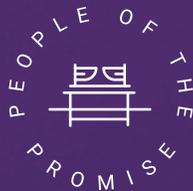


 Bible Study Fellowship®

**KINGDOM DIVIDED**

# JEREMIAH & LAMENTATIONS

A 3 WEEK MINI-STUDY





Welcome to BSF's study of Jeremiah and Lamentations!  
We hope God speaks to you through His Word and your group discussion.

**Here's how the Bible study works:**

- Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day.
- Discuss your answers with your small group at the end of the week.
- Listen to a podcast teaching on the week's passage.
- Read the notes with the passage's historical background and life application.
- Repeat!

We hope you enjoy using this four-fold approach to exploring God's Word in community with others.

Thanks for choosing to study with Bible Study Fellowship!

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# Jeremiah Part 1 – Ministry and Message

Jeremiah

## Lesson Questions

### First Day:

*The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.*

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. How has He provided, answered, comforted, restored, guided, etc.?

### Second Day: Read Jeremiah 1.

*God called Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations.*

2. a. What do you learn about Jeremiah from verses 1-4?

- b. From your previous study, describe what life was like during this period in Judah's history (skim 2 Kings 22–25, if helpful).
  
3.
  - a. What truths about God and Jeremiah are revealed in verses 4-5?
  
  - b. How do these truths speak to you personally?
  
4.
  - a. How did Jeremiah respond in verse 6, and how do you relate to his reaction?
  
  - b. What is significant to you about God's response to Jeremiah in this moment?
  
5. How did God describe Jeremiah's mission in verses 10-19?

**Third Day: Read the selected passages from Jeremiah in the questions below.**

*Jeremiah passionately shared God's burden for the people of Judah.*

6. Through many chapters, Jeremiah described Judah's coming judgment. Express the gravity of Jeremiah's message, as seen in the following verses:

Jeremiah 2:5-6; 3:19-20

Jeremiah 4:6; 6:1

Jeremiah 10:17-18

Jeremiah 25:8-14

7. a. What do the following verses reveal about Jeremiah's response to God's serious message?

Jeremiah 4:19-21

Jeremiah 9:1

Jeremiah 10:23-25

Jeremiah 15:16-18a

b. How deeply are you burdened by the spiritual peril of those around you?

c. Write a short prayer asking God to help your heart mirror His heart for people who need salvation.

#### **Fourth Day: Read the selected passages from Jeremiah in the questions below.**

*Jeremiah's ministry brought him personal suffering.*

8. Describe Jeremiah's personal experiences as a faithful servant of God from the following verses:

Jeremiah 16:1-4

Jeremiah 20:1-2

Jeremiah 26:7-11

Jeremiah 37:1-2, 16

Jeremiah 38:6

9. How might you reconcile Jeremiah's personal suffering with his faithfulness and God's provision?

10. Read Jeremiah 38:7-13. What stands out or encourages you from this account?

**Fifth Day: Read the selected passages from Jeremiah in the questions below.**

*Jeremiah spoke God's message as he warned of judgment but also promised hope.*

11. Jeremiah called the wayward people to repent, even as he warned of pending judgment. Read Jeremiah 18:7-8 and 21:8-9 and reflect on how these invitations display God's heart.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. a. Jeremiah warned of judgment but also promised a future day of restoration for God's people. He wrote a letter to exiles in Judah, recorded in Jeremiah 29:1-23. What stands out to you in Jeremiah's communication?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. Why is true hope so needed by people today? What gives you hope (see Jeremiah 14:22)?

**Sixth Day: Review Jeremiah 1 along with the questions and passages above.**

*God calls His children to share His burdens, speak His message, and trust Him with the results.*

13. What truths did you learn about Jeremiah, his mission, or his message? How will you respond to that truth?



# Lesson Notes

## Jeremiah

### Focus Verse

“See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.” – Jeremiah 1:10

### Outline

- Jeremiah's Ministry – Jeremiah 1; 34–45
- Jeremiah's Message – Jeremiah 2–33; 46–52

### Engage

God's promise to always be with us does not guarantee an easy life. We often expect God to protect us from harm when we seek to live for Him. Yet we find ourselves in a world where the majority turn away from Him. Following God requires swimming upstream – living a countercultural life. Speaking for God means proclaiming truth that some people mock and most reject or ignore. How do we continue to stand up for God while facing overwhelming pressure? What if obeying God makes your life harder, not easier? **God does not promise to spare His children from trouble, but He faithfully upholds those who put their trust in Him.**

God called Jeremiah to a long and difficult ministry. Jeremiah foretold tragic events and lived through them himself. He spoke on God's behalf to people who spurned God's message. Jeremiah bore the toll of costly obedience, physically and emotionally. He faced harsh circumstances, deep suffering, and painful rejection. Though he surely struggled through dark days, Jeremiah faithfully stood for God while the world around him crumbled. Sharing God's heart means caring more about the spiritual peril of others than personal ease. We live surrounded by people consumed by this world's charms and oblivious to the realities of eternity. As we enjoy the incomprehensible benefits of salvation, we must remain alert to the spiritual needs all around us. **God calls His children to share His burdens, speak His message, and trust Him with the results.**

### Who Was Jeremiah?

- **The Prophet:** Jeremiah's name means “whom the Lord appoints.”
- **The Audience:** Judah during the years leading up to and following their fall and subsequent exile to Babylon
- **The Message:** God's judgment against unrepentant Judah; hope beyond judgment for future restoration
- **The Images to Remember:** Almond branch, boiling pot, ruined linen belt, shattered clay vessel

We will study Jeremiah in two lessons:

- Jeremiah Part 1 – Ministry and Message (overview and themes of Jeremiah)
- Jeremiah Part 2 – Promises of Judgment, Restoration, and the New Covenant

## Jeremiah's Ministry – Jeremiah 1; 34–45

### The Man Jeremiah

Jeremiah was born in Anathoth, a small Levite village about 3 miles (4.8 km) from Jerusalem in the hill country of Benjamin. His father was a priest named Hilkiah – not to be confused with the high priest by the same name who discovered the book of the law during the reign of Josiah.<sup>1</sup> **Jeremiah was born into a family of priests and appointed by God as a prophet in Jerusalem.** His ability to purchase real estate and hire a scribe<sup>2</sup> suggests that Jeremiah had some personal wealth. A scribe named Baruch copied and compiled his dictated messages.<sup>3</sup>

Jeremiah primarily ministered to his own people in Judah, though he also prophesied regarding surrounding nations. **More than any other prophet, Jeremiah's messages uniquely entwined historical events with his personal life.** The book contains narrative historical accounts as well as prophetic declarations. Jeremiah's writings also grant transparent access into his own turmoil.<sup>4</sup> Though appointed by God, Jeremiah was rejected by the people God sent him to serve. He lived a life of ongoing conflict. Jeremiah faithfully confronted Judah's corrupt leaders.<sup>5</sup> He pled with his countrymen to repent and predicted God's coming judgment through an invading enemy.<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah's book contains more words than any other book in the Bible, perhaps reflecting his lengthy service and unwavering message for God's people.

**Jeremiah agonized fiercely as he shouldered, internalized, and even personified the weightiness of his prophetic messages.** He endured ostracism, arrest, and imprisonment.<sup>7</sup> The people of his own village threatened his life.<sup>8</sup> He was publicly humiliated and forced from his homeland.<sup>9</sup> Jeremiah was even thrown into a deep and muddy pit.<sup>10</sup> He faced deep anguish and heartache throughout his ministry.

Because of his painful journey and weighty message, Jeremiah is often known as “the weeping prophet.”<sup>11</sup> He also wrote Lamentations, which records his woeful cries over Jerusalem's destruction. Did Jeremiah have an unusually melancholy disposition or a need to constantly verbalize his grief? Jeremiah's plight does not exhibit weakness or faintness of heart. Rather, Jeremiah's enduring strength through multiplied years of intense hardship revealed the resiliency and strength of his character. **Jeremiah suffered greatly yet remained faithful to God for as long as he lived.** Jeremiah clung to God as he walked the path God marked out for him. Much can be learned from Jeremiah's steadfast obedience.

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1: Another Hilkiah: 2 Kings 22:8

2: Real estate: Jeremiah 32:6-15

3: Baruch: Jeremiah 36:4; 45:1

4: Jeremiah's turmoil: Jeremiah 15:17-18

5: Condemnation of leaders: Jeremiah 5:13, 30-31; 6:13-15; 22:1-5, 11-14; 23:1-4

6: Invading enemy: Jeremiah 1:13-15; 4:5-6; 6:1, 22; 10:22; 13:20; 15:12; 16:15; 20:4-6; 21:2-10; 23:8; 24:1-5

7: Arrested and imprisoned: Jeremiah 37:16

8: Threatened in Anathoth: Jeremiah 11:18-23

9: Taken to Egypt: Jeremiah 41:16-18; 43:1-7

10: Thrown in cistern: Jeremiah 38:6

11: Weeping: Jeremiah 9:1; 13:17; 14:17

## Imagery in the Book of Jeremiah

Jeremiah spoke clear words against outright sin. He also utilized images, even personally acting out expressions of God's message for the people. Illustrations or object lessons such as these listed below add emotion, depth, and color to the stark messages Jeremiah communicated.

