 24:5–7. God says of the exiles, “I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD... for they shall return to me with their whole heart.” What does this teach about God’s purpose in discipline and the kind of heart He is after?
4. God’s aim was a people who would “return to me with their whole heart.” What in your own heart is still held back from God, and what would whole-hearted return look like for you?

5. Read 25:1–11. For twenty-three years Jeremiah warned the people, “Turn now, every one of you,” and they would not listen, so God announces seventy years of Babylon. What does this reveal about God’s patience, and about the seriousness of refusing His repeated call?
6. God says the people “have not listened” and “have not inclined your ears to hear” through decades of warning. Where have you been hearing God’s call to change for a long time without yet obeying, and what keeps you from listening?
7. Read 25:8–14. God calls pagan Nebuchadnezzar “my servant” and uses Babylon to discipline Judah, yet promises to punish Babylon too “for their iniquity.” What does this teach about God’s sovereignty over the nations and over the whole course of history?
8. If God is truly sovereign over empires, headlines, and the rise and fall of powers far bigger than you, how should that steady you when the world around you feels chaotic or out of control?
9. Read 25:15–29. God hands “the cup of the wine of wrath” to nation after nation, and none escape drinking it. What does the certainty of this judgment reveal about God’s holiness and His response to persistent, unrepented sin?

10. Look back over both chapters, the two baskets, the seventy years, and the cup of wrath. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is using this sobering passage to deepen your trust in God's sovereignty or your seriousness about sin this week.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Ezekiel 11:14-21, God's parallel promise to give the exiles "one heart" and "a new spirit," removing the heart of stone; 2 Chronicles 36:20-21, the fulfillment of the seventy years, the land keeping its sabbaths while Judah served Babylon; Daniel 9:1-3, Daniel reading Jeremiah's seventy years and turning to God in prayer and repentance; Revelation 14:9-10 and 18:1-8, the cup of God's wrath poured out and Babylon the proud finally fallen; Matthew 26:39, where Jesus prays, "Let this cup pass from me," and yet drinks the cup of wrath in our place.

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