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THE LOOKOUT

JUNE 2023

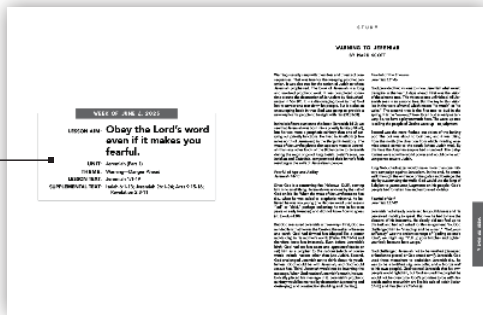
Unit: Jeremiah (Part 1)

Theme: Warning—Danger Ahead

Overview: We see warnings everywhere. Bridge out. Slow down. Don't drink the water. Warnings even predate the fall of humankind (Genesis 2:16-17). In the perfect Garden of Eden, God warned Adam and Eve against failing to trust his goodness. For the June lessons we are studying the book of Jeremiah, written by the weeping prophet, who also wrote the book of Lamentations, the subject of our May study. Students will learn how Jeremiah was warned about fear overtaking him, how worshipping anything other than God ends in judgment, how relying on a man-made temple is trusting in the wrong thing, and how liars like Hananiah will meet their doom.

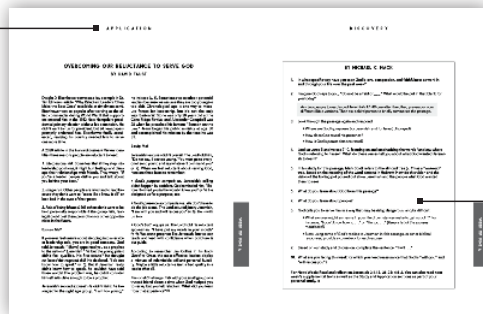
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Vertical tabs on the right side of the page indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF JUNE 11, 2023

LESSON AIM: **Turn away from
whatever you want
more than God.**

UNIT: Jeremiah (Part 1)

THEME: Warning—Danger Ahead

LESSON TEXT: Jeremiah 2:1-13, 26-28; 4:1-2

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Exodus 20:1-6; Isaiah 44:9-20;
1 Corinthians 8:1-7; 1 John 5:21

WARNING FOR IDOL WORSHIPPERS

BY MARK SCOTT

An idol is a substituted and false god. In fact, idols are *worthless* (Jeremiah 2:5). This word, *worthless*, is memorably translated “vanity” or “meaninglessness” in Ecclesiastes. The lesson’s supplemental texts help us understand this. We are to have no other gods (Exodus 20:1-6). Idols are literally dumb—i.e., they cannot speak (Isaiah 44:9-20; cf. Psalm 115:2-8). There are so-called “other gods,” but there really are not other gods at all (1 Corinthians 8:1-7). We are to keep ourselves from idols (1 John 5:21). This section of Jeremiah begins 13 oracles of God’s case against Judah that continue through chapter 25. The content can be framed up with the help of questions.

What Happened to You?*Jeremiah 2:1-3*

The *word of the Lord* came to Jeremiah, so he followed instructions and went and “proclaimed” (called) to Judah. The proclamation was a call back to their original faithfulness to the Lord. Their *devotion* (*chesed*; i.e., loyal love) was strong in the early days. It was likened to a bride loving her husband. She was faithful in following God’s leading through the wilderness. Israel was *holy* (set apart) to the Lord in its earliest days. She was likened to the *firstfruits* of the harvest. She was also victorious at every turn. In fact, *disaster* (evil) would befall any nation that tried to devour Judah. So, what happened to this earliest devotion?

What Is Wrong with Me?*Jeremiah 2:4-8*

Jeremiah then asked what *fault* (iniquity or wickedness) Judah found in God. Was Israel’s waywardness somehow God’s fault? When God’s people follow *worthless idols*, they become what they follow (cf. Hosea 9:10). God delivered them out of Egyptian slavery. One would have expected the people to ask, “*Where is the Lord?*” After all, God led them through a *barren*, dry, and uninhabited desert. Then he planted them in a *fertile* (*karmel*; i.e., plentiful) land that provided for their every need. One would have thought they would live in total obedience.

Instead, Israel *defiled* (polluted) and made God’s *inheritance* (his people) *detestable* (abominable or disgusting). Making matters worse, the *leaders* (shepherds) led the way in this rebellion. *Priests*, teachers of the law, and *prophets* stoked the disobedience. Instead of God being the source of their revelation, they turned to Baal (the Canaanite god of fertility). What terrible thing had the Lord done to deserve this response?

Why Not Look Around?*Jeremiah 2:9-13*

God brought *charges* (pleadings or chidings) against Judah, and he would also bring them against subsequent generations. While every individual is responsible for their own sin (Ezekiel 18:4), the effects of sin affect multiple generations. So, God called Judah to take a field trip and see if other nations had exchanged their gods. Did the island of *Cyprus* give up on its god? Did *Kedar* (the sons of Ishmael) give up on its god? Do nations typically change gods? Jeremiah then added, “*Yet they are not gods at all*” (which Paul also taught the Corinthians).

Jeremiah sounded like Paul again when he charged Judah with exchanging God for idols (Romans 1:22-23). Even the *heavens* would be *appalled* (awestruck) by this. God’s people made two mistakes other nations had not made. They forsook their God and tried to be their own god. They jettisoned the *spring of living water* and *dug their own cisterns*.