- He bought, wore, and buried a linen belt (likely an undergarment) to symbolize Judah's adultery. – 13:1-11
- He never married, by God's command and likely in view of dire circumstances awaiting his nation. – 16:1-4
- He went to a potter to see a marred and remade clay object symbolizing Judah's destruction and hope. – 18:1-12
- He symbolically broke a clay jar to foretell Judah's coming disaster. – 19
- He saw a vision of two baskets of figs (good and bad) as an encouraging symbol regarding Judah's exiles. – 24
- He wore a yoke on his neck to illustrate submission to Babylon as God's instrument of judgment. – 27-28
- He purchased land, likely to express confidence in God's restoration of the land and people. – 32:6-44
- He buried stones in Egypt to foretell Babylon's defeat of Egypt. – 43:8-13

## The Times of Jeremiah – 1:2-3

**Jeremiah's ministry took place in an age of crisis.** He served more than 40 years, approximately from 627-586 B.C. and under five Judean kings: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. As one of God's final preexilic prophets, Jeremiah painstakingly proclaimed the imminence of God's judgment and the urgency of the people's repentance. He ministered before, during, and after Jerusalem's fall to Babylon. Jeremiah personally experienced the devastation of exile. The narratives of 2 Kings 21-25 and 2 Chronicles 33-36 reflect the historical background surrounding Jeremiah's ministry.

**Judah's spiritual condition reached an all-time low during the years of Jeremiah's ministry.** Flagrant idolatry and child sacrifice, promoted under Judah's kings Ahaz<sup>12</sup> and Manasseh,<sup>13</sup> progressed across the land. Religious insincerity, adultery, injustice, slander, and dishonesty prevailed among the people. Politically, Assyria's power was on the decline, culminating in the destruction of Nineveh in 612 B.C. Subsequently, the Neo-Babylonian empire increasingly gained power. The path God orchestrated took shape as nations aligned to carry out His promised judgment. Against the backdrop of this landscape, God called young Jeremiah to declare His words of truth. Judgment was coming. Repentance was urgent.

<sup>12</sup>: Ahaz: 2 Kings 16:1-20; 2 Chronicles 28

<sup>13</sup>: Manasseh: 2 Kings 21:1-18; 2 Chronicles 33:1-20

## Jeremiah's Call – 1:4-19

The book of Jeremiah opens with God's commission to Jeremiah. God used beautiful words, vibrant images, and a unique personal experience to tailor His call to this young prophet-to-be. All that Jeremiah heard and felt helped him understand the realities of his divine appointment. This pivotal experience prepared Jeremiah for a tough ministry ahead. How many times through his life did Jeremiah remember God's calm reassurance in this moment? God knows what His servants need to develop their faith and empower their obedience.

### God's Choice – 1:4-10

God chose Jeremiah for his assignment before he was born. He determined that Jeremiah would declare a specific message to specific people living at a specific time in history. Jeremiah heard these words: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart..." The Hebrew word *yāda'*, translated "knew" in Jeremiah 1:5, conveys far more than intellectual knowledge. *Yāda'* expresses personal commitment. In Genesis 4:1, *yāda'* describes the intimate relations between a husband and his wife. In Amos 3:2, *yāda'* portrays God's commitment to His people, Israel. Here, God intentionally communicated His personal commitment to Jeremiah as He appointed him a prophet to the nations. God remains purposefully and intimately involved with His chosen people today.

God's absolute knowledge and sovereignty exposes human weakness. Despite God's reassuring words, Jeremiah hesitated. He replied to God, verbalizing his sense of inadequacy: "Alas, Sovereign LORD, ... I do not know how to speak; I am too young." God countered Jeremiah's doubts with powerful reassurance. "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you." Recognizing human limitations prepares God's servants to depend on Him and not their own resources.

The Lord reached out his hand and touched Jeremiah's mouth, promising His provision precisely where Jeremiah felt inadequate. God would fill Jeremiah's mouth with His words. Jeremiah was not the only prophet to experience this awareness of need and God's promise of provision. Moses acknowledged his stammering speech.<sup>14</sup> God similarly touched Isaiah and Ezekiel when called to prophetic ministry.<sup>15</sup>

God personally confirmed His involvement and identification with Jeremiah and his work. Jeremiah heard God speak words that crystallized his entire ministry: "See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

### God's Charge – 1:11-19

God illustrated His charge to Jeremiah through two visions. First, Jeremiah saw the branch of an almond tree. Just as the early-blooming almond tree signaled the start of spring, Jeremiah's message would awaken the fulfillment of the judgment God promised. Second, Jeremiah envisioned a boiling pot tilting toward him from the north. This image symbolized the coming invasion from Judah's northern enemy – Babylon. God called Jeremiah, from the start of his ministry, to proclaim these hard truths and promised to protect and preserve him along the way.

14: Moses' inadequacy: Exodus 3:1–4:17

15: Isaiah and Ezekiel: Isaiah 6:6-7; Ezekiel 2:9–3:3

## Jeremiah's Personal Sufferings – 34–45

Jeremiah's book flows between historical narrative and prophetic declarations. **Chapters 34–45 and 52 contain accounts of Jeremiah's suffering during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem.** These chapters offer the historical background to Jeremiah's prophecy and ministry, which we will continue to explore in this lesson and the next.

### Before Jerusalem's Fall – 34–38

Jeremiah recalled the overt failures of Judah's King Zedekiah and recorded the backstory of events under one of Zedekiah's predecessors, Jehoiakim. **Jeremiah remained actively involved with King Zedekiah, who embodied the very evil for which Judah was judged.** When King Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon, Zedekiah was appointed to rule Judah by the Babylonian king.<sup>16</sup> Zedekiah propagated evil and led the people further astray.

With the noise of Babylon's invading troops rumbling in their ears, Jeremiah warned wicked King Zedekiah that the city would fall, and he would be taken captive. **Zedekiah failed to heed this warning, but everything Jeremiah predicted came to pass.**<sup>17</sup>

Judah's kings did not welcome Jeremiah's messages from God. King Jehoiakim burned a scroll on which Baruch recorded Jeremiah's dictated warnings. **Jeremiah's plight intensified as Zedekiah continued to ignore the Lord's warnings.**

Jeremiah's adversities intensified as he continued to have private audiences with rebellious Zedekiah. He was beaten and thrown into prison. **Despite personal suffering, Jeremiah refused to relent in speaking God's true message concerning Judah's dismal future.**

Accused of seeking the harm of his countrymen, Jeremiah was thrown into a muddy cistern – a pit used to collect water. He was left to starve to death. **God showed mercy to His downtrodden prophet.** A Cushite man named Ebed-Melek rescued Jeremiah. He even provided rags to put under Jeremiah's arms while he was pulled from the muddy pit with ropes. Scripture's record of this small demonstration of kindness speaks encouragement to us. God often expresses His tender mercy and intimate care in tangible ways that we will notice. Even as we suffer, God stokes the fire of our faith by providing what we need most.

### During Jerusalem's Fall – 39

Babylonian forces eventually broke through Jerusalem's walls and conquered the city. **On the very day God ordained, enemy forces captured Zedekiah and took Jerusalem's citizens captive to Babylon.** Interestingly, Nebuchadnezzar instructed his commander to spare Jeremiah, who was released from prison and allowed to stay with his own people. Amid this terror, God spoke a message to Jeremiah for Ebed-Melek "...you will not be given into the hands of those you fear. I will save you; you will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life, because you trust in me, declares the Lord." God's faithful may suffer, but He sees what His people endure. God can be trusted when obedience becomes costly.

<sup>16</sup>: Zedekiah as king: 2 Kings 24:15-19; 2 Chronicles 36:10-14

<sup>17</sup>: Prophecy against Zedekiah and fulfillment: Jeremiah 32:1-5; 52:7-11

# God's Purifying Process to Transform His People

## The Doctrine of Sanctification

Jeremiah suffered greatly as he obediently spoke for God. How do we explain Jeremiah's fortitude and resiliency? Only God could have equipped and strengthened Jeremiah to persevere as he did. Jeremiah lived centuries before Christ completed His work of salvation on the cross. Today, people who put their faith in Jesus' atoning sacrifice are delivered from the eternal punishment their sin deserves. Along with the eternal benefits of salvation, God begins a purifying work within the life of every believer. **Sanctification is the process of ongoing spiritual growth that God initiates within His children.** God's involvement in a believer's life incorporates more than forgiving past sin and providing eternal hope. God actively involves Himself in the day-to-day walk of every believer.

**Through the power of His Holy Spirit, God uses life's circumstances, His Word, and His people to make His children more like His Son.** God works within us to accomplish what pleases Him. The Holy Spirit changes a believer's appetites so that pleasing Him matters more than what we desire. This divine work helps God's children seek the unseen treasures of eternity. God works within believers to reveal specific sin and gives the power to obey Him from the heart.

To fail to recognize God's purposefully purifying plan in the moments and days of life is to miss an amazing blessing. **Whether celebrating or suffering, focusing only on the momentary joys and pains ignores God's greater purposes for us.** Jeremiah may not have understood God's full plan while he languished in mud up to his armpits. However, God was accomplishing more than Jeremiah realized. God is always doing more than we perceive.

God has sanctifying, purifying, and positive purposes in everything you face. When you do not have the strength to pray, God is at work. He remains faithfully present when your questions outstrip your answers. God draws near when life's difficulties become overwhelming. When you experience anything in life that loosens your grip on this world and its fleeting charms, God is teaching you that He is worthy of your trust. Your sanctification does not depend on your fortitude and resilience. Rather, your sanctification relies on God's strength. He accomplishes what we cannot. When you look back over your life, how has your dependence on God grown? Do you increasingly love what He loves and hate what He hates? As you journey through life, God's Holy Spirit will help you love Jesus more than you enjoy sin. **God sanctifies His children as they walk in this world.**

## After's Jerusalem's Fall – 40–45

Jeremiah was later taken captive to Egypt. Undeterred, he continued to speak for the Lord. Jeremiah prophesied against Egypt as he navigated this grueling path. Removed from Jerusalem and held against his will, Jeremiah braved the misery he predicted for Judah. **Harsh circumstances and a hard message did not deter Jeremiah from fulfilling God's call.** Suffering often wears people down when one grief piles upon another. We cannot persevere through compounded hardship by merely bolstering our human strength. Instead, God calls His people to rely on Him when hardships test their resolve. God receives the glory when He does what we cannot.

