

Jeremiah's Message

Devotional Reading: Luke 6:40–46

Background Scripture: Jeremiah 7:1–26

Today's Scripture: Jeremiah 7:1–26

I. Message Introduced Jeremiah 7:1–2

¹ This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² “Stand at the gate of the LORD’s house and there proclaim this message:

“Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD.”

1–2a. The primary task of a prophet is to communicate God’s *word* to whom-ever God directs. And Jeremiah receives direction in this regard numerous times in the book that bears his name. *The gate of the Lord’s house*, where the message is to be proclaimed, is a choice of location.

2b. The message is targeted specifically toward those *people of Judah* who *enter in at these gates to worship the Lord*. The sheer size of the territory of Judah, encompassing some 3,400 square miles, means that not all people can make it to Jerusalem on a weekly basis to worship at the temple. So we don’t really know how big the prophet’s audience is.

II. Change Needed Jeremiah 7:3–4

³ “This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. ⁴ Do not trust in

deceptive words and say, “This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!” ’ ”

3. Jeremiah’s message is a simple if-then statement, with the words *if* and *then* being unstated although implied at this point; both will be stated plainly a bit later.

The positive action to take is stated with the word *reform*. The evil *ways* to be amended have just been specified in Jeremiah 6. These involve oppression, wickedness, and corruption, among other sins.

4. The foundational change is that the people must decide where they will place their *trust*. *Deceptive words* characterize the messages of the false prophets (Jeremiah 5:31; 14:14–15; 23:9–32). This problem is central to Jeremiah’s message throughout the book.

Apparently, the people have been told by these charlatans that *the temple of the Lord* is inviolable and eternal. Thus they place their trust in a building rather than in the one whom the building is to honor. The people seem to reason that if God intended to preserve the temple, then they, too, were protected from harm, regardless of their actions. Yet Jeremiah reminded them that, as far back as the time of King Hezekiah, they had been warned that the destruction of the temple was a possibility.

III. Outcomes Desired

Jeremiah 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.”

5. Jeremiah goes on to specify the actions (*ways* and *actions*) that must *change* as trust is redirected. He demands an overhaul of the people's behaviors that have brought the Lord displeasure. Right behaviors logically involve two general categories: things *to do* and things *not to do*. To *deal with each other justly* fits the first category.

6a. Now the prophet turns to the second category, things *not* to do. Interestingly, the command *do not oppress* later becomes the positive action in “rescue from the hand of the oppressor” (Jeremiah 21:12). God's concern is for *the foreigner* (non-Israelites who live among the residents of Judah), *the fatherless* (orphans), and *the widow* (women who have lost the financial security of having a husband).

6b. The worship of *other gods* is warned against and condemned numerous times in the Old Testament and is the first of the Ten Commandments. To engage in such a practice is to worship idols (Isaiah 2:8, 20). As Jeremiah warns, the Lord will not overlook such horrendous wickedness. The sin of idol worship is so serious that it is likened to adultery.

7. This verse completes the if-then statement. If the people repent and abandon their oppressive and ungodly behavior, a promise awaits. The Lord will allow them to continue to live in Jerusalem and the surrounding regions of Judah and

Benjamin, *the land* that the Lord *gave* to their *ancestors*.

IV. Hypocrisy Exposed

Jeremiah 7:8–11, 21–23

⁸ “But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.”

⁹ “Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, ¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, “We are safe”—safe to do all these detestable things? ¹¹ Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD.”

²¹ “This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves! ²² For when I brought your ancestors out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices, ²³ but I gave them this command: 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.”

8. Jeremiah's message moves to the heart of the people's moral dysfunction. They have completely believed the *deceptive words* of their evil leaders and false prophets. This especially indicts the false prophets who have gained influence over the people. While lives built on lies may seem rewarding in the short term, God will not allow dishonesty and corruption to thrive in the long run. Those who believe lies cannot profit in the end.

