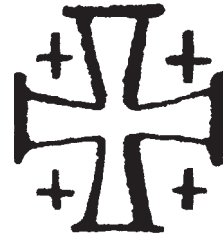


Leader's Guide

Creative
Communications
Sample



Jeremiah:

A Book On Surviving Disasters

A Bible Study in Seven Sessions

by Dr. Reed Lessing

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Introduction to Jeremiah

The Book of Jeremiah Outline and Structure

Jeremiah presents the death of one world (chapters 1-25) in order to prepare for the resurrection of another (chapters 26-52). This understanding is based upon God's actions of plucking up and breaking down, as well as building and planting (Jer 1:10). If we look closely, the book is a literary conundrum. Poetry and narrative stand by each other and often are not thematically connected. The prophet's sermons appear out of nowhere, stories exhibit no chronological order, words of destruction and hope compete with each other for prominence and, most notably, the book has multiple endings: Chapter 45, Chapter 51 and Chapter 52. Jeremiah depicts disaster not only by writing about it, but also by mixing genres and giving us a blurring, swirling, conflicting cacophony of voices. Disaster is never "neat and tidy," and neither is the book of Jeremiah. If we count words and not chapters, Jeremiah is the longest book in the Bible.

Jeremiah's Ministry

The prophet began his ministry in 626 BC, the thirteenth year of Josiah (Jer 1:2), at about age twenty. The prophet was the son of Hilkiyah, a priest living in Anathoth, about three miles northeast of Jerusalem (Jer 1:1). Jeremiah may have been well off financially since he bought the estate of his bankrupt kinsman without difficulty (Jeremiah 32). After Josiah's death in 609 BC, the prophet was persecuted by the rise of an idolatrous faction in Judah (e.g., Jer 20:2). He was protected some by God-fearing elders and princes after his messages against the nation (e.g., Jeremiah 26). King Jehoiakim (609-598 BC) destroyed Jeremiah's dictated prophecies (Jeremiah 36). King Zedekiah (598-586 BC) allowed the nobles to arrest Jeremiah as a traitor who was urging the nation to submit to Babylon (Jeremiah 38). Although the prophet was offered a place of honor by the Babylonians after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, he chose to stay with his people in Judah and care for those who remained after the deportation (Jeremiah 40). After the murder of Judah's leader Gedaliah, Jeremiah was taken off to Egypt by fugitive Judahites (Jeremiah 43). The prophet lived a few years in Egypt and then probably died there.

Tips for Using This Study Guide

1. Always begin each session with a prayer. One is included for each session. You are encouraged to expand each of them with prayer concerns from the group.
2. Feel free to follow the format of each session as presented here or rearrange and adapt the material to meet the needs of your group.
3. Most Bible verses are printed out for you in this guide, but you may want to have your Bible handy for placing these verses in context.
4. As you work through the material in this study guide, be sure to write down in the margins any questions that come to mind or any thoughts that arise in the course of the discussion and your contemplation on each session's Scripture verses.
5. Throughout each session, think about ways in which the events related in this book of the Bible had an effect on your ability to survive various crises in your life. Reflect on what impact this study has had on you between sessions and report your experiences back to the class at the next session.
6. If you are using this guide in a group setting, consider assigning printed Bible verses to various people in the class to read aloud at the appropriate time. This will move the session along more efficiently.

Note that some of the questions ask for facts. Typically, the answers to these questions will come from the Scripture verses just read. Other questions are more subjective, asking for your opinion or an example from your own experience. Since your life experiences are different from anyone else's, answers to these questions are neither right nor wrong. A Leader's Guide that accompanies this material is available from Creative Communications for the Parish (Code RLG).

Session Two:
Surviving Through Refusing
To Live In The Past



Opening Prayer

Gracious God, embolden us with these words of faith: “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Ps 27:1). For you know, O God, how often fear grabs hold and suffocates us. Being so overwhelmed with the future we choose to live in the past, paralyzed with apprehension and dread. Send forth your Holy Spirit as we study. Let his presence cheer us when we are in sorrow, strengthen us when we are in trial, revive us when we lose hope, ignite us when we feel hopeless and kindle in us an undying devotion to the truth of your Word. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Leader’s Guide
For Session 2

BEFORE CLASS: Read through this session yourself. Examine the Bible readings printed and become acquainted with them.

READ: Have someone read the Opening Prayer or read the prayer in unison.

READ: Read or have someone read the Synopsis of the Theme.

SHARE: Allow participants to share with one another what they idealize about the past.

Questions

READ: Read or have someone read Jeremiah 28.

Synopsis of the Theme

Life is not what it used to be. The past is over. Everything will be plucked up and torn down—the nation, the kingship, the temple, and the ancient hope for landed security (Jer 1:10). Israel’s habitat will be broken, the tent will be destroyed, cords will be snapped and the children will go into exile (Jer 10:20). The institutions upon which Judah relied in the past are broken beyond repair, for kings fail “to execute justice in the morning” and prophets speak lying words, saying, “Peace, peace, when there is no peace” (Jer 6:14; 8:11). Grandiosity and false security have no place among the exiles. They need to close the door on the past and welcome the future. Their new identity will be that of survivors.

Topic for Sharing/Ice Breaker

When someone talks about “the good ol’ days,” what comes to mind? Why do we idealize the past?