## Jeremiah's Message – Jeremiah 2–33; 46–52

Jeremiah's message, which we will study closely in our next lesson, mirrored that of Isaiah and other preexilic prophets. These men preached to the same wayward people in the same turbulent times. Jeremiah's message to Judah can be easily encapsulated in three points:

- You have broken God's covenant by your sins of idolatry, injustice, and empty religion.
- Judgment is coming. Repent!
- Hope exists beyond judgment. God will restore what sin has destroyed.

## Jeremiah's Major Themes

- **God Himself:** The promise-keeping God cannot tolerate sin but stands ready to restore what sin has destroyed. The presence, power, and purposes of God cannot be ignored.
- **Divine judgment:** Israel and Judah broke their covenant with God and awaited His promised judgment. God is too holy to allow sin to go unpunished.
- **Repentance:** God offers a way of hope and restoration for all who turn from their wicked ways and to Him for salvation. God's heart is compassionate toward sinners; He longs for us to turn to Him.
- **The new covenant:** Israel broke their covenant with God. God has provided a new way for sinners to find hope and restoration through His Son.
- **Hope of future restoration:** Despite Israel's sin, God promises a day of future restoration and hope to His wayward people. People who turn to God face a bright future.

Jeremiah's personal life and prophetic message were woven together against the backdrop of Judah's impending exile. He foretold and lived through God's judgment. Jeremiah shared God's burden for His people and spoke His message to them faithfully. Like Jeremiah, God continues to equip Christians to stand for Him in a world where most people reject or ignore Him. **God calls His children to share His burdens, speak His message, and trust Him with the results.** The people of Judah failed to respond to Jeremiah's warnings. God's judgment came, just as He promised. The future restoration of God's people that Jeremiah promised remains just as certain. Speaking and living for God is right, even when it means standing against the crowd. When faithfulness is costly for God's servants, He supplies the strength needed to persevere and sanctifies His children through the process. God can be trusted.

## Outline of Jeremiah

- I. Jeremiah's call – 1
- II. Messages to Judah – 2–33
  - A. Condemnation – 2–29
  - B. Consolation – 30–33
- III. Jeremiah's Personal Sufferings – 34–45
  - A. Before Jerusalem's Fall – 34–38
  - B. During Jerusalem's Fall – 39
  - C. After Jerusalem's Fall – 40–45
- IV. Messages to the Nations – 46–51
- V. Jerusalem's Fall – 52

## Take to Heart

### Hold Fast

God shines His light into dark places. When God's people descended into flagrant idolatry and refused to repent, He sent prophet after prophet to Israel and Judah with urgent pleas and stark warnings. **God called Jeremiah to speak for Him during Judah's final hours.** God's commission as a prophet to the nations humbled Jeremiah, who immediately felt the weight of human fear because of his youthfulness and inexperience. God touched Jeremiah's mouth and promised He would show him where to go and tell him what to say. His message and ministry would be to “uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:10). The long and difficult path God planned for Jeremiah would be accomplished by God's power alone.

God's assignment for Jeremiah came with personal suffering. Jeremiah's passionate and uncompromised delivery of God's messages brought hatred and persecution from those he confronted. **Despite personal anguish, Jeremiah spoke boldly for God for more than 40 years.** He repeatedly delivered warnings of judgment, a call to repentance, and promises of restoration beyond the exile. Though he was a faithful prophet called by God, Jeremiah was not spared from witnessing and experiencing the devastation that came with God's judgment.

### Apply It

God knew Jeremiah before He formed him within his mother's womb. Jeremiah's divine appointment originated before he drew a breath or spoke a word. God also knows you intimately. He has ordained

specific purposes for you and your life.<sup>18</sup> Like Jeremiah, the thought of serving God or speaking for Him can make us shrink back in fear. What makes you feel ill-prepared or inadequate to do great things for God? Realizing what we are not helps us face the reality of who God is. **A healthy assessment of our deficiencies prepares us to trust God to do what we cannot.** We need to know that God's work depends on His strength, not ours. Anything we have to offer God, He has supplied.<sup>19</sup> What is God asking you to do for Him? What is holding you back? The God who knows you completely and loves you perfectly desires to use you for His glory.

Jeremiah's resiliency and steadfast obedience challenge and inspire us. God called him to a task that promised to be tough. God revealed to Jeremiah the peril awaiting Judah but did not shield His faithful servant from the harm that fell upon his countrymen. He carried a spiritual burden few could bear. God's children do not live in a bubble – spared from the pain and wreckage of this fallen world. Christians live under evil governments and through bitter wars. In fact, Christian persecution will escalate as history moves towards Christ's return.<sup>20</sup> **God has positioned you in a world, city, neighborhood, and even a family with great spiritual needs.** As you share in the hurt of the fallen world, how will you respond? Do you seek to escape the pain? Like Jeremiah, are you willing to walk toward and through hardship in answer to God's call? How is God leading you to reach out to those who may be unaware of the spiritual peril they face? If our comfort were God's primary concern, He would immediately transport us to heaven. Instead, God leaves us here to make a difference. What comfort are you willing to forsake to obey God?

**Life in this world is hard, but God promises a bright future for those who seek Him.** Jeremiah held out hope, even as he foretold coming trauma. In many ways, this world's hardships awaken our longing for the resolution and restoration God promises. Hope comes as a precious gift from God. For the believer, Christ has provided salvation from sin's just penalty. Present suffering pales when compared to eternal glory.<sup>21</sup> God's children can experience His peace and presence, even while walking in a world filled with trouble.<sup>22</sup> Believers face illness and death with certain hope beyond the grave. We are promised a future time when evil's reign of terror will end, and sorrow will be no more.<sup>23</sup> The future hope God gives His children permeates their present lives and transcends outward circumstances. Do you struggle to find hope in this world? Those who put their faith in Christ have certain comfort beyond this world's pain. How will you allow God's truth and hope to fill you today?

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18: God's purposes: Ephesians 2:10

19: Serving in God's strength: Colossians 1:29; 1 Peter 4:11

20: Hardship for believers: Luke 21:12-18; 2 Timothy 3:12-13

21: Eternal glory: 2 Corinthians 4:17

22: Transcending peace: John 16:33; Philippians 4:7

23: No more suffering: Revelation 21:3-5

# Jeremiah Part 2 – Judgment, Restoration, and the New Covenant

Jeremiah 2–33; 46–52

## Lesson Questions

### First Day:

*The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.*

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. How has He provided, answered, comforted, restored, guided, etc.?

### Second Day: Read the selected passages from Jeremiah 2–29 listed below.

*Jeremiah exposed Israel and Judah's sin.*

*Note: Jeremiah 2–29 contains 14 messages written to Judah before the exile regarding Judah's sin and coming judgment. The questions on the second and third days focus on the major themes within this lengthy section.*

2. a. Jeremiah repeated the accusations and warnings of other prophets we have studied. What specific sins against God by the people of Judah did Jeremiah expose in the following passages?

Jeremiah 2:23-25; 3:13

Jeremiah 5:13, 30-31; 23:10b-11

Jeremiah 5:26-28; 7:5-11

- b. Why should God's people acknowledge and repent from specific sins, not just their general sinfulness?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c. How have you experienced God's redemptive work in your life regarding patterns of specific sin?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. a. Describe Jeremiah's attitude as he exposed the sins of his countrymen (see Jeremiah 4:19-21; 8:21-9:2).
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. What are some right and wrong ways Christians can communicate the truth about sin and judgment?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Read Jeremiah 18:1-11. What truths about God, His heart, and His ways do you learn from this passage?

**Third Day: Read the selected passages from Jeremiah 4–29 and 46–51 listed below.**

*Jeremiah announced the specifics of the coming judgment.*

5. a. What facts did Jeremiah foretell about God's judgment on Judah (see Jeremiah 4:6; 13:18-20; 20:4-6; 25:8-14)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. Which facts did you find significant in Jeremiah's prophecy? Why?

6. How did Jeremiah describe the suffering that would accompany God's judgment (see Jeremiah 6:1-7; 11:22; 12:12-13)?
  
7.
  - a. Skim Jeremiah 46–51 and list the surrounding nations that would also face a Babylonian attack.
  
  - b. Read Jeremiah 51:34-35. Why might this message have comforted the people of Judah?

#### **Fourth Day: Read Jeremiah 30–33.**

*In the middle of warnings regarding the coming disaster, Jeremiah proclaimed hope and restoration for God's people.*

8.
  - a. From Jeremiah 30:1–31:30, in what ways did God promise to restore His people?
  
  - b. Why would these promises encourage the people of Judah at this point in their history and beyond?
  
9.
  - a. Israel broke the covenant they made with God through Moses (see Exodus 19:3-6; 24:1-8; Deuteronomy 29:1–30:3). Considering their failure, what amazing promise did God make through Jeremiah in 31:31-37?
  
  - b. How do Christians today experience the reality of this promise (see 2 Corinthians 3:3-6; Hebrews 7:18-22; 8:8-13; 10:15-17)?

c. In what ways has God expanded your personal appreciation of this promise?

10. What specific encouragement did God extend to His people through Jeremiah's purchase of a field in chapter 32?

### **Fifth Day: Read Jeremiah 52.**

*Jeremiah experienced the devastating fall of Jerusalem.*

11. a. Describe the Babylonian attack on Jerusalem. How were the citizens impacted?

b. What happened to King Zedekiah?

c. Why was the desecration of the temple particularly devastating?

