

SESSION 5: PEOPLE IN THE DIVISION TO EXILE

PREPARATION FOR THE SESSION

Read Isaiah ch. 2, 19:21-25, 25:6-8, 66:18-21; Jeremiah 18:1-11, ch. 7, ch 29; Lamentations 3.

Summary of the Video: Module 3, Episode 5

What do we learn about the nature, constituents, leadership structure, ethics and identity of the people of God? There's quite a bit in this section, not only on who they are currently but also on who they will be in the future.

It can feel like non-Jews aren't really part of the Old Testament story. But Isaiah paints a very different picture: he depicts a universalization of Abraham's family. He envisions Jewish people who've been scattered throughout the world returning to the land of Israel. As they return, they will be accompanied by non-Jewish people who desire to worship Israel's God. See Isaiah 2, 11:11-16, 19:21-25, 25:6-8, 49:6-7, 55:1-13, 66:18-21. Isaiah has a twin vision: we (non-Jews) are the ones to whom the Gospel has been sent, but all of us who have been brought in now have the responsibility to go out and bring others in.

Did the Israelites live with a sense of the mandate of God to be a light to the nations?
Probably not in the way we would think about it, but their goal would have been to embody the wisdom of God so that the nations would be drawn to it.

Then we get into another angle on how the people of God should think of themselves: Potter, pots, and promises (Isaiah chapters 45 and 64; Jeremiah 18:1-11). We gain insight about salvation, predestination and prophecy as we examine this theme in Isaiah and Jeremiah.

We investigate Jeremiah 29 in its historical context: a letter to an exiled community teaching them how to respond to their situation in a godly way. Jeremiah 29:11 is not a promise of personal prosperity, a mandate to transform culture through the arts, or an exhortation against forming Christian ghettos. It's saying, "Get comfortable living in exile because you'll be there a long time." Therefore, as Christians see the extended length of our exile on earth, we develop a long-term perspective and plan for faithfulness to the Lord and establishing his church.

In Jeremiah 7 (his "Temple Sermon") we can catch a glimpse of the ministry mindset and calling of Jesus. Jeremiah called for the judgment of the nation and its temple, so did Jesus (see Matthew 21-25). The people acted like the temple protected them from God's judgment, but it didn't. Jeremiah and Jesus warn the people of God's judgment in light of the people's wicked hypocrisy.

We turn from Jeremiah to Lamentations in order to learn how to handle suffering. A "lament" is a sad, grieving song. Lamentations laments the judgment pronounced in Jeremiah. It begins in sadness, reaches up to a point of hope, and then plummets back again to sadness.

As we continue examining what this section of Scripture says about “people”, we look at the “four main evils” that plagued them in that day and plague us in our day: idolatry, immorality, independence and injustice. Idolatry is the root of the other three. Immorality is mostly sexual in nature; independence is an arrogance or pride that moves toward a political seizure of power; injustice is the abuse of justice, trampling the rights of others, to gain money or power.

Andrew Wilson ends by proposing a group exercise looking at the “injustice” denounced in the prophets and attempting to connect this with our modern world. We’ll do some of this in our group meeting.

Terms You’ll Need to Know:

Pejorative—critical or condescending.

Marx—an influential German philosopher in the 19th century who saw money and a desire by the dominant class to have power as the root problem of human society.

Freud—an influential Austrian psychologist in the early 20th century who often put sex and sexual desire at the center of how he viewed human problems and solutions.

Nietzsche—an influential German philosopher in the 19th century who famously said that “we have killed God” and therefore can be completely independent (and, even though he celebrated it, he saw how problematic this would be).

Undergrads—students leaving high school and entering university.