Who Can Really Save?*Jeremiah 2:26-28*

Jeremiah 2:14-25 (the intervening verses which are not part of the lesson text) basically affirm that Judah had no one to blame but herself. The people brought trouble on themselves. Jeremiah uses the illustration of a thief who is *disgraced* (shamed) *when he is caught*.

Much like Isaiah (his predecessor), Jeremiah mocked idolatry (Isaiah 44:9-20). The *kings*, *officials*, *priests*, and *prophets* went belly-up by addressing *wood* and *stone* as their father and mother. They turned away from God, but then, in a pinch, cried out for God to save them. That was audacious. Idols cannot really save, as evidenced by their inability to help Judah in her time of need. Judah had as many gods as it had towns, but they were of no consequence.

How Can This Work for Good?*Jeremiah 4:1-2*

After a further call for repentance (in Jeremiah 3), the prophet offered a deal with Judah. If they would *return* (repent or turn around) and put away their idols, seek truth, justice, and righteousness, and swear by God in their vows to him, then God would work everything for good. Essentially Judah would end up advertising for God. The *nations* would see God’s care for his people and *boast* of the God of Israel. ■

APPLICATION

ACCEPT NO SUBSTITUTES FOR GOD

BY DAVID FAUST

The Egyptians worshipped the sun god Ra. The Canaanites worshipped Baal and Ashtoreth. The Greeks honored so many deities they even erected a statue to “An Unknown God” in case they missed one. The silversmiths’ union in Ephesus sold silver statues of the goddess Artemis, so they became upset when Paul’s preaching about the true God interfered with their business model.

But pagans aren’t the only ones who worship idols. God’s covenant people sometimes make the same mistake. That’s why the first of the Ten Commandments warns, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3) and John cautions believers, “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

While Moses received God’s commandments on Mount Sinai, the Hebrews were melting down their jewelry to make a golden calf. Later, God instructed Moses to put a bronze serpent on a pole, and those who looked toward it in faith were healed from poisonous snake bites. At first the bronze snake was a good thing—a gift from God. But the Israelites turned it into an idol and centuries later King Hezekiah had to destroy it (2 Kings 18:4).

Good Things Viewed as Ultimate Things

Today’s spiritual substitutes are subtle and sophisticated. The author Tim Keller points out that idols don’t always look bad on the surface, but often they are “good things turned into ultimate things—things that constitute our most fundamental significance and security.”

Keller wrote in *Counterfeit Gods*, “An idol is anything more important to you than God. Anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God. . . . Anything that is so central and essential to your life, that should you lose it your life would feel hardly worth living.”

Work is good, but not if it crowds out God. Food is a blessing, but Scripture warns about people whose “god

is their stomach” (Philippians 3:19). It’s fine to enjoy sports and social media, but how much time, money, and emotional energy do these activities deserve? Sexuality is a gift to be enjoyed in marriage, but in Jeremiah’s day the culture had become so preoccupied with sex and accustomed to moral laxity that people forgot how to blush and behaved like “well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man’s wife” (Jeremiah 5:8; 6:15).

It’s good to have healthy self-esteem, but not to elevate our own ideas above God’s wisdom. We should appreciate nature and care for the environment, but never worship created things rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). It’s fine to earn, save, and spend, but Jesus warned, “You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24) and Paul called greed a form of idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

Cisterns and Scarecrows

The true God is like a reliable spring of clean, refreshing water. God-substitutes are like “broken cisterns that cannot hold water” (Jeremiah 2:13). A spring gives and gives; a cistern merely collects rainwater, which eventually becomes stagnant. False gods can’t satisfy thirsty souls.

Here’s another analogy: “Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field, their idols cannot speak” (Jeremiah 10:5). False gods are flimsy, like scarecrows made from wood and straw. They don’t last; they must be propped up; they are mindless and powerless.

But the true God—our Creator, Father, and Redeemer—is unrivaled. Let’s recognize God’s rightful place and pray, “No one is like you, Lord; you are great, and your name is mighty in power” (Jeremiah 10:6).

Personal Challenge: What false god threatens your love for the true God? ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. Has God recently called you to serve him in a way that could be risky, dangerous, and/or difficult? How have you responded to him?
2. What is something on which people spend lots of money, time, or energy which is ultimately worthless? (*Why do you think they do that?*)

Ask two people to read aloud **Jeremiah 2:1-13, 26-28; 4:1-2** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passages.

3. Throughout this passage, in what different ways did people treat God?
 - How did God respond?
4. Like the church in Ephesus, the Israelites had forsaken the love they had at first (Revelation 2:1-4). What causes people to stray so far from a loving and glorious God?
5. Look again at the charges God brought against Israel (2:9-13). What charges would God bring against his people today?
 - In light of those charges, how should we respond? (*See 4:1-2; Revelation 2:5.*)
 - How will God respond if we do return to him?
6. What do you learn about God's nature from this passage? (*See especially 2:7 and 4:1-2; cf. Luke 15:11-24.*)
7. What do you learn about yourself?
8. How can you use this passage to share God's truth and grace with someone who has strayed from God?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. In what area of life are you currently asking, "Where is the Lord?"

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Jeremiah 7:1-15, 21-23**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