12. The details Jeremiah predicted came to pass. Why is this important?

13. What is the significance of Jeremiah's final words regarding Judah's King Jehoiachin?

### **Sixth Day: Review Jeremiah's messages of judgment and hope.**

*Only God can make new what sin has broken.*

14. What is the clearest message God spoke to you through the book of Jeremiah?



# Lesson Notes

Jeremiah 2–33; 46–52

## Focus Verse

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.” – Jeremiah 31:31

## Outline

- The Declaration Against Judah – Jeremiah 2–33
- The Decrees Against the Nations – Jeremiah 46–51
- The Destruction of Jerusalem – Jeremiah 52

## Engage

How do you fix what is badly broken? We can repair or replace a defective household appliance or repair a shattered window. We can seek counseling or mediation to mend torn relationships. However, humanity faces pervasive spiritual brokenness with deeply damaging results. Sin corrupted creation’s perfection, impacting individuals, nations, and society at large. We often fail to connect the world’s dysfunction with the systemic damage wrought by sin. Understanding sin’s destruction makes us long for God to bridge sin’s breach, as He has promised to do. **Sin’s destruction can only be repaired by God Himself.**

Israel and Judah rebelliously broke their covenant with God in multiple ways. They worshiped false gods, mistreated one another, and perpetuated empty worship rituals without true heart commitment to God. Despite their sin, God relentlessly communicated with His wayward people who had His laws but needed a change of heart. He continued to call them back to Himself even as they marched toward and through intense judgment. Though Jeremiah’s book resounds with warnings, a powerful theme of hope also arises. God promised a new covenant that would fulfill and extend the old covenant they had broken. Through faith in Christ, believers experience the wonders of the new covenant God promised through Jeremiah. **Only God can make new what sin has broken.** The comfort Jeremiah offered to Israel extends to God’s people today.

## The Declaration Against Judah – Jeremiah 2–33

Jeremiah ministered faithfully for nearly 40 difficult years – before, during, and after the fall of Jerusalem and Judah’s exile to Babylon. Through intense warnings, object lessons, visions, and other visual demonstrations of his message, Jeremiah consistently called God’s people to repentance. His unpopular and confrontational message caused him personal suffering. He was threatened, put

in stocks, beaten, jailed, thrown into a cistern, and eventually taken captive to Egypt.<sup>1</sup> Despite the costliness of obedience, Jeremiah persevered in preaching God's Word to people who persistently rejected God Himself. Deep within Jeremiah's lengthy message of condemnation lies a thread of encouraging consolation and enduring hope.

## Condemnation – 2–29

Jeremiah began with 14 messages to Judah concerning God's coming judgment. **Written before the exile, Jeremiah exposed in detail how Israel failed to live as God's people and broke their covenant with God.** As a result, the nation faced a grim future. Jeremiah carried a weighty burden of personal anguish over the guilt and future of his nation.<sup>2</sup> He did not proclaim cold, hard facts with a stony heart. Jeremiah's personal example of delivering painful truth with anguish and a quiver in his voice sets an example for us. God compels believers to share the certainty of God's coming judgment, but with compassion and a tearful, pleading heart.

**Jeremiah clearly understood and articulated God's righteous character, just judgment, and the people's guilt alongside the restoration available for all who turned to God in repentance.** The primary features and themes presented regarding God's just actions against Judah prove helpful in understanding Jeremiah's passionate message.

**God's merciful desire for His people to repent and to restore their relationship with Him is evidenced by the many prophets He sent to Israel and Judah.** The various prophets brought the same basic plea – each with a different focus to prompt God's people to hear and respond. The continuous messages spoken by God's prophets and recorded in the Bible continue to speak to believers today. The hope they promised found its ultimate fulfillment in the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus, who fulfilled the old covenant and mediates a new covenant for us.

### Jeremiah Confronted Sin

“But my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols.” – Jeremiah 2:11b

**With a similar theme as the prophet Hosea, Jeremiah condemned Israel's rampant idolatry as spiritual adultery, prostitution, and promiscuity.**<sup>3</sup> Pervasive idolatry even led to the despicable practice of child sacrifice.<sup>4</sup>

**Jeremiah also exposed Israel's leaders for their evil ways and failure to lead God's people as He intended.**<sup>5</sup> The corruption that permeated Israel's prophets, priests, and kings led the nation into tragic injustice against one another. Exploiting the people God endowed them to protect, these leaders preyed on widows, orphans, and foreigners.<sup>6</sup>

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1: **Jeremiah's suffering:** Jeremiah 11:18-23; 19:14–20:2; 26:7-24; 37:15; 38:6; 40:1; 43:1-7

2: **Jeremiah's anguish:** Jeremiah 9:1; 13:17; 14:17; 15:17-18

3: **Spiritual adultery:** Jeremiah 2:23-25; 3:1-9; 5:7-9; Hosea 1:2; 2:2

4: **Child sacrifice:** Jeremiah 19:5; 32:35

5: **Condemnation of Israel's leaders:** Jeremiah 5:13, 30-31; 6:13-15; 22:1-5, 11-14; 23:1-4

6: **Oppression:** Jeremiah 5:26-29; 7:1-15; 22:13-19

## Jeremiah's Warnings of Disaster

“Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: ‘Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin.’” – Jeremiah 25:8-9

### A Specific Enemy

**Jeremiah foretold God's design to use a foreign nation as His instrument of righteous judgment.** Jeremiah's prophecy spanned many years, so the threat of the Babylonian empire escalated during his ministry. Initially, Jeremiah repeatedly mentioned a threat from the north that would bring disaster upon Judah.<sup>7</sup>

**When Jeremiah identified the enemy from the north as Babylon, his prediction gained clarity.**<sup>8</sup> At a pivotal time in Judah – during the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign in Judah and the first year of King Nebuchadnezzar's reign in Babylon – the facts came into focus.<sup>9</sup>

For 23 years, Judah stubbornly ignored Jeremiah's warnings and aroused God's anger. God's people awaited judgment they brought upon themselves. **In a bold pronouncement, Jeremiah declared that “God's servant” – Nebuchadnezzar – would come against the land, its inhabitants, and surrounding nations.**<sup>10</sup> This announcement came prior to Babylon's first attack on Judah.<sup>11</sup>

Summoned by God Himself, these northern peoples and armies would render Judah a desolate wasteland. **God also determined the amount of time His people remained under Babylonian domination – 70 years.**<sup>12</sup> Almighty God accomplishes His divine purposes in myriad ways. Kings and kingdoms rise and fall at God's command. Governments and kings who do not acknowledge God unknowingly fulfill His plans. God orchestrates human history. Even so, nations and people remain accountable to Him for their evil deeds.

### Severe Suffering

Repeated warnings from Jeremiah contained vivid descriptions of the severe physical suffering that the people would endure. **Jeremiah agonized in personal pain as he forecast the reality facing his nation.** He cried out, “Oh, my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain. Oh, the agony of my heart! My heart pounds within me, I cannot keep silent. For I have heard the sound of the trumpet; I have heard the battle cry. Disaster follows disaster; the whole land lies in ruins” (Jeremiah 4:19-20a).

**Key words describing the gravity of suffering awaiting Judah appear often in Jeremiah's warnings.** He spoke of *famine*.<sup>13</sup> He described *destruction*.<sup>14</sup> He prophesied that *the sword* of another nation would inflict terrible harm.<sup>15</sup> Jeremiah's bleak and forthright words did not sugarcoat the agony Judah faced.

7: **Threat from the north:** Jeremiah 1:13-15; 3:11-18; 4:5-6; 6:1, 22; 10:22; 13:20; 15:12; 16:15; 23:8

8: **Babylon:** Jeremiah 20:4-6; 21:2-10; 24:1-5

9: **Timing of Babylon's rise:** Jeremiah 25

10: **God's servant Nebuchadnezzar:** Jeremiah 25:8-14

11: **Jeremiah's suffering in Jerusalem:** Jeremiah 26-29

12: **Babylonian domination:** Jeremiah 25:12

13: **Famine:** Jeremiah 11:22; 14:1-6, 12-18; 16:4; 18:21; 21:7; 24:10; 27:8, 13; 29:17-18

14: **Destruction:** Jeremiah 4:6; 6:1-7; 10:17-18; 20:8

15: **Sword:** Jeremiah 4:10; 5:17; 6:25; 9:16; 11:22; 12:12; 14:12-18; 15:3, 9; 16:4; 18:21; 19:7; 21:9; 25:16

**Judah had reached the point of no return; God's judgment would bring devastating results.** Jeremiah summarized the Lord's determined discipline on His rebellious people: "Then the LORD said to me: 'Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from my presence! Let them go!'" (Jeremiah 15:1). God's people remain accountable to Him.

## The Call to Repentance

"If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned." – Jeremiah 18:7

Throughout his ministry, Jeremiah's message was overwhelmingly sobering. Chapter by chapter and year after year, he personally struggled under the weight of the ominous truth he proclaimed on God's behalf. **As he reflected God's justice and judgment, Jeremiah upheld God's compassionate desire to restore the repentant.** If the nation listened and returned to God, disaster could be averted. Jeremiah extended God's offer. He urged the people to choose God and follow His ways. "This is what the LORD says: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death" (Jeremiah 21:8).

## The Hope of Restoration

"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.'" – Jeremiah 29:11-12

**Chapters 26–29 record Jeremiah's suffering during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem.** In chapter 29, Jeremiah wrote a letter from Jerusalem to those held captive in Babylon. This important passage teaches God's people how to engage with an unbelieving society. Jeremiah encouraged the exiles to bless their Babylonian neighbors and to flourish spiritually and physically while living in a foreign land. Jeremiah promised that at the end of 70 years of captivity, God would bring them back to the land. Even during exceedingly difficult circumstances, God's children can thrive under His faithful care. God's life and light shine through His people when they trust Him and yield to His purposes, no matter their challenges.

