

Jeremiah

I. The Main Idea of Jeremiah

The book of Jeremiah records the final years of the Judean kingdom.

God sent one final prophet to his people and made one final appeal for them to repent before judgment comes.

God could have left Judah to face the end alone, but because of his love and faithfulness, He gave them a faithful messenger to prophesy in Judah's final days and beyond.

In the book of Jeremiah, God ...

- ... lays out his case against Israel,
- ... records the people's rejection of God's call to repent,
- ... records the final judgment God brought on Judah through the Babylonians,
- ... and gives promises for a future restoration.

II. Outline of Jeremiah

Jeremiah 1	Prologue
Jeremiah 2-25	Oracles of Judgment Against Jerusalem and Judah
Jeremiah 26-29	<i>Narratives</i> : Judah's Unbelief and the Warnings of Exiles
Jeremiah 30-33	Oracles of Israel's Salvation and Promise of a New Covenant
Jeremiah 34-45	<i>Narratives</i> : The Fall of Jerusalem & the Punishment of Judah
Jeremiah 46-51	Oracles of Judgment Against Foreign Nations
Jeremiah 52	Epilogue

Jason DeRouchie, ed. *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013), 242.

However ... The book of Jeremiah is notoriously difficult to organize. Unlike other books of the Bible, the content of Jeremiah's books seems to be more haphazard. Perhaps the best explanation of this is the fact that Jeremiah faced severe trials and persecutions during his ministry. He may not have had the luxury of time when he could sit down and organize everything neatly. So the haphazard organization of the book may simply be a reflection on the chaotic nature of Jeremiah's life.

III. Interpretive Keys to Jeremiah

Genre: Mostly Poetry, Some Narrative

- It expresses “experiences, ideas, or emotions in a style more concentrated, imaginative, and powerful than that of ordinary speech or prose.”
- Form of poetry is Hebrew parallelism.

IV. Key Passages of Jeremiah

Jeremiah 1 - Jeremiah's Call

- Evidence for personhood before birth (v. 5).
- Almond tree: first tree to blossom after winter (blossoms in Jan. & Feb), symbolic for events that will happen sooner rather than later.
- Boiling pot from the north: The Babylonians were going to approach Judah from the north.



Jeremiah 2:1-3:5 – God Case Against Israel

- Similar to Isaiah, Jeremiah lays a case against Israel. They had broken the covenant in various ways, including idolatry.

Jeremiah 2:11-13 “Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”

- Illustration: empty cistern vs. spring of living water.

Jeremiah 18 - The Potter and the Clay

Jeremiah 18:1-4 “The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: ‘Arise, and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.’ So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do.”

- Ancient potters would mold a wet piece of clay on a wheel that was either turned by hand or by foot.

- The clay itself either cooperates with what the potter is doing or resists what the potter tries to do. God tells Jeremiah that he works with people the same way (Jer. 18:5-11).
 - If he intends to bring good on a people but they insist on committing sin, then he will instead bring judgment on them.
 - If he intends to bring judgment on a people but they repent of their sin, then he will instead bring good on them.
- Paul uses the same metaphor for God in Romans 9:20-21.
 - “But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?”
- Resource: <https://sourceflix.com/product/the-potter/>

Jeremiah 25:11-12 – Length of the Exile

- Jeremiah predicted that the Exile would last for 70 years, one year for each of the missed Sabbaths during the 490-year period when the kings reigned (cf. 2 Chr. 36:20-21).
- The best understanding of the 70 years of the Exile seems to be that it began when Nebuchad-nezzar first took a portion of the Judeans with him back to Babylon in 605 B.C., and ended when Zerubbabel led the first group of Exiles back to the land in (possibly) 536 B.C.
- Near the end of the exile period, Daniel read Jeremiah’s prophecy and prayed that God would bring an end to the exile (Dan. 9:1-3). In response to his prayer, the angel Gabriel brought a message to him from God.

V. Messianic Elements within Jeremiah

The Righteous Branch of David: Jeremiah 23 & 33

- In these passages, Jeremiah is picking up on a symbol that was introduced by Isaiah and is developing it further.
 - *Isaiah 4:2 “In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel.”*
- Jeremiah 23:5-6 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely,



and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'"

- The ESV ("The LORD is our righteousness") and the NIV ("The LORD Our Righteous Savior") may not have the best translation of this last phrase.
 - Based on the accent marks in the Hebrew Bible, a better translation would be "Yahweh, our righteousness."
- In other words, the last phrase gives us two names of this "righteous Branch."
 - Thus this verse is evidence of the divinity of the Messiah and it was used by the early church as a proof text to prove Jesus' divinity from the Old Testament. (Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 187-189.)
- Jeremiah 33:14-26 "In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." (v. 15)
 - This passage again refers to the Messiah as a "righteous Branch." It goes on to emphasize the eternal nature of God's Covenant with David. Just as surely as the sun rises and sets each day, God is still keeping his covenant with David (vv. 20-21). The New Testament makes clear that this promise is kept through Jesus.

