



JEREMIAH & Lamentations

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Welcome to the book of Jeremiah!

To begin your study of Jeremiah, meditate on the content of the book represented in the overview chart below. Notice that we divide the book into two parts. Chapters 1-37 are dealing specifically with the sins of Judah (the southern kingdom). God then turns His attention to the surrounding nations. It is clear that even though God holds His people to a high standard, that same standard of truth and justice will be applied to all nations! One key verse we have chosen is 5:14 where we observe the purpose of God's call of Jeremiah.

JEREMIAH Sin's Condemnation

AGAINST JUDAH	AGAINST NATIONS
2:2-6; 6:16; 26:8,9 31:33,34; 36:22-24; 37:15-17	Destruction...52:12-15 Deportation...52:27
1-37	38-52

"Seek the ancient paths and find rest for your souls." 14:2

Also note the scripture references listed in the overview chart above. Take this opportunity to investigate each one, looking for the relationship between the section titles and key verses. Use these passages as "guideposts" to unlock the message of the book.

WHY STUDY the book of Jeremiah?

The cost of proclaiming God's truth is one of this book's priceless teachings for every servant of God. This principal runs counter to the "if it feels good, to it" thinking of today. What if Jeremiah had followed that philosophy? Do you think he would ever have carried out his commission as God's spokesman to the nation of Judah? For God's people, the motto must sometimes be: "Even if it doesn't feel good, if God says so, do it anyway." Where are you fighting the "God-said-it-but-I-don't-feel-like-it" battle today? Select an area, then pray this prayer: "God, by your strength, I want to be a Jeremiah in _____. Help me to obey you, regardless of how I feel or what it may cost me personally."

Open your heart as you read!

In Christ the sin of God's people may be removed as far as the east is from the west, but willful sinning sickens His heart and brings His discipline upon us. From Jeremiah we can learn that living a pleasing life before God involves a choice to listen to what He has spoken. If we stray from this pattern, it will only result in pain in our lives. Selective obedience can be spiritually dangerous!

AUTHOR AND DATE OF JEREMIAH

Jeremiah was one of Judah's great prophets during the nation's darkest days. For more than forty years, this heart-broken man of God faithfully proclaimed a heartbreaking message to a faithless, God-rejecting people. Despised and persecuted by his countrymen, Jeremiah bathed his harsh prophecies in tears of compassion. His broken heart caused him to write a book which is difficult to arrange chronologically or topically. But, through his sermons and signs, he faithfully declared that surrender to God's will was the only way to escape calamity.

Jeremiah almost appears to be a man selected somewhat against his will to be God's spokesman to his generation (1:6-8). His reluctance may have been based on feelings of personal inadequacy when confronted with that almost hopeless task of recalling apostate Judah to true repentance. To make matters worse, at an early stage in his ministry, he was forbidden to marry (16:1-4), and the ominous reasons given made more clear than ever the fact that Judah stood under divine judgment. In order to better identify with the man Jeremiah, ask yourself this question. "How would I feel if God required that I serve Him in a place where I didn't want to go, to a people who continually rejected me, knowing all along it was a dead-end effort with no future?"

DATE

Because of the names of certain kings mentioned in the book (Josiah, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah, Gedaliah) and the fact that Jerusalem evidently had not yet fallen to Nebuchadnezzar in 586, the date of writing is set at around 604 to 600 B.C.

OTHER BACKGROUND

Much of Jeremiah's book resembles a personal diary of the day-to-day traumas and trials of a prophet of God. While chapters 1 through 34 center around Jeremiah's prophetic sermons, chapters 35 through 52 deal primarily with Jeremiah's personal experiences.

Just as the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 with the subsequent, world-wide dispersion of the Jews was a climax of judgment for the Jews' rejection of the Messiah, so the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. with the associated captivity of Judah in Babylon (Chaldea) was the catastrophic judgment of God's chosen people in Old Testament days. It is concerning this coming catastrophe that Jeremiah's sermons and experiences are referring.

When Jeremiah's ministry began, Judah was subject to Assyria, then the world power for some 300 years. When the capital of Assyria, Nineveh, fell in 612 B.C., Assyrian dominance disappeared. Egypt and Babylon competed for control of the world. The battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. decided the issue in favor of Babylon. Judah was then subject to Babylon. On several occasions, Egypt sought to make secret alliances with Judah's kings, hoping these alliances would tip the balance of power back into Egypt's favor. Part of Jeremiah's job was to convince the people and rulers of Judah that Babylon, the nation from the "north" (4:6), was the divinely destined master of Judah for the near future, and that Judah's flirting relations with Egypt would only add horror to the doom to come. But his appeals were rejected. In 588 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian armies besieged Jerusalem and, 30 months later (586 B.C.), the city and its temple were totally destroyed.

