

Babylon and you  
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Text: Jeremiah 1–3

Why approach the subject of idolatry through the eyes of Jeremiah? God's reputation for mercy is well established, but we often avoid His justice. Our longsuffering Lord cannot put up with evil forever, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah is a poignant example of a nation under divine judgment. We too are a nation filled with idolatry, and God's patience is waning toward us. As ungodliness and its consequences permeate the United States of America, the book of Jeremiah will guide us toward powerful, Spirit-filled living in a nation under judgment.

Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet because he was well acquainted with national tragedy and personal suffering during his long tenure as the mouthpiece of the Lord. As the first chapter of Jeremiah indicates, God had placed a sovereign calling upon his life from before his conception. Jeremiah was intimately known and loved by God; he was set apart for his prophetic post. While some prophets were bearers of God's mercy, Jeremiah delivered difficult messages of judgment in response to Judah's idolatry.

The ministry of Jeremiah was consistently opposed by Judah's spiritual wickedness. Brief periods of reform did crop up, but Judah was in decline. It was a day of deaf ears. No one wanted to hear warning of coming judgment, though Judah had witnessed the destruction of Israel, her sister kingdom to the north. Through the armies of Assyria, God had judged Israel for her idolatry, and Judah was failing to learn the lesson.

What are the characteristics of idolatry from Jeremiah?

1. It is an exchange of gods. The nation of Judah forsook the Lord, the fountain of living waters, and carved out dry cisterns for nourishment. They sought fulfillment elsewhere, abandoning God and claiming another.
2. Idolatry is also to have a vision of God based upon individual desires. To the people it seemed the pagan gods were tolerant and encouraging toward sexual immorality.
3. Idolatry is willful selfdeception. Deep down, the nation of Judah knew their souls were stained and scarred by their wickedness, but the people continued to justify their idolatry.

Realize that all idols, then and now, demand worship and allegiance? Sports, businesses, relationships, money, and fame are all idols that demand our attention. Directed by desire, we shape gods that suit our appetites, for the human mind is an idol factory. The only answer to this problem is to return to the Lord, as the third chapter of Jeremiah preaches. Coming to the one true God with our idols, let us lay them down before God and bow before the Lord alone. As we observe in Jeremiah, it was too late for Judah; judgment was coming. Perhaps it is even too late for the United States of America, but we hope that repentance will take hold.

Where is hope for the faithful in this dismal picture of Judah and the United States of America? Surrendering our own idols, we must recognize that God has fortified us for the task at hand, just as He prepared and prequalified Jeremiah to walk in victory; therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at them, lest I dismay thee before them. For, behold, I have made thee this day a fortified city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail

against thee: for I am with thee, saith Jehovah, to deliver thee. (Jeremiah 1:17–19 ASV). God has called us to minister at this point in history. Knowing that God is with us, we too can go forth victoriously in our age.

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