God's plans prevail. **The people of Judah would survive the exile and return to their homeland!** Until God calls His people home, they are to bless and serve their neighbors. When evil appears to have an upper hand, God's promises of His coming kingdom and eternal glory offer hope. Sin does not have the last word.

## Consolation – 30–33

After many chapters of intense warnings, Jeremiah's message shifts to one of hope.

### The Promise of Restoration

“‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their ancestors to possess,’ says the LORD.” – Jeremiah 30:3

**Despite the nation's sin, Israel would be delivered from her enemies, return to the promised land, and experience peace and security.** The restoration of the exiled remnant to the promised land later in Israel's history partially fulfilled these promises. Complete fulfillment awaits Christ's second coming. One day in the future, Jesus will establish His kingdom and rule the nations in righteousness. How we long for that day!

### The Promise of a New Covenant

“‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.’” – Jeremiah 31:31

Israel broke her covenant with God. In a beautiful expression of mercy and grace, God promised a new covenant with His people. Israel's first covenant with God contained commands and prohibitions. God promised blessings if they obeyed Him and remained true to the covenant and curses if they did not. **Unlike the Mosaic covenant, this superior new covenant would bring internal transformation, the forgiveness of sins, and rich knowledge of God Himself.** God's Spirit would rewire people's hearts, enabling them to walk in faith and to know and obey God. This promise of a new covenant spoke to Israel but points to salvation in Christ – available to individuals from all nations and lands. This covenant is available to you! The new covenant does not depend on the obedience of the people, but instead rests in the absolute perfection of Christ and His sinless sacrifice on their behalf.

**Many New Testament passages quote and reflect this important passage in Jeremiah.**<sup>16</sup> The law God gave Israel through Moses relied on animal sacrifices – insufficient in and of themselves to provide forgiveness from sin.<sup>17</sup> Those who humbled themselves before God in faith found salvation through sacrifices that anticipated a greater and more perfect one in the future. The breakdown of the old covenant did not lie in the covenant itself, but in Israel's refusal to turn from their sin and seek God. The people needed a new, circumcised heart.

**Jesus Christ sealed the new covenant with His own blood, bringing salvation to all who put their faith in Him.** Jeremiah beautifully describes the glorious forgiveness offered by Christ. “‘This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, “Know the LORD,” because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the LORD. ‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more’” (Jeremiah 31:33-34). Jesus reconciles sinners to God and restores their relationship with Him.

<sup>16</sup>: New Testament references: Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25; 2 Corinthians 3:3-6; Hebrews 7:18-22; 8:8-13; 10:15-17

<sup>17</sup>: Insufficient sacrifices: Hebrews 8:8-10

## Words of Hope

“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”  
– Jeremiah 33:3

**In chapter 32, God instructed Jeremiah to purchase a field while he was imprisoned within the royal palace and Nebuchadnezzar’s army besieged Jerusalem.** Jeremiah directed the placement of the purchase deeds in a sealed jar to symbolize God’s promise to restore His people to their land. This visible step of obedience showed his faith in God’s promise, despite outwardly dismal circumstances. God encouraged His faithful prophet, saying, “I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?” (Jeremiah 32:27).

Still confined to the king’s courtyard, Jeremiah continued to receive encouraging promises from God. The very place battered by the enemy army would one day thrive with flocks and people. **God’s glorious promises point to Jesus, the Messiah, who would come to fulfill God’s plan for Israel and humankind.** The “righteous Branch” that would “sprout from David’s line” would bring righteousness.<sup>18</sup> God called Jeremiah and the people to believe His promise of future restoration and hold onto hope even while enemy troops attacked the city.

## The Decrees Against the Nations – Jeremiah 46–51

**A collection of poems recorded by Jeremiah described the suffering of Israel’s surrounding nations under Babylon’s onslaught.** God’s judgment falls, not just on His own people, but all people and nations. Jeremiah’s proclamations started with Egypt, a perpetual enemy of God’s people. Additional oracles were delivered against the Philistines; Moab; Ammon; Edom; Damascus, the capital of Syria; Kedar and Hazor; and Elam.

Jeremiah expressed God’s coming retribution against Babylon in his longest and last message (50–51). **God used Babylon to render His just judgment against evil; the conquering nation would also face God as judge.** Jeremiah described Babylon’s fall as sudden. The Medes and Persians overthrew Babylon in 539 B.C. This prophecy also points to a far future day. Babylon, a frequent biblical symbol of organized evil, will one day fatally and finally fall under the righteous reign of Messiah.<sup>19</sup>

## The Destruction of Jerusalem – Jeremiah 52

Serving as God’s prophet, Jeremiah’s ministry spanned many years and many kings. He witnessed the escalation of evil in Judah and the rise of the Babylonian empire. He experienced the dreadful and devastating moments when Jerusalem fell. **Jeremiah’s personal experience through the terror of the Babylonian invasion impacted him greatly.** The book of Lamentations, the focus of our next lesson, captures his personal expressions of deep anguish and lament over the terror he witnessed and experienced.

<sup>18</sup>: The righteous Branch: Isaiah 4:2; Jeremiah 33:15-16

<sup>19</sup>: Babylon’s evil: Genesis 11:1-9; Revelation 14:8; 18

# God Keeps His Promises

## The Doctrine of Covenants

Covenants play an important role in the Bible. **Most simply, covenants are promises God makes to an individual or group.** Some covenants, such as God's covenant with Israel through Moses, were conditional – dependent on the people's response.<sup>20</sup> God promised abundant blessings *if* the people obeyed His commands. Other biblical covenants stood on God's unchangeable commitments to fulfill His promises. God's vow to make Abraham's offspring into a great nation and land rested on God's resolve to form and deliver His people.<sup>21</sup>

Jeremiah laid out multiple ways Israel and Judah failed to keep God's conditional covenant. He described God's judgment under the Babylonians that God had promised if the people disobeyed – and they did. However, Jeremiah foretold something new and wonderful alongside the difficulties he announced. He previewed a God-initiated new covenant – a shining truth that the New Testament expands. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection secured the way of salvation for all who put their faith in Him. God declares everyone who turns to Jesus in faith as righteous in His sight. Indwelt by the Holy Spirit, believers experience the power and desire to seek and please God. Obedience to God flows out of love and gratitude, as God's Spirit empowers His children to think and act rightly. **Because of the new covenant, every true believer rests secure in Christ – no strings attached.**

To disregard God's promises in the Bible means missing the only source of true security known to mankind. God's promises are inextricably linked to His character. Therefore, to ignore His promises is to neglect God Himself. There is no way of salvation apart from what God has promised and accomplished. To ignore God is to opt out of His blessings. **An anchorless life and dismal future await anyone who refuses to believe what God has declared to be certain.**

God did not leave desperate people in the dark searching for answers that He cunningly withheld. **God made promises – secured by who He is – that cannot be broken by the certain failures of sinful people.** The old covenant paved the way for the new covenant, which represents unshakable hope available to everyone who puts their faith in Christ. Believers need not wonder if they have been good enough to please God. Because of what Christ accomplished, God's children remain settled and secure on God's promises, which cannot be broken. There is no better place to rest!

## Jerusalem's Terror

Chapter 52 parallels 2 Kings 24:18–25:30 and Jeremiah 32–33, recording the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem and the exile of God's people. **This narrative verifies not only the events, but also**

<sup>20</sup>: Mosaic covenant: Exodus 19:3-6; 24:1-8; Deuteronomy 29:1-30:3

<sup>21</sup>: Abrahamic covenant: Genesis 12:1-3

**confirms the fulfillment of Jeremiah's God-given prophetic declarations throughout his ministry.** Zedekiah ascended to Judah's throne when then-king Jehoiachin was taken captive.<sup>22</sup> During the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, the Babylonian army surrounded Jerusalem. Severe famine gripped the city, and the people endured great hardship.

**Jerusalem's fall was brutal and bloody.** King Zedekiah witnessed the assassination of his own sons before his enemies gouged out his eyes and took him to Babylon. The invading army breached Jerusalem's walls, then ravaged and burned the city. Temple treasures were stolen and taken to Babylon. The Babylonian forces deported the people of Judah in several stages. Groups of exiles were taken to Babylon three times during King Nebuchadnezzar's reign, with only a few poor people left to tend the land.

## Jehoiachin's Release

Jeremiah's book concludes with an unexpected but significant detail regarding King Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah) of Judah, who reigned three months before being taken captive.<sup>23</sup> **Babylon's king brought Jehoiachin out of prison and granted him the privilege of dining regularly at his royal table.** Why would Jeremiah's long and important book end with this unusual detail? Why would a foreign king allow this deposed king such an honor?

This flicker of hope rises at the end of Jeremiah's account of judgment and destruction by God's design. Jeremiah reminds us that God had not forgotten His exiled people or the Messianic line of David. This dining arrangement reinforces Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the new covenant and the future restoration awaiting God's people. **Only God can make new what sin has broken.** Judah and Israel broke their covenant with God. People throughout the ages have been surrounded by are surrounded by pervasive brokenness caused by sin. Only God can repair what sin has destroyed. Turning to Christ for salvation provides the only source of true hope and restoration.