Jeremiah 31 – The New Covenant

- In Jeremiah 31, in the midst of the pouring out of judgment on Judah, Yahweh predicts that one day He would establish a "New Covenant" with the nation of Israel. This is the last covenant in a series of covenants mentioned in the Old Testament. God had made a covenant with Noah, with Abraham, with the nation of Israel in time of Moses, and with David.
 - Parties:
 - Made between God and the house of Israel and the house of Judah (31:31; cf. 31:35-37)
 - Note: it is not made directly with the Gentiles. They need to be "grafted" into the olive tree of Israel (Rom 11:17-24).
 - Type of Covenant: Conditional or Unconditional?
 - Irrelevant, since the people will not break this covenant (31:32) .
 - Time Period:
 - Future for Jeremiah's generation: "the days are coming" (31:31); "after those days" (31:33).
 - Once established it is an "everlasting covenant" (Jer 31:35); Isa 55:3; 61:8; Jer 32:40; 50:5; Ezek 16:60; 37:26.
 - Sign of the Covenant:
 - None?
 - Possibly the Lord's Supper.
 - Promises:

- The law will be put within them and written on their hearts (31:33)
 - “I will be their God, and they shall be my people”(31:33)
 - God’s ultimate goal.
 - This phrase occurs numerous times in this section of the book: 30:22; 31:1, 18; 32:38.
 - Every Israelite will know the Lord (31:34)
 - Forgiveness of sin. (31:34)
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- The New Covenant is contrasted with the Mosaic Covenant in that it will be characterized by laws written on the heart instead of being based on a list of laws that are imposed on the people from the outside (Jer. 31:31-33a). In other words, God’s people would obey Him from hearts that had been changed.
 - During the Last Supper, Jesus points back to this passage when he says “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (1 Cor. 11:25; cf. Luke 22:20). Paul referred to himself and his missionary companions as “ministers of a new covenant” (2 Cor. 3:6).
 - Thus, as Christians in the 21st century A.D., we are participants in the New Covenant predicted by Jeremiah in the 6th century B.C. ... over 2600 years later! We have a relationship with God today because of the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah and initiated by Jesus.
 - The longest quotation from the Old Testament provided by a New Testament writer is a quotation of Jeremiah 31:31-34 in Hebrews 8:8-12. The writer of the book of Hebrews explains that Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant (Heb. 9:15; 12:24) and fully explains the significance of the New Covenant in Hebrews 8-10.
 - The New Covenant ...
 - replaced the Old/Mosaic Covenant (Heb. 8:13),
 - is better than the Old/Mosaic Covenant (Heb. 7:22; 8:6),
 - is an eternal covenant between God and His people (Heb. 13:20).

Lamentations

I. The Main Idea of Lamentations

After Jerusalem was destroyed as a judgment for Judah's sin, the writer of Lamentations grieved the loss of the city where God had placed his name, but provided hope to God's people by reminding them of God's faithfulness and steadfast love.

To honor the city where God had placed His name and where His temple stood for almost 400 years, an entire book of the Bible is devoted to mourning its destruction.

II. Outline of Lamentations

Lamentations 1	Jerusalem's Sorrow
Lamentations 2	God's Punishment
Lamentations 3	Jeremiah's Pain
Lamentations 4	Jerusalem's Siege
Lamentations 5	Jeremiah's Plea

Adapted from DeRouchie, ed. *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013) p. 280.

III. Interpretive Keys to Lamentations

Genre: Poetry

- It expresses "experiences, ideas, or emotions in a style more concentrated, imaginative, and powerful than that of ordinary speech or prose."
- Form of poetry is Hebrew parallelism.

Hebrew Acrostic Poems:

- Most of the five poems within Lamentations contain an acrostic: a poetic device where each line starts with the next letter in the alphabet.
 - Lamentations 1, 2, and 4: each verse starts with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet (22 verses each).

- Lamentations 3: each verse has three lines that start with the same letter, and the letters follow the order of the Hebrew alphabet (66 verses).
- Lamentations 5: no acrostic (22 verses).
- There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, which is why almost every chapter contains 22 verses. The exception is chapter 3, which has three times as many: 66 verses.
- The purpose of this poetic device seems to be to communicate the depth of the prophet's grief. He is using every possible letter of the alphabet to describe his anguish.

IV. Key Passages of Lamentations

Heart of Lamentations ... Lam. 3:22-24

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'"

- There are 22 strophes in Lamentations 3 ... each one is three verses long, marked off by the use of the same Hebrew letter at the beginning of each line which forms an alphabetic acrostic for the whole poem. But once you identify the strophes, you can group them together into stanzas based on themes.
- Stanzas in Lamentations 3
 - **Stanza #1** – vv. 1-21 (seven strophes): the poet focuses on various afflictions that the Lord has brought to bear on him, ending with a transition statement into the next section: "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope."
 - **Stanza #2** – vv. 22-42 (seven strophes): the poet focuses on the faithfulness of the Lord, drawing new perspective on his situation, and ending with a transition statement into the next section: "We have transgressed and rebelled, and you have not forgiven."
 - **Stanza #3** – vv. 43-66 (eight strophes): the poet is back to focusing on the afflictions brought to bear on the community and on him individually, but this time including the perspective he gained in the second stanza, namely, that the Lord sees what is happening, hears the prayer of his servant, and will eventually bring about justice on the ones who are attacking him.
- So verses 22-24 are the beginning of the center stanza of the center chapter of the book. And that stanza begins with the key thought which turns the whole poem in a different direction (as evidenced by how verse 21 points the reader to verses 22-24).
- This passage is in the very center of the center chapter of the book. So at the heart of the book is a message of hope.
- One of the great hymns of the Christian faith is entitled *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*. It is important to remember that this encouraging refrain comes from a book of the Bible when everything is falling apart, not a book of the Bible where things are going well.

- So in our own lives, when everything is going wrong and disaster has struck, we can find hope that God will be faithful even in the midst of the disaster.

V. Messianic Elements within Lamentations

Similar to Jeremiah in Lamentations, a short time before his crucifixion Jesus lamented over Jerusalem:

- Matthew 23:37-39 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' "

Thus, Jeremiah is reflecting the heart of Christ in this book. God does not delight in bringing judgment on his people.