Jeremiah: "Why is Judah going into captivity?" Read Chapters 1 - 37

Chapter	Title	Key Verse
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37		

Jeremiah: “Why will the Nations be Judged?” Read Chapters 38-52

Chapter	Title	Key Verse
38		
39		
40		
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52		

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER in light of the events and thoughts of Jeremiah:

What would you list as the “top 10” encouraging verses from Jeremiah?

How do these reasons for judgment differ from those in the first 37 chapters?

In what ways did God feel differently about the nations than His chosen people?

What are some things in our lives that can “grieve God’s Spirit” in the same way the sons of Judah caused God pain?

What about me?

What can we learn from Jeremiah’s messages that will keep us from falling into the same traps of that caused the Jews to stumble? In what ways does my heart wander toward idols? In what ways do I see a “Jeremiah heart” in my own life?

LAMENTATIONS Weeping Prophet

My Sorrow 1:2-12	His Anger 2:1,23	Our Hope 3:22-25
1	2	3
The Siege 4:10,20		My Prayer 5:12-22
4		5

"Suffering according to the will of God." 4:19

Notice the theme and key verse of Lamentations. Record them in your Bible. Now observe how the contents of the book "flow" and relate to the expanded theme.

The KEY EMPHASIS of Lamentations is on sorrow over fallen Jerusalem. The prophecy of Jeremiah in the book that bears his name has been fulfilled, and Lamentations is a record of that same prophet's sorrow over his beloved Judah and Jerusalem, the fallen people of God. In Lamentations we receive emotional reflections on the captivity as Jeremiah processes the sorrow that comes as a result of the devastations of sin. This was the fulfillment of Yahweh's plan (2:17). The lamentation (3:1-18) is coupled with a prayer of repentance (3:39-51), and the siege is graphically recounted in chapter 4. The book closes with an appeal to the remnant to return to God.

The KEY VERSE is 3:22-24, *"The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness."* "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him." Even in the midst of this sorrowful time Jeremiah focuses upon the lovingkindness and the grace of the God and His faithfulness toward us!

The KEY REASONS for the study of this book are 1) to understand the basis for sorrow over sin and its consequences for the people of God, and 2) to give us hope for the remnant who are the focus of God's grace.

The KEY PASSAGES are built around the overview divisions to help us see the "flow" of the book. How does each section relate to the passage cited?

Devastation and sorrow...desolation (1:1-7), sin (1:8-11), judgment (1:12-15), confession (1:16-22).

Yahweh's destruction...famine (2:11-13), false prophets (2:14), fulfillment (2:17), prayer (2:20-22).

Lament and prayer...sorrow (3:1-8), confidence (3:19-38), prayer (3:39-66).

Siege described...horrors (4:1-10), cause (4:11-12).

Restored remnant prayer...(5:1-22).

AUTHOR OF LAMENTATIONS

Lamentations was written by the prophet Jeremiah. The Septuagint and Vulgate translations introduce Jeremiah as the author. Hebrew and Gentile tradition do the same. Similarities between Lamentations and poetical sections of Jeremiah are also a giveaway to authorship. The writer was obviously an eyewitness of Jerusalem's destruction (Jeremiah 9:4 -14:17-22).

DATE

586 B.C. after the siege of Jerusalem.

BACKGROUND

Lamentations describes the funeral of a city. It is a tear-stained portrait of the once-proud Jerusalem, now reduced to a pile of rubble by the invading Babylonian armies. Lamentations is an appropriate sequel to the book of Jeremiah for it looks back to the same event which Jeremiah predicted: The fall of Jerusalem, 586 B.C. While the book of Jeremiah emphasizes warning, Lamentations emphasizes mourning...giving us two different glimpses of Jerusalem's fall.

Jeremiah writes his lament in acrostic or alphabetized fashion. Beginning each chapter with "A", he progresses verse by verse through the Hebrew alphabet, literally weeping from A to Z. In addition to being in acrostic form, Lamentations 1-4 were composed using the so-called "limping meter"... a cadence reserved for funeral dirges. How appropriate for Jerusalem and the weeping prophet Jeremiah!

WHY STUDY the book of Lamentations?

1. Sometimes people in our society, particularly men, think it is weak to shed tears. Jeremiah never had such a misconception. Nor did the One who remains history's perfect and complete man - the One who stood by His friend Lazarus' grave and wept. Why not profit from the emotions behind Lamentations and ask God to turn your heart from tough to tender? Perhaps you need to shed a few tears for those who do not know God as well as those who yet struggle and/or suffer.
2. Even in the midst of this sorrowful time, Jeremiah, in 3:22-24, focuses upon the loving kindness and the grace of God. He is faithful in His mercy toward us. Are you able to say with all of your heart the words of this passage, even in the midst of a sorrowful or tragic moment in your life?



Lamentations Chapter Chart

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Chapter	Title	Key Verse
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Write a paragraph describing Jeremiah's pain and hope over the destruction of Jerusalem:

What are the things in your life that have caused you pain?

The things you have brought upon yourself?

The things that have come about by poor treatment from others?

Do you find yourself avoiding pain or embracing it?

In what ways have you learned to help others who are in pain?