

Step Into Scripture—Sounds

Week 7: Break Up the Fallow Ground

This week in Jeremiah, we see a people on the brink—confident yet unrepentant. God calls Judah to **break up their unplowed ground** (Jer 4:3–4): soften their hearts, confess sin, and receive His Word. When God’s people repent, He gives **shepherds after His heart** (Jer 3:14–15); when they resist, they empower **false prophets** who soothe rather than save (Jer 5:31; 6:10). Jeremiah exposes sin as an **exchange** (Rom 1), an **addiction** (Jer 2:23–25), and a **deception** (Jer 3:4–5)—and points us to freedom in Christ through a new allegiance signaled in **baptism** (Rom 6:2–4; Col 2:11–12). God still invites: *“Return... Only acknowledge your guilt”* (Jer 3:12–13). Soft hearts receive the Word; hard hearts reject both message and messenger.

Discussion Questions

1. **What does it mean to “break up your unplowed ground”?** In Jeremiah 4:3–4, what does the farming metaphor teach about heart readiness for God’s Word?
 - **Answer:** Ancient farmers shattered hard soil, removed rocks and thorns, then sowed. Likewise, God calls for heart circumcision—removing hardness and sin so the Word can take root (Jer 4:3–4; 9:25–26). Jesus affirms this in the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:3–9, 18–23).
 - **Application:** Where is your heart “packed down” (pride, secret sin, cynicism)? What one practice this week will you adopt to *turn the soil* (e.g., daily confession, a media fast, Scripture meditation, reconciling with someone)?
2. **Why does repentance precede the blessing of godly shepherds?** According to Jeremiah 3:14–15, what’s the sequence between repentance and God’s provision of leaders?
 - **Answer:** God says, *“Return... then I will give you shepherds after my heart.”* Repentance positions God’s people to be led with knowledge and understanding. The NT echoes this: elders serve as under-shepherds under Christ, the Chief Shepherd, leading by example (1 Pet 5:2–4).
 - **Application:** How can our group practice repentant accountability so our leaders can truly shepherd us (e.g., receiving correction, honest check-ins, praying for leaders by name)?
3. **How does Jeremiah expose the nature of sin?** Summarize Jeremiah’s diagnosis of Judah’s sin and connect it to Romans 1.
 - **Answer:** Sin is an exchange (trading God’s glory for idols; Rom 1:23–25), an addiction (compulsive pursuit; Jer 2:23–25), and a deception (religious talk without obedience; Jer 3:4–5, 11–13). It blinds, binds, and grinds.
 - **Application:** Name one “exchange” you’re tempted to make (approval, comfort, control, screen time, money). What specific counter-practice will replace it this week (worship, generosity, Sabbath, serving, limit setting)?
4. **What kind of leaders do unrepentant people choose?** Contrast true and false shepherds in Jeremiah. What signs reveal each?
 - **Answer:** False: prophesy lies, lead by self-authority, promise peace without repentance—and people love it (Jer 5:31; 6:13–14, 10). True: God’s heart, knowledge, understanding, example (Jer 3:15; 1 Pet 5:2–4).

- **Application:** How can we guard our intake (podcasts, feeds, voices) to prize truth over flattery? What criteria will we use to test teaching (Scripture, character, accountability, fruit)?
5. **Why are our words a key measure of our hearts?** What does Jeremiah (9:3–5), James (3:5–10), and Jesus (Matt 12:34–37) teach about the tongue?
- **Answer:** The tongue aims like a bow (Jer 9), is a fire that corrupts (Jas 3), and reveals the heart's storehouse (Matt 12). We will answer for every careless word (Matt 12:36–37).
 - **Application:** This week, where will you replace a destructive speech habit (gossip, sarcasm, complaint, exaggeration) with a redemptive one (intercession, encouragement, direct peacemaking)? Who will you reconcile with?

Prayer Prompts

1. **Soft Hearts:** "Lord, break up our fallow ground. Circumcise our hearts. Make us good soil for Your Word." (Jer 4:3–4; Matt 13)
2. **Repentance & Shepherds:** "Father, we acknowledge our guilt. Grant us repentance and raise up shepherds after Your heart." (Jer 3:12–15)
3. **Holy Speech & Holiness:** "Spirit, tame our tongues and free us from sinful exchanges; establish us in truth, freedom, and love." (Jer 9:3–5; Jas 3; Rom 6)