Watch Video

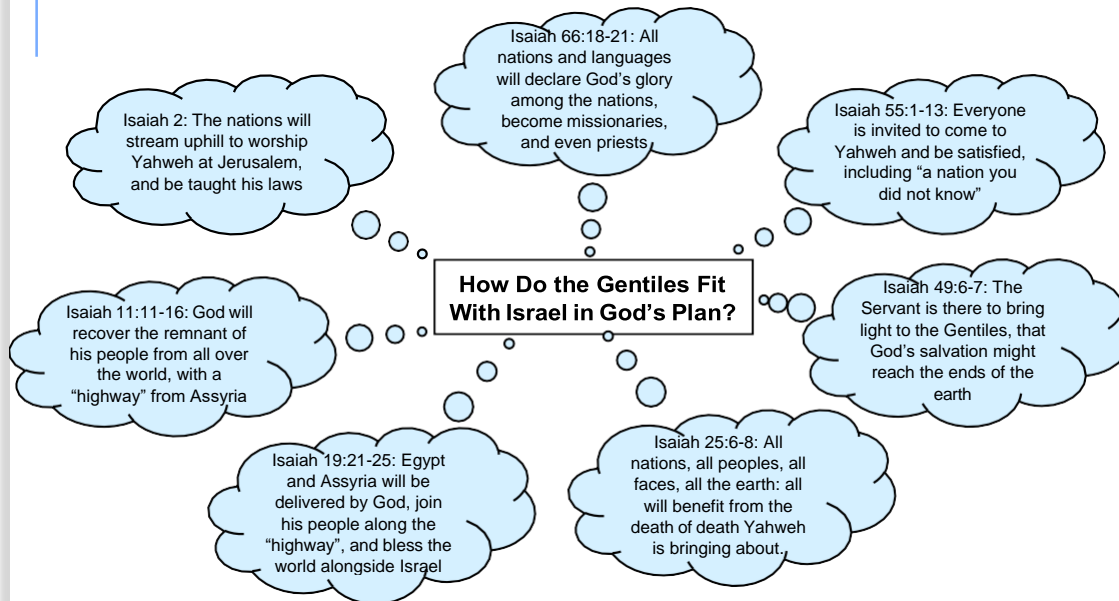
Watch Module 3, Episode 5 (1hr 27 minutes).

Division to Exile

- I. The Story So Far
- II. The History of Israel and Judah from the Division to the Exile
- III. God
- IV. Gospel
- V. People**
- VI. Mission