9. Jeremiah's indictment includes charges of breaking six of the Ten Commandments. These are the prohibitions against theft (eighth commandment),

murder (sixth), *adultery* (seventh), false witness (ninth), worship of *Baal* as an idol (second), and following *other gods* (first). The charge of idolatry is the most serious, and Baal is one of those “other gods.” Jeremiah refers to Baal 12 times in his book, and in two of those cases the designation *Baal* is plural. Prophesying a century before Jeremiah, the prophet Hosea warned the northern kingdom of divided Israel likewise concerning the Baals. They didn’t listen either.

10. It is not hard to imagine that Jeremiah’s voice crescendos to a peak with this verse. He directly calls out their hypocrisy. Coming into the temple, “the Lord’s house” (Jeremiah 7:2), and not experiencing pangs of guilt and remorse shows the depth of their depravity. They stand in the temple court believing they *are safe* (allowed) to continue *to do all these detestable things*.

11. Jeremiah’s word from the Lord concludes this section by repeating the temple’s designation as *this house, which bears the Lord’s Name*. It is the Lord’s “dwelling place” (Psalm 76:2), his “holy hill” (Joel 3:17), a place where the people of Israel come to encounter their God. But more than that, it is the “Lord’s house,” a place to which the Lord has allowed his name to be attached. This means God’s reputation is at stake. Unfortunately, since it has become *a den of robbers*, then the Lord’s name has been dishonored. Tragically, God judges this to be the case, affirming, *I have been watching*.

21. Jeremiah’s use of the extended title *the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel* underlines the serious tone of this section as the prophet introduces sarcasm. In effect, Jeremiah is saying, “Go right on ahead and continue violating the rules about *burnt offerings*, and see how things turn out!”

Burnt offerings were sacrifices in which a whole animal was burned on the altar in

the courtyard of the temple, a task that Jeremiah himself had likely undertaken as a priest. Such a sacrifice would be fully consumed by fire (see Exodus 29:18; Leviticus 1, 6:8–13). The phrase *add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices* refers to the general (and generally improper) way the original readers are conducting all their sacrifices, burnt offerings being only one part of those.

22. Some have claimed that this verse nullifies the entire sacrificial system of Israel and its temple as a later addition to the duties of the people of Israel, but this is unlikely. Jeremiah has high respect for the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament), which include detailed instructions on *burnt offerings and sacrifices*.

23. Simply put, proper sacrifices result from obeying God. While performing temple rituals may have quieted the consciences of some of the people, they must listen to the Lord and walk *in obedience to all* that he has commanded, not just some of them or just the ones that are most convenient. Obedience to the law is required. But that by itself isn’t enough. God does not delight in insincere sacrifices. Without the correct posture of heart and subsequent action, their sacrifices are useless and meaningless.

In Jeremiah’s situation, no one seems to listen and repent. His numerous enemies include “against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land” (Jeremiah 1:18).

Some readers today may wonder whether Jeremiah holds out hope that some will heed his message, turn from their wickedness, and claim the promise of future blessing. That’s a natural question to ask, but the more important idea is that when the fair warning proves to be true, the reality of who is a true prophet of God and who is not will be established.

Involvement Learning

Jeremiah's Message

Into the Lesson

Brainstorm traditions specific to your congregation. Write down the history of these traditions if you know.

Change can be difficult. Many people find security in traditions and preferences. In today's lesson, we will see how a refusal to change, despite God's prompting, ultimately led to God's judgment of Judah.

Into the Word

Read Jeremiah 7:1–11, 21–23. What did the Lord command the people when he brought them out of Egypt?

In what ways had the people not been obedient to this command?

How had the people demonstrated their trust in half-truths: "deceptive words that are worthless" (Jeremiah 7:8)?

How would you summarize Jeremiah's message in this passage?

Read Jeremiah 7:23 How would you describe the relationship between God and his people?

How could the people obey God and walk in his commands?

Key Verse

" 'But I gave them this command: 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.' "
—Jeremiah 7:23

Into Life

Spend one minute in personal self-reflection about a time when God rescued you from a time of oppression or injustice. Write a note of gratitude to God for his rescue during a time of oppression or injustice.

Thought to Remember

False prophets yield false profits.