Questions

- Read Jeremiah 28:

1In that same year, at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fifth month of the fourth year, Hananiah the son of Azzur, the prophet from Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of the LORD, in the presence of the priests and all the people, saying, 2“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. 3Within two years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the LORD’s house, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon. 4I will also bring back to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the exiles from Judah who went to Babylon, declares the LORD, for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.” 5Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to Hananiah the prophet in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD, 6and the prophet Jeremiah said, “Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD make the words that you have prophesied come true, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the LORD, and all the exiles. 7Yet hear now this word that I speak

in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. 8The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. 9As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet.” 10Then the prophet Hananiah took the yoke-bars from the neck of Jeremiah the prophet and broke them. 11And Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, “Thus says the LORD: Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all the nations within two years.” But Jeremiah the prophet went his way. 12Sometime after the prophet Hananiah had broken the yoke-bars from off the neck of Jeremiah the prophet, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: 13“Go, tell Hananiah, ‘Thus says the LORD: You have broken wooden bars, but you have made in their place bars of iron. 14For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I have put upon the neck of all these nations an iron yoke to serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they shall serve him, for I have given to him even the beasts of the field.’” 15And Jeremiah the prophet said to the prophet Hananiah, “Listen, Hananiah, the LORD has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie. 16Therefore thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will remove you from the face of the earth. This year you shall die, because you have uttered rebellion against the LORD.’” 17In that same year, in the seventh month, the prophet Hananiah died.

1. What picture of national collapse does Jeremiah paint?
2. What are the “Hananiahs” in your life that tell you things like, “Everything will work out. After a few difficult years, life will return to normal”?
3. What is our best strategy against those who say “Peace, peace” when there is no peace?

- Read Jeremiah 21:9; 38:2; 39:18; 45:5:

9He who stays in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, but he who goes out and surrenders to the Chaldeans who are besieging you shall live and shall have his life as a prize of war.

healing and newness. Hope involves telling the truth and letting go of the old so that God’s newness can break through (see Is 43:19).

“Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you; they are deluding you. They speak visions of their own minds; they keep saying ‘It shall be well with you...no calamity shall come upon you’” (Jer 23:14–17).

2. Answers will vary.
3. Answers will vary, but you may want to point out that God’s word is true and it is our only hope: Jn 14:6; Eph 6:14; 1 Tim 2:4.

READ: Read or have someone read Jeremiah 21:9; 38:2; 39:18; 45:5.

1. The prophet announces that God’s people can no longer live in the past. Ancient glories will not return nor can hopes for a renewed nation be sustained. They must not listen to the deceptive dreams of prophets (Jer 29:8) nor to the nationalist hopes of Hananiah, who was certain that Babylon would return stolen temple vessels and all would be well. According to Hananiah and the Jerusalem establishment there was little need to let go of the old world, for Judah’s crisis was understood to be only temporary and in the long run inconsequential. After a few difficult years, life would return to normal. With ringing authority Hananiah even gave dates and places (Jer 28:3–4).

But two times Jeremiah describes prophets like Hananiah: “They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace” (Jer 6:14; 8:11). Again, Jeremiah warns, “Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream” (Jer 29:8).

Hananiah embodies the universal desire to return to the “good ol’ days.” He rejects the fissured dimension of Judah’s experience in favor of unfounded hope. Anesthetized by wishful thinking, he would forget the personal and national traumas and live as if they did not really happen. Hananiah would create a pleasant, comfortable world that conformed to his own daydreams. And we, of course, tend to do the same. Yet, fabricating a fictive world, no matter how appealing, cannot bring about

2“Thus says the LORD: He who stays in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, but he who goes out to the Chaldeans shall live. He shall have his life as a prize of war, and live.

18For I will surely save you, and you shall not fall by the sword, but you shall have your life as a prize of war, because you have put your trust in me, declares the LORD.”

5And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not, for behold, I am bringing disaster upon all flesh, declares the LORD. But I will give you your life as a prize of war in all places to which you may go.”

4. As long as the Babylonians keep attacking, the only hope for the people is “to gain their lives as a prize of war.” The phrase means, “All you have is *you*.” You have survived, you are alive, but nothing is the same. Aside from Jeremiah 30–33 and a thin stream of hopeful promises across the book, the thrust is for little more than survival. Judeans must renounce their denial and embrace their present reality. Then they will live in the truth. Then they will be open to one another and to God.

5. Answers will vary.

READ: Have someone read the Closing Prayer or read the prayer in unison.

ASSIGN: Assign the Bible readings and questions for the next session.

4. What phrase is repeated in these verses?

5. What does it mean that after a huge loss your new title is “survivor”?

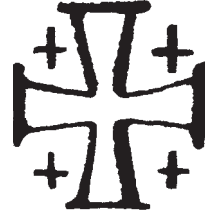
Closing Prayer

Lord God, Heavenly Father, with the psalmist we lament, “Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly clings to the ground. Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love” (Ps 44:24–26). We thank you that in Jesus Christ you have raised up a mighty Savior who is strong to deliver. He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He has rescued us from the enemy and the punishment that brought us peace was upon him. Thank you, Father, that in our Christ we have a lasting peace; indeed, a peace that passes all understanding. We claim it and will live by it all the days of our lives. We pray this in the name of Jesus, who is our Prince of Peace. Amen.

Assignment for Next Session

Read Jeremiah 2, which is a scathing rebuke against God’s people.

1. How would you describe the relationship between the LORD and Israel in the early days?
2. How would you describe the relationship in Jeremiah’s day?



Jeremiah:

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in Seven Sessions
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In this Bible study for any time of the year, author Reed Lessing uses the Book of Jeremiah as the source material for helping us as God's people to survive disasters of many kinds. Each session focuses on a particular means for survival presented by Jeremiah which we can put into practice in our lives today, not only to survive, but to thrive as the people of God!

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