

Explore the Bible: God is Personal

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“I take this issue personally!” We have all either said it or heard it, or both. It is an expression thrown out when someone’s actions cause us personal offense. Usually, it grows out of a slight to our character or priorities, intentional or not, that actually is more than a slight because of how deeply it wounds us.

In our passage today, Israel has fallen into the well-traveled path of replacing God with something God had blessed them with—in this case, the temple. From contemporaries of Jeremiah such as Zephaniah and Habakkuk, it is clear the people believed God would not do anything to them because they had the temple and, therefore in their mind, his favor or protection. What they failed to understand, however, was that such a perception amounted to dismissing God altogether.

God’s jealousy is one of the more misunderstood aspects of his personality. Though many will attempt to interpret the word more as zealousness, the fact of the matter is that the word in Hebrew translated as jealousy carries with it many of the same meanings and ramifications of its English counterpart.

Jealousy is simply the emotion experienced out of a need to protect what belongs to someone. For God, that most often finds application regarding how he is perceived or how his people are treated. When something, even a good thing, impacts either of those two realities, he takes it personally.

Listen (Jeremiah 7:1-2)

Self-evidently, the key components to a good conversation are the speaking and listening. God gives instructions to Jeremiah to go stand in the temple itself to proclaim his message. The very object Judah was using to replace God with is the location and topic of his message. The personal affront experienced requires a personal conversation.

The speaking part is easily achievable; it is the listening part that is harder to achieve. So, God begins this conversation with a command to listen or hear. The challenge Jeremiah faced was that the people were going about their usual experience of sacrifice, praise and adoration, but were doing none of those things with their lives outside the gates of the temple. This disconnect was born out of a misplaced prioritization of the location and object over the person. A conversation had to be had.

What are some areas of your weekly worship experience that have become disconnected from your daily life? What objects of blessing has God given you that have in some ways become more important than he is to you?

Correct (Jeremiah 7:3-8)

Twice in this section of the sermon God calls on Judah to correct their ways. The word used is the same used in God's imploring of Cain in Genesis 4 "to do well." The disconnect between Judah's worship and their everyday life required them to amend or change those actions to bring them into alignment with one another. Mistreatment of our fellow man is incompatible with an identity as a person of God. The two great laws of God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:36-40) cannot be separated.

In God's conversation with Judah, he tells them that they are having the

wrong conversation with others. The people were listening to prophets, priests, leaders and friends who were telling them that since they had the temple, they were safe. God's reply was that this ignored the personal relationship they were supposed to have with him and the blessings and consequences that accompany that relationship.

What voices are you listening to that advocate replacing God with something less? What are some active steps we can take amend our actions to align ourselves with the love for God we profess?

Stop (Jeremiah 7:9-11)

Jeremiah makes an appeal to Judah's conscience. As he continues to point out the disconnect in Judah's actions, he pushes the topic further by asking if it is logical to think one can do detestable things and believe God will bless such. He alludes to them as being thieves, because they have robbed him of the things most dear to him—his status and his people. These thieves were taking refuge from their sins in the very place God had set up to reveal with and deal with them.

What are some actions and activities you could do that you think would most clearly proclaim God's greatness?

Repeated (Jeremiah 7:12-15)

The conclusion of Jeremiah's sermon is a history lesson. God reminds Judah of the time in Israel's history when they relied on the ark of the covenant to save them rather than God (1 Samuel 4:3). Like Judah of his day, the people in Samuel's day had more confidence and trust in the object God had given them than in God himself. Consequently, just as Israel lost the ark previously, they would lose the temple in Jeremiah's day.

The response to Jeremiah's sermon is reported for us in Jeremiah 26. The people did not take well to God's threat and call for change. They took God's challenge of them as a personal offense rather than as a personal invitation. The irony of their misappropriation of the message Jeremiah shared should not be lost on us. Lest we get too confident in our own failings, we should see here how easy it is to repeat the errors of the past when we do not hear God's heart and instead see things only through our own lens.

What faults do you find yourself consistently returning to? How do we move past offense to truly listening when God speaks a word of correction to us?

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