



Discussion Guide

Rebellion: Jeremiah 2.1-13 and Romans 1.18-25

Getting Started: 10 minutes

- o Do you believe that people are inherently good or inherently broken?
- o Optional: What, if anything from the sermon, encouraged, challenged, or really made you think?

Setting the Stage: *“I believe that deep down people are basically good. All they need is knowledge and experience to point them in the right direction.” How many times have we heard this statement? It sounds right. It should work. It just didn’t for Israel. They knew God. They knew about Him and about the life He desired for them. As for experience, God likened their experience of Him to that of a marriage relationship. They had knowledge. They had experience. They walked away anyway, which makes me wonder, is there really such a thing as inherent goodness? I only wonder because I see a whole lot of Israel in myself.*

Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Jeremiah 2.1-13 (*You might consider setting the scene using information from the Context and Background*)
- God likens his relationship with Israel to a marriage. If you were a marriage counselor, how might you describe this marriage relationship? What is its trajectory? (*Tip: Look down through the text to draw out as many answers as possible.*)
- What, if anything, about this trajectory is surprising to you? (*Tip: Consider not only the present text but also the progression of “The Story” to this point.*)
- Israel seems bent on rejecting God. Knowledge of, experience with, and desire for God do not seem to be enough to bind Israel to God. What might possibly explain their actions?
- Think about God’s people today. Do you see any similarities between the behavior of ancient Israel and God’s people today?
- Read Romans 1.18-25. How is Israel’s story replayed in the lives of every person today? What does this say about ideas of inherent goodness?
- Do you see any areas where Israel’s story is your story? Can you elaborate?
- React to the following statement: “It seems that neither knowledge of God, nor experience with God is enough to bind one to God. We seem inherently bent to walking away, going it alone in order to be our own God. We seem to need something more, more than experience and knowledge. We seem to need help from the outside, help that will bind us once and for all to God.”
- Consider for a moment that the above statement is true. How might it lead us to respond? What might this response look like in our everyday lives?

Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group prayer time
- o House-keeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)



Group Notes

Rebellion: Discussion Guide

Jeremiah 2.1-13 and Romans 1.18-25

Context and Background

Jeremiah: Jeremiah was a prophet whose ministry was in the southern kingdom of Judah spanning the last forty years of its existence (627-586 BC). Jeremiah was probably of priestly descent (Jer. 1.1), but early in his life was called to serve as a prophetic mouthpiece for the Lord (Jer. 1.4-19). Jeremiah's ministry began in a time when the nation of Judah had reached an all time low. The kingdom had been led into idolatry and rebellion by King Manasseh (686-642 BC), and turmoil had ended King Amon's rule a short two years after it began (642-640 BC). Josiah was the present king of Judah (640-609 BC) when Jeremiah began his ministry. Josiah sought to institute a series of religious and social reforms. However, as can be seen in Jeremiah's preaching, these reforms had little lasting effect on the hearts and lives of the people of Judah leading the invasion of Judah by Babylon, an event that culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, thus ending the status of Israel as a sovereign nation (586 BC).

Connecting the dots of *The Story*: At this point, your group might be struggling to connect the dots in *The Story*. It is perhaps best to think of the Bible as a single story rather than a collection of books, one that can in a general way be viewed in a linear fashion. Each facet of the story is really the recognition of a movement of God, a movement that starts something new. This story begins with "Creation" in Genesis 1-2. Here we see that God created life and meant life to be marked by relationships of peace and intimacy between people and between Himself and people. This life intended by God was shattered by the choice of people to be their own gods. This brought "Brokenness" into the world and relationships with people and God (Gen. 3). God moved to correct this brokenness with "Promise" (Gen. 12). God promised to bring the world back to His creative intentions through one man and his descendents. Several generations later—430 years—we see God's first move to fulfill this promise. This movement was the giving of "Law" (Ex. 20). This Law was actually God instruction of how life was to be lived. It was God's gracious gift to a bent and broken people revealing His intentions for life and relationships. Thus, Law points back to Creation and to the original state life was meant to be lived (Matt. 22.34-40). So far, Creation has been broken and God has taken steps to rectify that brokenness. The next chapters in *The Story* reveal the outcomes of these steps taken by God. Namely, *The Story* reveals the depth of Brokenness, something that cannot be fixed by Law, a Brokenness that needs a greater and deeper movement of God to rectify life.

