

# Explore the Bible: God is Exclusive

June 12, 2023

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for June 25 focuses on Jeremiah 12:1-13.*

I think that we all have had those moments when we have felt like we were all alone. Moments when we feel misunderstood, unloved, overwhelmed and lost. For the believer, these times can feel especially difficult because of our relationship with God. We know in our head God will never leave nor forsake us, but our feelings and experience are communicating very different conclusions.

That disconnect can lead us in many different directions. It can be the source of abandoning our faith or the reality that brings all the more closer to our God. The difference really is in what voices we choose to listen to, the pursuits that we chase and how honest we are with all the available information.

Our passage today falls into a section of Jeremiah that are called the complaints or confessions of Jeremiah. Most scholars identify six separate passages within Jeremiah as these confessions (11:18-23; 12:1-6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-13,14-18), though some will combine the first two and instead see five confessions. It is these passages in particular that gave rise to Jeremiah acquiring the title, “the weeping prophet,” due to the morose tone of these texts and the grief that he expresses. All of which is driven by a deep feeling of abandonment and betrayal on the part of the prophet.

## Just? (Jeremiah 12:1-4)

Jeremiah reveals right at the outset of his complaint what will be the anchor that eventually brings him through his hurt—God always will be found righteous. To be righteous means to be in the right or to have followed the right course.

Ironically, it is also this understanding that has led to Jeremiah's confusion, because the reality of God's righteousness does not mesh with the fact that Jeremiah is suffering for carrying forth the righteous message God had given him. If God is right and his message is right, and the people also belong to God, how can his people attack his prophet? It is all in his hands, and it does not make sense that Jeremiah is suffering.

One of the elements of the exchange that seems most off to us about this exchange and Jeremiah's words throughout the confessions are his words of self-justification. He raises the issue of his own integrity several times. In our post-Reformation world, we see such statements as unjustified arrogance or misplaced confidence in our own righteousness. After all, Scripture tells us that there are none righteous.

But we need to realize, even as we rightly acknowledge all righteousness comes from God, that as people in exclusive relationship with God, our covenant agreement has benefits and stipulations we have the right and responsibility to claim and act upon. If God is true to his word, and we know he always is, then it is proper to raise those issues when we do not feel like we are enjoying them. If not, what benefit is there really in being part of the relationship? Indeed, our eternal hope is built around confidence in his promises. Why can't our present hope and life be also?

*What are the promises of God about our righteousness and standing that grow out of our relationship with him that we can lean on? How does acknowledging, not only the requirements, but the blessings of our*

*covenant change our perspective of life's ups and downs?*

## **Capable? (Jeremiah 12:5-6)**

The danger, of course, to leaning into God's promises is that it can sometimes lead to presumption. Having confidence in who God is and relying on that is built around remembering the whole counsel and words of God. If we only connect with those positives, we might slip into the error of demanding of the sovereign God things that would ultimately limit his position as sovereign.

In this part of the exchange, God asserts his sovereignty to act in a way that is both consistent with his promises, but expressive of his leadership, as well. He tells Jeremiah the situation is going to get more difficult. In a fallen world, dealing with fallen people, success and prosperity are not always the outcome of those who are faithful. Still in those times, God calls us like he did Jeremiah to trust in him. A few lessons ago, we noted God's call is to faithfulness, not success. In the hardest of times, that is an important reminder.

*How do we maintain that balance between promise and presumption? How do you define success and is that consistent with God's promises and expressions in Scripture?*

## **Abandoned? (Jeremiah 12:7-13)**

The conversation comes to a head with God identifying with Jeremiah's plight. The words God utters here are some of the strongest and most intense expressions of grief and loss you will find on his lips anywhere in Scripture. He expresses this hurt for three very simple reasons.

First, God does truly grieve over the sin of his people. The impassibility of

God does not mean that he never feels emotion, only that they never come to the point of controlling him as they do us. From God's grief after the fall and at the flood, to Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem, we know that he experiences sorrow.

Second, these words remind Israel, and us, of the seriousness of sin. To see the God who loves, provides, delivers and challenges is—hopefully—to come to the realization of what our sin does and how important it is to redirect our lives and actions to his desires.

Finally, God wants to identify with Jeremiah to help him in his own journey of grief. Knowing that God has felt and experienced some of the same things we go through is comforting. Knowing the sovereign powerful God really understands us gives us confidence he really will see us through our experiences. That itself is the biggest benefit of being in an exclusive relationship with our creator.

*What are some other biblical passages that draw on how God identifies with our sufferings? How does it make you feel to realize that the God you serve walked the ground you walk on and breathed the air you breath? How can that realization be used in your own life to grow in confidence and righteousness?*

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