37

The Global Vision of Isaiah



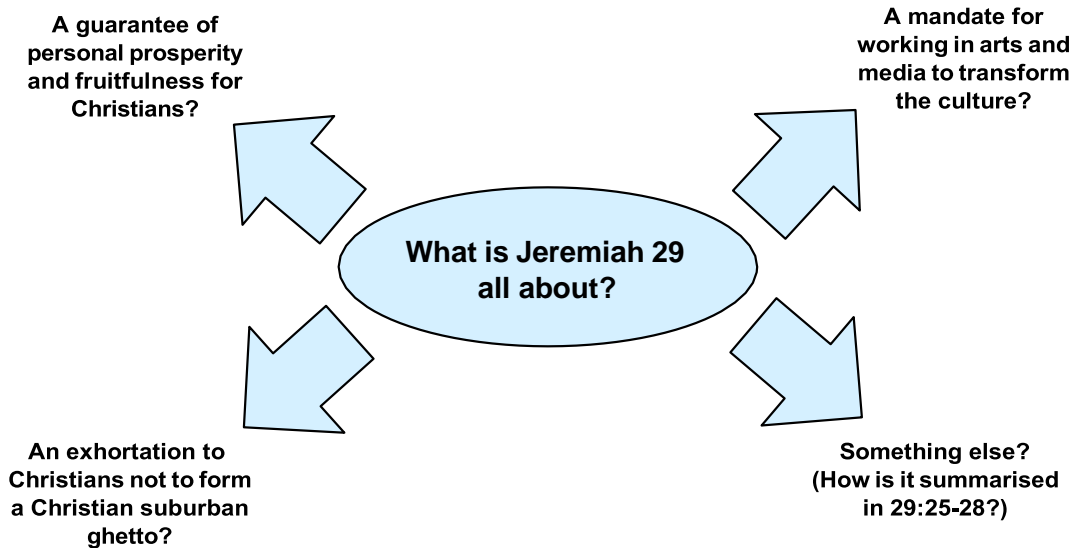
38

Potters, Pots and Promises

- Three separate texts in Isaiah and Jeremiah use the analogy of a potter and his pot to describe the relationship between God and Israel (Isa 45:9; 64:8; Jer 18:1-11). The Jeremiah passage is the most detailed
 - In the real-life example, the clay is spoiled in the potter's hand, and the potter reworks it into another vessel (18:4)
 - God then says that he is entitled to do the same with Israel (18:6)
 - In the immediate context, this means that when a nation repents, God will not judge it by bringing disaster upon them, even if he has declared that he would (18:7-8) ...
 - ... and that when a nation does evil, God will no longer do them good, even if he has declared that he would build them and plant them (18:9-10)
- This has several implications for biblical theology
 - Israel are a pot that has spoiled in the potter's hand, and they will consequently face exile, even though God has promised to bless them
 - Prophetic promises are intended to provoke obedience and repentance, not to act as cast-iron guarantees of what will happen in the future (at a personal level, this is very important)
 - More controversially, the pot/potter analogy in Romans 9 is probably targeted specifically at Israel – they have been reshaped into serving a different purpose – in this case, a temporary rejection resulting in salvation to the Gentiles

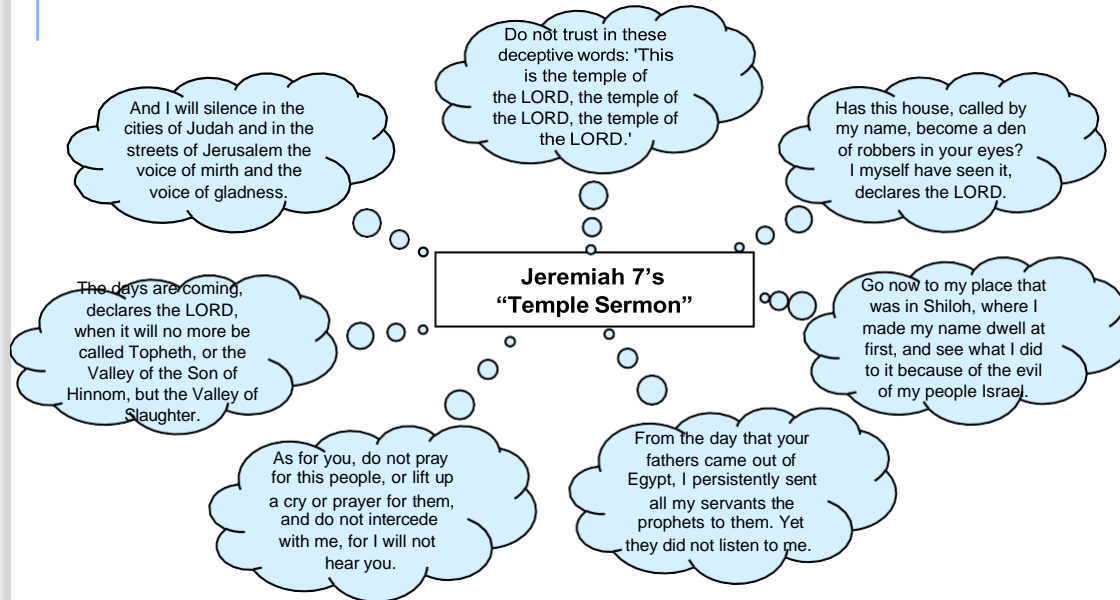
39

The Letter to the Exiles



40

Jesus and Jeremiah



41

Handling Suffering in Lamentations

- Lamentations 3 is an amazing song, and shows some real-life ways of handling suffering, at the all-time low point of God's people. Consider 3:16-40 in particular. What responses to suffering emerge in each paragraph?

