

The Compass

Week 41

OT Readings: Jeremiah 10:1 – 25:38

NT Readings: Colossians 3:18 – 2 Thessalonians 2:17

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- As you continue with Jeremiah, continue to be sensitive to God's heart and responses, there is much in this book – God's heart is on His shirtsleeve.

New Testament

- The Thessalonian letters are Paul's correspondence to a church he established on his second missionary journey; read Acts 17:1-10 for a short account. 1 Thess. 1-3 covers Paul's relationship with these believers; chapters 4-5 address issues that have to come to Paul's attention because of Timothy's visit to Thessalonica.¹
- 2 Thessalonians continues Paul's correspondence to Thessalonica. 2 Thess. 2:2 identifies a major concern; the believers have been "shaken" by the false idea that the "day of the Lord" has already come. Paul addresses this and the implications.²

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

Jer. 14:8 with 16:10-15. Jeremiah 14:8 plumbs the depth of the tragedy – how God has been pushed and driven from the land having no place to be with and among His people. The One who longs to be with His people established a place to be with them in the building of the tabernacle and later the temple. Now He wanders through the land as a stranger with no place to settle because of the hardness of His people's hearts. Such a situation, to drive and push God out of their midst, must surely have serious consequences – they too will be thrown out (16:10-13). Yet, God looks past the tragedy to the hope of future redemption (16:14-15)! How great and good and willing is His heart! He never gives up; He never ceases to apply His infinite attributes of love and wisdom toward a redemptive solution - despite our indifference and rejection. Yet -

Our situation in America is unfortunately very parallel. Beware! Don't let the busyness and activity, the "really big show" of the American mega-church fool you into thinking that He is welcomed and present with us.³ If we take away anything from Jeremiah it must be this: you can have all the religious trappings (Jer. 7) and still be hardened and far away from God. We *must* plumb the depths of our own hearts: Is He welcome in my heart? Is the door wide open? Is welcomed, sought after, hungered after in our churches? Do we invite His presence and are unsatisfied without it? Or does Jer. 14:8 apply to us – are we so satiated with the pleasures and concerns of our tragically small lives and superficial culture that He finds no place to rest and establish Himself among us? If so, then like Judah, we will face the tragic consequences of going forward without Him.

Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

Jeremiah 18:1-17. 22:1-5. 26:1-6.⁴

Jeremiah 18:1-17 is important theologically to understanding Jeremiah in that it establishes the *way* God works with the nation of Israel; there is a leading idea and principle here that can be applied to our own lives. Using the analogy of the potter with the clay, God gives Jeremiah insight into how He is working with Judah's choices as He seeks to move forward with them toward the hope of repentance and a changed heart (Jer. 18:11).⁵ All of these passages state a rather profound truth: our choices really matter and God takes them seriously. Our choices are authentic; God recognizes them, considers them significant and responds to them as though they matter – because they really do! The "if...then" passages of Jeremiah show how God gives to us as people created in His own image real say in how events transpire. God is no tyrant who imposes His will on the world without regard for His creatures; He takes *us* seriously.⁶

Have you stopped to consider how *interdependent* you are with those around you? You, I, we do directly impact people around us. Have you considered how not just your choices impact others, but even your attitudes? What about your thoughts, for our thoughts inevitable come out in actions and attitudes?⁷

Difficult Question of the Week

Jer. 17:9. Q. "Is the heart of the *believer* really 'deceitful' and 'desperately wicked?'"

This passage is commonly quoted to show how the human heart is wicked and deceptive; it is often applied to believers as well as unbelievers. The problem with applying this passage to the believer, in my view, comes from a failure to read the context carefully. The whole of the book and this passage in particular addresses the reality of Judah in this historical moment – **these** hearts are evil, **they** insist upon following their own evil desires (18:11-12), **their** hearts have *turned away* from the Lord (17:5). To generalize this passage so as to include believers is to undo the very reason that God is addressing Judah's hearts in the first place. Jeremiah's very purpose in appealing to them, seeking to expose their wicked hearts to them, is so that they will repent and change this very condition! Jeremiah seeks to challenge the deceitfulness of their hearts so that they would know the truth and align their hearts accordingly. Once this change has taken place, their hearts would of course no longer be deceitful. The whole of Jeremiah is an appeal to them repent and *change* their hearts – from wicked and deceitful hearts to honest and right hearts – aligned with God and His truth. If wicked and deceitful is the condition of our hearts, what makes us at the core any different than those who are deceived and in rebellion against God?

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¹ Paul's initial time with these believers was cut short and he is concerned for their stability and welfare. He sends Timothy to check on them and Timothy's return and report is the context for what he writes. See Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, 364-372.

² While 2 Thess. 2:1-12 and 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11 provide place for many to speculate on the "end times," we do well to read these passages carefully in their historical context. For an overview of alternative "end times" views, see Robert G. Clouse, *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (IVP, 1977). Also, N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (Harper Collins, 2008).

³ The danger is real. One Chinese Christian upon touring American churches was asked his impressions. He nailed it, "It is amazing what you Americans can do without God."

⁴ 26:1-6 is part of next week's readings, however, historically it fits with Jer. 7; also it is one of the "perhaps" and "if...then" passages of Jeremiah. Terence Fretheim discusses the theological implications of these passages in *The Suffering of God*.

⁵ The potter/clay imagery here (18:1-4) is to be interpreted in the context (18:6-12). God explains what the potter/clay metaphor means in how He gives the principle (18:5-10) and then the application (18:11-12). What the metaphor CANNOT mean in this context is that God is meticulously controlling Judah and that they have no authentic choices. Rather, the metaphor says exactly the opposite; God is working **with** Judah's choices seen in their present "spoiled" condition in hopes of a better future outcome.

⁶ Read Psalm 8. Created in His own image we have an inherent dignity, though we have marred and defaced it with our rebellion and sin. Helpful in understanding God's interactivity with us is John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*.

⁷ Winkie Pratney captures this well, "It is entirely possible that the ability of free will or choice is the one facet of God's own personality that makes us most like Him...Our choices actually call into existence moral paths and realities that never before existed in the universe...Because God is a Creator, a person able to originate that which has never been before, so man, made in His image, is also able to originate choices for which he must be held responsible. This leaves us with one awesome conclusion: everything we do is important. Choices are creations that can never be recalled; sin and righteousness are real; and heaven and hell are real. Man is not a nothing, whether he is a sinner or a saint; man is himself an originator, a creator and the choices he makes will affect both the universe and the future." *The Nature and Character of God*, 147. Lest we become obsessive and over analytical here, remember that we live in a love relationship with God; as we receive and respond to that love He will empower and lead us into a way of life whereby we can make wise and loving choices like He does. It is a "relaxed intentionality."