## Take to Heart

### Hold Fast

Like other prophets, Jeremiah confronted Judah and Israel's sin and idolatry. He spelled out the damage caused by their spiritual adultery and rebellion against God. Jeremiah enumerated the specific sins of Israel's leaders, who failed to guide the people and steward their God-given responsibility. **Israel and Judah awaited God's judgment because they broke their covenant with God.**

With increasing clarity, Jeremiah announced that God's judgment would come in the form of an enemy from the north – Babylon. Acting as God's instrument, this enemy nation would rise in power and inflict painful punishment on the people, land, and surrounding nations. Jeremiah did not deliver this ominous message in a coldhearted or disconnected way. He foretold these dreadful events but also lived through the deadly onslaught himself. Jeremiah delivered agonizing expressions of the impending doom awaiting his nation – both verbally and visually. His unpopular message brought

<sup>22</sup>: Zedekiah as king: 2 Kings 24:15-19; 2 Chronicles 36:10-14

<sup>23</sup>: King Jehoiachin: 2 Kings 24:5-17; 2 Chronicles 36:8-9; Matthew 1:11

him great suffering. Whenever God challenges people, He also offers hope and restoration if they heed His call. **Along with the bad news, Jeremiah called people to repentance and announced God's good plan beyond Israel's purifying pain.** The historical events he predicted and witnessed were not the final chapter of God's story or plan for Israel.

## Apply It

God sent Jeremiah to bear and share a difficult message. People can overlook the sturdiness of character in the man known as the “weeping prophet.” Jeremiah faithfully carried a heavy message with integrity and personal empathy. How deeply do we feel the anguish of people in line for God's coming judgment? Jeremiah did the hard thing faithfully and for a very long time. What makes you want to quit? How willing are you to persevere when God's way involves a long and hard road without an easy exit? God pointed Jeremiah to the hope beyond the pain. He carried on, embracing unseen treasures that outweighed the suffering. **A lifetime of faithful service to God is accomplished one day at a time.** Will you faithfully endure – trusting God when the path He marks out for you is harder than you expected?

Christians today live in the middle chapters of a developing story. We recognize that God created the world, sent His Son, and set us on a Spirit-powered walk on earth while we await eternity. Like Israel, we are exiles longing for a better place and more glorious day. However, resolution often feels like a distant dream. Jeremiah experienced more pain than parties. He predicted joyous restoration yet lived through brutal disaster. However, God's plan was not thwarted by Jerusalem's siege. Do you find yourself waiting for a happy ending that seems impossible? Scripture tells us that we see in a mirror dimly – perhaps only cloudy glimpses of coming glory.<sup>24</sup> **People who trust God find hope and stability in God Himself – not in personal ease.** If you feel like God has paused your life in a season of trauma, will you trust Him? How will you fix your gaze on God while you wait on Him to resolve your most challenging situation?

**God can repair what sin has destroyed.** His story does not end with the brokenness we see and experience. God not only *can* fix sin's damage, but *He delights to do so.* God repeatedly called His people to repent and rest by faith in His provision. His invitation to faith remains open to the world – and to you. He longs for us to run to Him to find comfort, peace, and wholeness. Whether we consider this world's craziness or the sin that lurks in the private corners of our hearts, we know that God does not turn away from our desperate plight. God will bring restorative judgment and uphold justice. But even as He does, He paves a way to make us new. God did a new thing through His Son to free us from sin's bondage.<sup>25</sup> God has planned “great and unsearchable things” that our minds cannot contain and our words cannot express.<sup>26</sup> How will you experience the new life, new hope, and new power God has for you in your daily life? If you know Him, will you continue to walk and trust that He is at your side and has your best interests at heart?

24: Dimly in a mirror: 1 Corinthians 13:12

25: God's new way: Isaiah 43:18-19; Matthew 9:16-17

26: Great and unsearchable: Jeremiah 33:3

# Lamentations – Poetic Expressions of Painful Loss

Lamentations

## Lesson Questions

### First Day:

*The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.*

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. How has He provided, answered, comforted, restored, guided, etc.?

*Based on traditional scholarship, BSF assumes Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations.*

### Second Day: Read Lamentations 1–2.

*Jeremiah lamented his own suffering and that of God's people.*

2. Expressions of lament are common throughout the Bible. Consider Job 3:3-26; Psalm 10; and Matthew 23:37-39 as examples.
  - a. What does it mean to lament?

- b. What important lessons can you draw for your own life from this precedent?
3. Each chapter in Lamentations highlights different pronouns, indicating the unique focus of each lament. Identify the predominant pronouns, to whom each refers, and the primary theme you recognize within each of the first two chapters?
- Chapter 1
- Chapter 2
4. What stands out to you from Jeremiah's agonizing words over his pain and the suffering of God's people?

### Third Day: Read Lamentations 3.

*Jeremiah recounted his suffering and praised God's faithfulness.*

5. Identify the predominant pronouns, to whom each refers, and the primary theme within this chapter.
6. a. Find a phrase or two in chapter 3 that poignantly express Jeremiah's personal turmoil.
- b. How does Jeremiah's focus shift in the middle of this chapter?
- c. What truths about God do you learn from verses 31-39? How does this encourage you?
- d. In what ways does Jeremiah plead his case before the people and God in verses 40-66?
7. What helps you focus on God when you are overwhelmed by a troubling situation?

## Fourth Day: Read Lamentations 4.

*Jeremiah described the suffering of the people of Jerusalem.*

8.
  - a. Identify the predominant pronouns in this chapter and to whom they refer.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Jeremiah compared the state of the people before Jerusalem fell with the current deplorable conditions. From verses 1-10, how were various groups of people traumatized by the city's destruction?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. Summarize the theme of this chapter.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. What words or phrases from verses 11-22 indicate God's response to the sins of His people?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. How are you helped or troubled when you consider God's judgment?

## Fifth Day: Read Lamentations 5.

*Jeremiah prayed on behalf of God's people.*

11.
  - a. Identify the predominant pronouns in this chapter and to whom they refer. How does this focus reveal Jeremiah's identification with and advocacy for God's suffering people?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. What is the primary theme of chapter 5?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. Jeremiah recounted specific atrocities against the people of Judah. What spiritual or emotional benefits can be gained by identifying or describing our suffering to God?

13. From verses 1-18, what did Jeremiah pray for God to remember about His suffering people?
14. What comfort did Jeremiah seek in verses 19-21? What personal comfort do you draw from these verses?
15. Verse 22 ends the book of Lamentations without a joyful resolution.
- a. In what ways were Jeremiah and God's people waiting for the resolution they desired?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Describe a situation in which you are waiting on God to fulfill His promises. What are you learning about yourself? About God?

### **Sixth Day: Review Lamentations.**

*God compassionately hears the anguished cries of His suffering people.*

16. What was the most prominent message God spoke to you through your study of Lamentations?

*Passage Discovery (homiletics, word study, etc.) for Group and Administrative Leaders: Lamentations*



# Lesson Notes

## Lamentations

### Focus Verse

“Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” – Lamentations 3:22-23

### Outline

- The Need to Lament
- The Message of Lamentations – Lamentations 1–5

### Engage

No one can deny the constant barrage of challenges we face in life. Our trials range from passing annoyances to paralyzing anguish. Ignoring pain or suppressing trauma may temporarily bring distraction but cannot offer the relief we desire. We are helped to remember God’s infinite knowledge of everything about us. He knows how we think, what we feel, and how best to help us. **God completely understands what we see dimly but feel intensely.** He is not surprised by our emotions or repelled by our neediness. God sees our hardships. He hears our cries and knows when life hurts. We cannot measure God’s faithfulness and goodness by the circumstances that cause us grief.

Lamentations records the violent throbs of an aching heart. For many valid reasons, scholars believe the prophet Jeremiah penned these words. He expressed his deep anguish over the unspeakable trauma of Babylon’s conquest of Jerusalem. He did not hold back or sugarcoat the pain. Jeremiah knew God would hear and respond to his broken heart. **God compassionately hears the anguished cries of His suffering people.** This tear-stained book helps us know how to acknowledge our pain to a loving, ever-listening God.

## The Need to Lament

### The Context of Lamentations

**Lamentations records a series of poems mourning the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of God’s people.** Jerusalem’s significance to the Israelites within past and future redemptive history cannot be overemphasized. The city of David represented the center of Israel’s worship and the pinnacle of God’s promises to His people.<sup>1</sup> Jerusalem was God’s “chosen city” – the place where He

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1: Promises: 2 Kings 19:31

promised to preserve His presence.<sup>2</sup> In 586 B.C., Babylon invaded the royal city, burned the temple, and took its citizens into exile. Though God's prophets foretold this attack as an act of His judgment, the horrific destruction and intense cruelty experienced by God's people left them in utter chaos. This book captures the confusion of a disheartened people.

## The Author of Lamentations

**Lamentations does not name its author, but scholarly tradition points to Jeremiah as the prophet who penned the book.** Jeremiah predicted Jerusalem's destruction, and he lived through the desolation. Emotive expressions reveal Jeremiah's passion for God's people and his painful life experiences. Other Scripture passages declare God's instructions for Jeremiah to record words of lament for His people.<sup>3</sup> The subject matter and writing style within Lamentations parallel the book of Jeremiah.<sup>4</sup> Details regarding Jerusalem's siege alongside the people's suffering line up with Jeremiah's experience of Babylon's devastating onslaught. For the sake of our study, we will assume Jeremiah to be the author of Lamentations.

## The Biblical Precedent for Expressing Lament

**The Bible encourages hurting people to verbalize hard questions and express profound grief.** Job mourned his overwhelming losses.<sup>5</sup> Lament poems abound in the book of Psalms, where as many as one-third of all the Psalms are laments.<sup>6</sup> Many other Scripture passages similarly reflect the human need to lament life's struggles.<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah's heartfelt cries capture not only human woe, but also express certain hope in God despite the difficulties voiced.