The Text

Honeymoon Bliss (Jeremiah 2.1-3): Jeremiah's first recorded sermon to the people of Judah is a prophetic indictment of Israel's treatment of their relationship with God, a relationship likened to a marriage (Jer. 2.2). In the beginning, God's union with His people experienced something of a honeymoon period. God had acted upon his promises to Abraham and brought the people of Israel out of Egypt into the desert. There, in the desert, God gave Israel the Law and confirmed his covenant with them (Ex.19-20). The covenant affirmation was, in God's mind, not unlike that of a wedding ceremony, one in which God wed Himself to Israel, His bride. The first days of this union were good. Israel responded to God with affection, following Him through the wilderness. In return, God honored Israel and protected her.

Marriage Disharmony (Jeremiah 2.4-8): Somewhere along the way things changed between Israel and God. The love and devotion that marked their relationship ended, at least on Israel's part. Protesting His innocence, God states that Israel has strayed from Him (Jer. 2.5). The idea in the text is nothing other than adultery. Israel left God to follow idols. It is interesting to note that God remarks that Israel has subsequently become like what they follow, revealing the truth that people become like that which they follow (Jer. 2.5). The irony of Israel's actions is deep. Though God had protected and provided for them, they had abandoned Him. Further, they had defiled the land He had given them. The leaders, both religious and political, gave no thought to God or His ways but led people further away from God (Jer. 2.8).

A Husbands Charge (Jeremiah 2.9-13): Through Jeremiah, God steps forth to make a charge of a husband who has a grievance against His wife. The formula echoes ancient legal proceedings giving this the appearance of a divorce suit. God states that what Israel has done, no people have ever done before. One might go to the east (Cyprus) or to the west (Kedar) and find that no people had ever abandoned their gods. Such a terrible thing had never been done before and thus the heavens should shudder. The actions of Israel could be boiled down to two points. First, they had forsaken God, the very source of life. Second, they had turned to themselves in an effort to provide that very life, something they should recognize they are unable to do (Jer. 2.13). When one considers Israel's actions, two implications should stand out. First, the turning away from God and the life He provides in order to provide life on one's own terms is not new. This is simply a reenactment of the eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree in Genesis 3. Israel makes the same choice Adam and Eve made. Herein lies the second point. Israel has chosen the path Adam and Eve chose even as they are recipients of God's promises and Law. They knew that God wanted to restore life, and they knew that God's Law pointed the way back to life as it was meant to be lived. In spite of this knowledge and experience, they chose to walk away from God and His life for one they could provide on their own.

Israel's story is our story (Romans 1.18-25): The Apostle Paul wrote to the churches in Rome to bring unity between two disputing parties (Rom. 14-15). He used the argument of universal sinfulness (Rom. 1-8) as one of his main points, reminding the Roman Christians not to look down upon one another. In this argument about universal sinfulness, Paul reminds us that Israel's story is our own story. He begins by stating that all people have a general awareness of God, something gained through creation (Rom. 1.19-20). However, in spite of this knowledge, people choose to reject God (Rom. 1.21). This rejection of God is for idols, including idols of self, a choice that creates a downward spiral to life (Rom. 1.22-25).

Application: Israel knew God. They knew who He was and what He planned to do. They rejected Him anyway. They turned away and sought to live life on their own, a life in which they found life on their own terms. Basically, our story is Israel's story. All of us, whether in specific or general ways, know God. We know that He has intentions for life. Willingly, we walk away to find life on our own terms. It seems that knowledge of God or even of the life He desires is not enough to bring about a return to Eden. Neither is experience with God, nor is desire to return to Eden enough to get us back. People seem to be fundamentally broken at the deepest level, unable to turn even if it be ever so slightly back to God. Therefore, if we are to return to Eden, there must be another way, a way that in no way depends on people.