He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes; my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, "My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD." Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me.

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.

It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him; let him put his mouth in the dust—there may yet be hope; let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, and let him be filled with insults.

For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men. To crush underfoot all the prisoners of the earth, to deny a man justice in the presence of the Most High, to subvert a man in his lawsuit, the Lord does not approve.

Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come? Why should a living man complain, a man, about the punishment of his sins? Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD!

42

Idolatry, Immorality, Independence and Injustice

- Four main evils characterise Israel and Judah during this period – but they are also, in many ways, the four main evils that have characterised the human race throughout our history
- The basic evil is Idolatry: putting something or someone else in place of God. "For they also built for themselves high places and pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree" (1 Kgs 14:23 etc)
- From here, three other besetting sins typically follow
 - Injustice – the idea of worshipping a god who did not judge injustices, since they were most likely unjust themselves, was very appealing to those who would oppress and trample the rights of others. This is the strongest theme in the prophetic words of Amos, some of Micah and some of Isaiah (especially chs 1-5)
 - Immorality – idolatrous worship is often sexually promiscuous, with prostitution, cultic sex and fertility symbols frequently involved. Worshipping Yahweh involved monogamous fidelity
 - Independence – both Isaiah and Jeremiah denounce Israel and Judah for relying on other nations (Assyria, Egypt) to rescue them, rather than calling out to God for deliverance
- In many ways, these remain the three key ways human beings fall into sin once we abandon God
 - Money – injustice – economic sin – a Marxist or Marxian view of humanity
 - Sex – immorality – sexual sin – a Freudian view of humanity
 - Power – independence – political sin – a Nietzschean view of humanity

What is Meant by “Injustice” in the Prophets?

Text	Specific Injustices Denounced	Contemporary Examples
Amos 2:6-8		
Amos 3:15 – 4:5		
Amos 5:10-12		
Micah 2:1-4		
Isaiah 1:21-23		
Isaiah 3:14-24		
Isaiah 5:8-13		

GROUP MEETING:

Discussion Questions

Before getting into these specific questions, spend a few minutes discussing what struck you or stuck with you from the video. What were some of the main points? Did any of Andrew's comments or questions open up the Bible in a profound way to you? Also, ask if anything was confusing or needs clarification.

1. Racial issues have become quite important in popular culture. How do Andrew Wilson's comments on Isaiah inform how Christians ought to approach conversations about race?

2. What did you think of the place of non-Jews in the Bible before watching this video? How has your view developed through this session?

3. What insight do the texts about pots and pottery give into God's relationship to humanity? How does this affect your approach to the lost?

4. If the "prophetic promises are not guarantees", how does this impact the way we approach modern prophecy? What is it? What is its goal? How do we evaluate/judge prophetic words for accuracy?

5. How would you say that God wants us to understand and apply Jeremiah 29 (including verse 11) to our Christian lives? How does Andrew Wilson's teaching change your perspective on this question?

6. Of the “four main evils”, which resonates most strongly with you? How would the teaching of this video enhance your awareness of what’s wrong with the world? Describe how you might use this material to disciple or evangelise.

7. Have a look at the group exercise on injustice in the prophets in comparison to our day. Work through a few of the passages and relate them to your context.

Meditation on Scripture

Isaiah 1:4, 27-29 (Repent of sin, especially idolatry)

Jeremiah 18:5-11 (Submit to the potter)

Jeremiah 29:4-7 (Engage for the long haul)

Putting This Session into Practice

A theme in this section must be humility before God because of the many ways we’re broken, unjust, idolatrous, immoral, and, simply, human. He is the potter; we are clay. We have been invited to respond to his work in our lives, but we need to remain mouldable, pliable and responsive to him. This week, in prayer, submit yourself to the potter and remind yourself of your weakness and need for him to remake you in his image.