Jesus Himself spoke human words to express profound sorrow. While He walked on earth as a sinless man, Jesus witnessed sin's devastation. He wept beside a friend's grave.<sup>8</sup> He suffered rejection and betrayal. Matthew 23:37-39 records Jesus' sorrowful lament over Jerusalem and the people who spurned His nurturing love. **Like Jeremiah, Jesus expressed His deep emotional pain in spoken words.** The Son of God who came to earth to bear our grief and carry our sorrows<sup>9</sup> understands turmoil within the human spirit.

## The Human Experience That Produces Lament

**Examples from Scripture help us recognize our genuine need to express confusion and the longings of our hearts directly to God.** Loss, pain, and death are regular fare on planet Earth. God does not guarantee even faithful believers a smooth path through or an easy exit from this life. Expression of lament varies among cultures. However, refusal to think and talk about the groanings that arise within us often hurts us.

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2: **God's chosen city:** 1 Kings 9:3; 11:13, 32; 2 Kings 21:4, 7; 1 Chronicles 23:25; 2 Chronicles 6:6; 36:15; Ezra 1:3; 7:15; Psalms 102:21-22; 135:21

3: **Jeremiah's call to lament:** 2 Chronicles 35:25; Jeremiah 7:29; 15:15-18; 18:19-23

4: **Similarities to the book of Jeremiah:** Jeremiah 9:1, 18 with Lamentations 2:11; Jeremiah 30:14 with Lamentations 1:2; and others

5: **Job's lament:** Job 3:3-26; 7:1-21; 10:1-22

6: **Laments in Psalms:** Psalms 3; 10; 63; 69; 74; 79; 120

7: **Other laments:** Genesis 6:6; 1 Samuel 1:9-16; 2 Chronicles 20:12; Jeremiah 12:10-13; Habakkuk 1-2; Mark 14:36; 2 Corinthians 7:10; James 5:1

8: **Jesus wept:** John 11:1-44

9: **Jesus, the grief-bearer:** Isaiah 53:4

# Sin's Sorrowful Impact on This World

## The Doctrine of Suffering

**Jeremiah's agonizing expressions recorded in Lamentations remind us that sorrows abound in this world.** People all around us face physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual pain. Life's natural course involves losing people and things we love. Our human fortitude wanes. Our comfort zones are constantly tested. At times, we feel paralyzed with anguish. Jeremiah personally experienced the consequences of Judah's unrepentant rebellion against God. The heavyhearted prophet expressed the raw physical and emotional pain he felt when God's judgment fell on his beloved city, Jerusalem.

Sin's curse rendered this world a trouble-filled place. While not all suffering directly results from personal sin, the general brokenness of humanity, creation, and society brings hardship in many forms. Certainly, hope abounds for those who seek refuge in God. In gracious and sacrificial love, God sent His Son to break sin's curse and offer salvation to all who trust in Christ. **Believers journey through life simultaneously experiencing pain and embracing hope.** God does not exempt His children from this world's grief but provides the strength to persevere through life's most unexplainable and hurtful moments.

We forfeit an opportunity to grow when we fail to acknowledge and express the reality of personal suffering. Every hard situation offers an opportunity to intentionally yield our sorrow to God's redemptive power. When we suppress our agony under a superficial smile, we fail to reap the deeper benefits God intends for us. **Acknowledging the depth of our internal and external struggles helps us recognize our overwhelming need for God's intervention and sustaining grace.**

God longs for needy people to seek Him for shelter. **God hears and understands our deepest groanings – even pain our words cannot fully express.** Suffering life's difficulties tenderizes our hearts and exposes our need for God. Like Jeremiah, we should learn to cry out to God – our Creator and Sustainer. Jesus Himself experienced the most intense human suffering possible to free us from the paralyzing grip of sin's damage. We should never hesitate to pour out our most honest grievances to God. Trusting God does not require ignoring anguish. What pain or loss should you honestly lament? How will you trust God with your current anguish?

**As we stand firmly on sound theology concerning God and His ways, honest expression of profound anguish and confusion proves healthy.** Putting deep pain into human words acknowledges our inner turmoil while expressing the buried churning we cannot dismiss. God is not shocked or repelled by your sincere expression of doubt, questions, or unmet expectations. He hears and responds to our sorrowful cries. God tenderly inclines His heart to the needy and hurting. There is no pain in this life that God does not see and understand. Our tears do not turn God away; rather, they draw Him near to us.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>: Tears: Psalm 34:18

Our travail on earth causes us to long for heaven. As we experience life's catastrophes, we are compelled to seek comfort and restoration that only God can provide. **Believers cry out honestly to God – but not without hope.** God's promises meet the pangs of our anguished hearts. We can approach God seeking to trust Him when struggling to do so. While ultimate deliverance can seem like a distant promise, God gives sustaining grace for every trial. Like Jeremiah and the psalmists, expressing the reality of both pain and hope offers a path to trust God in practical ways.

## The Practical Benefits of Studying Lamentations

Lamentations provides helpful insights for God's people across all ages. Lingering to reflect on heartache and loss does not always appeal to hurting people. Lamentations may seem like a neglected book within the Bible. Perhaps the raw grief and suffering the book expresses challenges those who want only happy news. **The book of Lamentations offers needed help to us – both in processing our own lives and coming alongside others in pain.** In times like ours, we need a book like this.

This book helps us learn how to honestly cry out to God. God knows, and we cannot ignore, the catastrophic realities we face. We should rightfully express indignation when we observe sin's carnage in our world and people's lives. God made us as emotional beings. **Expressing and processing what we feel helps align our thinking with what God has declared as truth.** Without crying out to God, how can we find any sense of peace in a world so impacted by human suffering?

**The book of Lamentations, with its bitter agony and beams of hope, stands within the canon of Scripture for a distinct purpose ordained by God.** We approach this book expecting God to teach us something of who we are and who He is. Believers, empowered and indwelt by God's own Spirit, face troubles in this life. God equips His children to face difficulties honestly and in His power. Lamentations serves as a helpful guide for grieving people.

## The Message of Lamentations – Lamentations 1–5

### An Orderly Response to Disordered Circumstances

The land and people of Judah experienced the chaotic disruption of everything that felt normal, comfortable, and important. Marauding Babylonian troops destroyed their homeland and stole their possessions. The enemy killed and deported their loved ones. Jeremiah stood in the settling dust of his war-torn city and penned poetic words to capture the pain. As humans seeking perspective, we yearn for order when life confuses us. When circumstances spiral out of control, we attempt to control something. Like Jeremiah, we cry out for order. Lamentations is not a rambling account of disjointed emotions. **Jeremiah offered a precisely organized expression of deep anguish.** His orderly approach contrasts with the disarray of a decimated city and disillusioned people.

## The Purposeful Emphasis

Jeremiah chose a specific focus for each of his five poetic expressions.

- **Chapter 1:** The Ruined City of Jerusalem – “She” and “her”
- **Chapter 2:** The Judgment Brought by God – “He”
- **Chapter 3:** Jeremiah’s Personal Grief and Hope – “I,” “me,” and “my”
- **Chapter 4:** The People’s Loss – “They” and “their”
- **Chapter 5:** The People’s Prayer in Light of the Pain – “We” and “us”

## The Structured Elaboration

Lamentations divides into five chapters, each presenting a poem with a distinct emphasis. **Jeremiah constructed each of the first four chapters as an acrostic built on the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.** Chapters 1, 2, and 4 each have 22 verses – one verse per letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The longest poem in chapter 3 contains 66 verses – 3 verses for each letter. This chapter expands Jeremiah’s tear-stained words to include promises of hope. Chapter 5 also contains 22 verses but does not follow the acrostic pattern of the other chapters.

Why would Jeremiah write his lament in this way? He chose an intentional format to memorialize Israel’s grief. Certainly, such a pattern would facilitate expression and aid memory. But perhaps most dramatically, the structure communicated Jeremiah’s desire to express his grief comprehensively – from “A to Z.” We often experience emotions that are difficult to explain. Sometimes we express ourselves from every angle with hopes of capturing something meaningful. **Jeremiah’s purposeful structure reflects the width and breadth of the suffering he experienced and wanted to explain.**

## The Comprehensive Expressions

**Jeremiah also utilized multiple literary devices to add meaning and color to his words.** We read deeply descriptive prose and poetry. He employed personification in chapter 1, portraying Judah as a bereft widow. In chapter 4, Jeremiah used the technique of comparison and contrast to point out the stark change of circumstances the people faced. With skill and purpose, he changed the pronouns from poem to poem to give each one a unique emphasis. His well-chosen words reflect language from other parts of the Old Testament. Jeremiah’s desire to fully express the burden in his heart shines clearly throughout this book.

## The Poignant Emotions

The rich expression of deep emotion rises through and beyond Jeremiah’s literary techniques. His extreme sorrow resonates throughout this mournful book. **Jeremiah articulated the desperation he felt on behalf of God’s people in raw and heartrending terms.** His honest expression of human grief and struggle represents a healthy response to the trouble we face in this world.

# Five Sorrowful Songs Lamenting Jerusalem's Fall – 1–5

## Jerusalem's Utter Desolation – 1

From where we stand today, we cannot fully appreciate the loss experienced by God's people when Jerusalem fell. **Chapter 1 personifies the ruined city of Jerusalem as a widow who lost everything she lived for.** Jeremiah's descriptive account mirrors a funeral dirge. He processed the "widow city's" ruin as he recounted the graphic details of Jerusalem's demise. The city and temple were burned and ransacked. The people were taken into exile. With no hope for comfort, "Daughter Zion"<sup>11</sup> mourns with weeping and wailing. Jeremiah's description reveals he had witnessed the wreckage himself.<sup>12</sup> Death, starvation, and destruction overtook the beautiful city of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah clearly connected Jerusalem's desolation with her sins. "Jerusalem has sinned greatly and so has become unclean. All who honored her despise her, for they have all see her naked; she herself groans and turns away" (Lamentations 1:8). **Jerusalem's painful loss of beauty, majesty, and treasures came not merely as a military conquest, but by God's hand of righteous judgment.** The chapter ends with a prayer that Jerusalem's conquerors will also face God's judgment.

