

BIRDS, PROPHETS, AND CHRISTIANS

Presented by

Tyler Mullins

In the Old Testament, two books were written by the prophet Jeremiah, who is known to us as “the weeping prophet” because he cried over the failure of God’s people to repent of their sins and obey the Lord. First, Jeremiah wrote the book that bears his name. Second, he also wrote the book of Lamentations.

God had instructed Jeremiah to preach to the people of Judah to try to get them to leave their wicked, sinful way of life. Since the time of Joshua and the judges hundreds of years earlier, the people had gone through cycles where they disobeyed God, turned to worship idols, were punished, cried out to God for help, were forgiven, turned their backs on God again, and then repeated the same process. Over a period that covered many years, God had given the people of Judah many opportunities to love and obey Him, but they refused to do so. When Jeremiah was selected to preach to the people, he knew that God’s patience with them had worn terribly thin. God’s message to the Jews through Jeremiah was this: If you do not repent, you will be taken away as slaves to a foreign land where you will remain in captivity for seventy years and experience horrible suffering.

Jeremiah preached to the people for forty years. He tried many different ways to convince them of their need to return to God, but they continued to listen to false teachers who would preach whatever they wanted to hear. The situation that existed in Jeremiah’s day reminds us of the instructions that Paul gave Timothy when he said, “The time will come when people will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4). That is **exactly** what had happened in Jeremiah’s day. His message was too sad and too depressing for the people of Judah. Instead, they wanted to hear upbeat, happier sermons which told them that their idol worship and immoral lifestyles were all right, and that a loving God would not **really** send their nation into captivity or destroy their precious city of Jerusalem as Jeremiah had predicted.

Finally, Jeremiah explained to the people that they were headed for destruction just as surely as “a horse charging into the battle” (Jeremiah 8:6). He then said in the next verse, “Even the stork in the heavens knows its times; and the turtledove, swallow, and crane observe the time of their coming; but my people do not know the judgment of the Lord.”

Illustrations from nature were used frequently by the Bible writers in an attempt to help us understand God’s message. For example, in Luke 12:54-56 Jesus said to the Jews of His generation,

“Whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, ‘A shower is coming’; and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say, ‘There will be hot weather’; and there is. Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?”

The Jews of Jesus' day acknowledged things around them in nature, yet they rejected the more-important spiritual matters that He was teaching them. Jeremiah's use of the birds' migration was his way of telling the Jews that **even the animals were smarter than they were!** As birds head toward the safety of an unseen, far-away destination, they have the ability to stay on course—even in fog or stormy weather. Then, when the season changes and the time comes for them to go back the way they had come, they start out with just as much preparation, confidence, and determination as they did when they were making the journey for the first time.

Jeremiah was trying to help the Jews understand that, as God's people, they were badly "off course." They had started out being faithful to God, but had ceased doing that and had started worshipping false gods. As a result, their lives were filled with sin. Jeremiah's point was this: "If the birds of the air are smart enough to stay on course to their proper destination, then why aren't you able to do the same thing and stay on course to your destination of heaven?"

Unfortunately, Jeremiah's message fell on deaf ears. The people ignored the warnings that God's "weeping prophet" had given them. Thus, just as Jeremiah had predicted, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon eventually waged war on them, defeated them, destroyed their treasured city of Jerusalem, and carried the people of Judah away into captivity—where, true to Jeremiah's prediction, they remained for the next seventy years.

Just as surely as the Jews in the Old Testament needed to listen to Jeremiah's message, we today need to listen to the message of the New Testament. We, like the birds of the heavens of which Jeremiah spoke, must be diligent to "stay on course" so that we can go to our eternal home in heaven with Him. In Matthew 25:46 Jesus said that we have two choices. Either we can be evil and "go away into everlasting punishment," or we can be righteous and "go away into eternal life." The people of Jeremiah's day made the wrong choice. Which choice will **you** make?