

The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations

Lesson 21: The Remnant, Flight to Egypt, and Final Oracles -- Jeremiah 40:1-45:5

The city has fallen. The smoke still hangs over the ruins of Jerusalem, the temple is rubble, and most of the people have been marched off to Babylon. But God, in His mercy, has left a remnant in the land, a few farmers and soldiers and frightened families, and He has given them a good and gentle governor named Gedaliah. For a moment there is a flicker of hope. Gedaliah tells them, "Do not be afraid... dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you." They gather wine and summer fruits. Vines are pruned. Life, fragile and green, begins again in the ashes.

And then, in a single act of jealous treachery, it is shattered. A royal-blooded man named Ishmael, stirred up by a foreign king, comes with ten men under the cover of friendship, shares a meal with Gedaliah, and murders him at the table along with everyone around him. The little hope is butchered. The remnant, terrified now of Babylon's revenge, comes to Jeremiah with what sounds like the holiest of requests. "Pray for us," they beg. "Whatever the Lord your God says, we will do it." They even add a solemn vow: "Whether it is good or bad, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God."

Watch closely, because this is one of the most honest pictures of the human heart in all of Scripture. They wait ten days for God's answer. And God's answer is clear: stay in the land, do not go to Egypt, and I will plant you and not pluck you up. But the moment the word comes back the way they did not want it, they call Jeremiah a liar. "You are telling a lie," they say, and they do the very thing they swore not to do. They go to Egypt, and they drag the old prophet and his scribe Baruch down with them. They had already decided. They only wanted God to bless the decision they had made.

Down in Egypt, the mask comes off entirely. When Jeremiah confronts their idolatry, the people answer him to his face with breathtaking boldness: we will keep burning incense to the "queen of heaven," because back when we did that, "we had plenty of food... and saw no disaster." They have rewritten their whole history to defend their idols. And in the middle of this stubborn, sinking story, God speaks one quiet, tender word to weary Baruch: stop seeking great things for yourself; I will give you your life as a prize of war. This lesson is about the danger of asking God for guidance we have already decided to ignore, the idolatry that lives in the human heart, and the deep contentment of wanting God more than greatness.

Group Discussion: The remnant came to Jeremiah with what sounded like total surrender: "Whatever the Lord your God says, we will do it... whether it is good or bad" (42:5-6). Yet the moment God's answer did not match what they wanted, they called the prophet a liar and did the opposite. Why is it so easy to ask God for guidance while our minds are already made up,

and how can we tell the difference between truly seeking God's will and merely seeking His blessing on our own?

Personal Reflection: God told Baruch, in the middle of a collapsing nation, "Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not" (45:5). Where are you reaching for "great things," recognition, security, advancement, comfort, and what would it look like to lay that ambition down and be content with the gift of God's presence and your life in His hands?

Read Jeremiah 40:1–45:5

Study Questions

1. Read 40:1–6. The pagan captain of the guard tells Jeremiah, "The Lord your God pronounced this disaster... because you sinned against the Lord and did not obey his voice." What does it reveal about God's sovereignty over history, and about the clarity of His justice, that even a Babylonian officer can rightly name why Jerusalem fell?
2. Gedaliah was a good and trusting man who was murdered by a jealous rival he refused to suspect (40:13–41:3). When has someone's envy or treachery wounded you or someone you love, and how did you keep your heart from turning hard?
3. Read 42:1–6. The remnant vows, "Whether it is good or bad, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God." What does this passage teach us about the difference between sincerely surrendering to God's will and merely going through the motions of seeking it while our hearts are already set?

4. Have you ever asked God (or godly counselors) for direction about a decision you had, in truth, already made? What did that reveal about your heart, and what would honest seeking have looked like instead?

5. Read 42:7–22. God’s answer is to stay in the land with a beautiful promise: “I will build you up and not pull you down... for I relent of the disaster that I did to you.” How does God’s patient willingness to “build and plant” this guilty remnant display His covenant mercy, and how is even His warning about Egypt an act of love?

6. God told the remnant their fear of Babylon was driving them toward the very destruction they were fleeing in Egypt (42:13–16). Where is fear pushing you toward a decision that feels safe but actually leads you away from God, and what would trusting Him instead require?

7. Read 43:1–7. The leaders accuse Jeremiah of lying, reject God’s clear word, and drag the prophet and Baruch down to Egypt. What does this account teach us about the deceit of a heart that has decided to disobey, and how disobedience must always call God’s truth a lie to justify itself?

8. The remnant did the very thing they had sworn not to do, the moment God’s answer crossed their wishes (43:2–4). Where have you made a promise to God in a hard moment that you quietly abandoned when obedience grew costly?

9. Read 44:15–19 with 44:24–28. The people insist on worshiping the “queen of heaven,” claiming, “When we burned incense to her... we had plenty of food and prospered.” How does this stubborn idolatry expose the way the human heart rewrites its own history to defend its idols, and what does it reveal about the deep nature of all idolatry as trusting something other than the living God?
10. Read 45:1–5. To weary Baruch, who groans, “Woe is me... I am weary with my groaning and find no rest,” God says, “Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not,” yet promises, “I will give you your life as a prize of war.” Looking back over this whole passage of pretended seeking, broken vows, and idolatry, name one specific way the Lord Jesus is teaching you to seek Him rather than greatness, and to be content with the gift of Himself.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: James 4:13–16, the warning against presumptuous plans, “you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills,’” a direct contrast to the remnant who decided first and asked later; Luke 6:46, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”; 1 Samuel 15:22, “to obey is better than sacrifice,” God desires obedience over religious motions; 1 Timothy 6:6–8, “godliness with contentment is great gain,” the answer to Baruch’s reaching for great things; Colossians 3:5, covetousness named as idolatry, the “queen of heaven” of the modern heart.

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