## Jerusalem's Painful Discipline – 2

**Chapter 2 cements the conclusion that Jerusalem's pain came as the justified expression of the Lord's wrath.** In a "cloud of his anger," God "hurled down the splendor of Israel" (2:1). God's wrath emerges as a theme of this poem. God's righteous anger against sin and its destruction represents the execution of His justice in a timely and purposeful way. God's persistent pleas for repentance demonstrated His patience for people caught in sin's trap. God is slow to anger, but He determines the right time to punish those who refuse to turn to Him.

Jeremiah expressed internal torment over Jerusalem's fate. The mournful heart of God's weeping prophet presents an example of the sorrow we should feel about sin's devastation. **Not only does Jeremiah deeply grieve the painful consequences of Israel's sin, but he also invites the desolate people to call on God.** "Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the LORD. Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint from hunger at every street corner" (2:19).

## Jerusalem's Unquenchable Hope – 3

**Chapter 3 offers the longest and most hope-filled expression in the book.** This poem erupts from the heart of a "man who has seen affliction" (3:1), capturing Jeremiah's personal sorrow on behalf of the people he loved and served. His vivid descriptions of his personal anguish, physical torment, and emotional bitterness put agonizing words around his brutal pain. His skin and bones bear the weight of suffering. Emotionally, Jeremiah feels consumed by paralyzing agony – walled in by intense grief. He feels attacked, pierced, and mangled by the enemies.

People process grief and loss in various ways. Rarely do we take time to put our deepest pain into excruciating words. **While Jeremiah's expressions are challenging to read, he captured the valleys**

11: Daughter Zion: Lamentations 1:6

12: Details of Jerusalem's defeat: Lamentations 1:7, 10-11, 13, 15, 18-20

**of the human spirit in amazing language.** The reality of human pain cannot be ignored. Whether or not we find words to express what we experience, recognizing the depths of our struggles helps us turn to God. When we acknowledge the trauma that numbs our human hearts, we stand ready to turn to God – our only source of hope.

Jeremiah recognized that God’s promise to bring judgment had come to fruition. As he pondered that reality, his thoughts turned to another certainty. God also promised to faithfully uphold His covenant promises. **The exercise of God’s promised judgment brought reassuring hope that rose from Jerusalem’s smoky ruins.** Because God remains unchangeably faithful, His purposes prevail over people’s desperation.

**Jeremiah’s downcast heart now intentionally focused on God Himself, not his troubling circumstances.** His powerful recitation of truth about God continues to help us today. “Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, ‘The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him’” (3:22-24). How can we understand the depths of God’s love? Jeremiah burst into praise for God’s inestimable faithfulness to unfaithful people. For God’s children, every new day dawns with a fresh supply of God’s endless mercies. This is good news for sinners who remain in constant need of God’s redeeming grace.

God’s actions always reflect the consistency of His character. God does not delight in afflicting people. “For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone” (3:33). **Israel received the justice their sins deserved, but God’s compassionate heart yearned to restore them to Himself.**<sup>13</sup>

A glimmer of hope stands tall at the center of this book lamenting apparent ruin. The remainder of chapter 3 again reflects God’s just recompense on Israel’s sins. **With a faith-filled grip on God and His sovereignty, Jeremiah entrusted his sorrowful circumstances to God alone.** The chaos we feel and the uncertainty we experience can firmly rest within the almighty hands of God. God longs for His children to pursue and cling to Him, even as they live amid this world’s rubble.

## Jerusalem’s Suffering People – 4

**Lamentations 4 presents the distressing plight of Jerusalem’s citizens under the lengthy Babylonian siege.** Jeremiah contrasted the people’s circumstances at the height of the city’s splendor with the terrible suffering they were now experiencing. Precious children once pampered now starved. Princes who lavishly dressed in splendor now died and wasted away. Formerly compassionate women now cooked and ate their own children due to the severe famine. Judah’s king, descended from the royal line of David, was taken captive. Deep suffering resulted because the people refused to turn to God.

## Prayer for God’s Mercy – 5

**A passionate prayer on behalf of God’s people closes Jeremiah’s lament.** He asked God to remember their suffering and acknowledge their weariness. Jeremiah lamented the awful trauma the people experienced and called on God to restore them as His people. After pages of woeful words, Jeremiah declared, “You, LORD, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation.

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<sup>13</sup>: God’s desire to restore; Jeremiah 32:41; Hosea 11:8-9

Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long? Restore us to yourself, LORD, that we may return; renew our days as of old (5:19-21).”

**Jeremiah acknowledged both the awfulness of what he faced and the certainty of who God is.** He cried out for God to remember His people. And even as that hopeful prayer rose to God, Jeremiah ended this sorrowful book without a happy ending or joyful resolution. In essence he said, “You are God. Remember your forsaken people – unless it is too late.” While we likely wish the book ended with a “happily ever after” conclusion, Jeremiah signs off with the tension unresolved – waiting for what God had declared but what was not yet in view. Scripture tells the rest of the story – God’s plan to restore Israel and the world through His Son.

In this life, we will never have the complete picture of God’s greater eternal work. Like Jeremiah, there will be moments when we experience unresolved pain. In confusion or uncertainty, we will cry out in anguish to the Lord. Remembering God’s certain character and promises offers needed perspective. Most often, we are called to wait for complete resolution. True faith holds on to what God has promised despite circumstances. **God compassionately hears the anguished cries of His suffering people.** Sin’s damage is real, but so is God’s faithfulness.

## Take to Heart

### Hold Fast

**Lamentations records five strategically organized lament poems expressing comprehensive grief over Jerusalem’s fall and the exile of God’s people.** The grievous losses and traumatic suffering came as an act of God’s judgment because God’s people refused to forsake their sin and turn to Him. With literary precision, the poet we assume to be Jeremiah expressed Israel’s grief with raw honesty. While most of the book spells out incredible pain, a beacon of hope rises in the middle of the book, chapter 3. The God who brought the judgment He promised will also fulfill every promise He has made to restore His people. Jeremiah lauded the depths of God’s love and the certainty of His faithfulness.

Lamentations records the actual grief of Jeremiah, Jerusalem, and Judah. **The book also provides an example of how God’s people should pour out their own anguish to God.** The trouble and suffering in this life cannot be denied and should not be suppressed. God knows and understands every pang we feel as we walk on earth. He stands ready to hear our cries and carry our sorrows.

### Apply It

God does not guarantee a pain-free life to anyone. Momentary hardship is one thing, but intense and prolonged suffering deeply tests our faith. Jeremiah witnessed and experienced cruelty and destruction that defied description. Nevertheless, he did his best to put heartfelt words around his pain. With profuse and descriptive words, he poured out his heart to God. Have you ever described your deepest hurts – from “A to Z” – to God? **We do not tell God anything He does not already know, but we gain perspective as we articulate our agony to God.** We sometimes tell people we are “fine” – even when we are not. Today you are most likely facing a challenge that you cannot solve or understand. Something in your life feels chaotic and out of control. God knows the ways you are

not “fine” – so tell Him about it! He knows and listens. He understands and cares. God has purposes beyond your pain. What do you need to pour out to God?

Jeremiah’s passionate declaration of God’s love and faithfulness exploded in the middle of his record of sadness. He recited and embraced truth about God despite what he felt. **Jeremiah relished God’s freshly delivered expressions of faithfulness that met every new day, no matter how sad or defeated he felt.** He acknowledged that he only remained standing and breathing because of God’s faithfulness and love. How can you shift your focus from your desperation to the truth of God’s power, love, and faithfulness? Listen to music that praises God.<sup>14</sup> Memorize Scripture.<sup>15</sup> Pray and ask God to align your thinking to His.<sup>16</sup> Filter what you see and feel through what you know is true about God and His ways.<sup>17</sup> By the power of God’s Spirit, take your anxious thoughts captive.<sup>18</sup> Give a friend in Christ the space to come alongside you to encourage you.<sup>19</sup> Faith involves trusting God in intentional ways about specific circumstances. How will you deliberately set your gaze on God, not your circumstances?

Jeremiah expressed his pain, declared God’s faithfulness, and cried out for God’s mercy. However, he did not end his book with a superficial smile or a “happily ever after” moment. At the end of his honest confession, Jeremiah embraced the tension of unresolved conflict. **Our observations and experiences do not reveal the ultimate victory God promises.** God knows we gain much by waiting on Him when our gas tank is empty, our strength is failing, and our answers are few. We prefer resolution, but God encourages us to trust Him for the final chapter only He will write. What unresolved situation must you entrust to God? Will you believe that God has plans that exceed your limited understanding as you hang on with weary hands and a fainting heart? Hebrews 11:1 tells us that “faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” We cannot muster up obstacle-crushing faith. We bring only confusion and weakness, and God supplies the rest. Will you join Jeremiah in being humble, honest, and yet hopeful? God can be trusted with everything you cannot understand or control.

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14: **Singing to God:** Colossians 3:16

15: **Hiding God’s Word in our hearts:** Psalm 119:11

16: **Praying:** 1 Peter 5:6-11

17: **Think on truth:** Philippians 4:8

18: **Captive thoughts:** 2 Corinthians 10:5

19: **Encouragement:** Hebrews 10:24-25



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