

What's the Point...of Jeremiah?

Mark Garner

Jeremiah lived during the final years of Judah, when due to the Judeans' idolatry and hardened hearts, God sent the Babylonians to discipline them in the hope some of the Judeans would turn to him. Jeremiah is usually remembered for his gloomy prophecies, yet even in these we can also see God's desire to give us hope and grace, in the midst of this world's fears and sorrows.

Ask Where The Good Way Is (Overview Of Jeremiah 1-28)

The prophet often forewarns the Judeans about what they would face if they don't turn to God; at other times he reassures them that, even if Judea itself falls and they are exiled, God will restore them when they seek him in truth. Jeremiah had to proclaim a foreboding message, yet it was also a message of God's hope. He regularly reminds them, and us, to seek God's guidance ("ask where the good way is") so that we may find rest for our souls (Jeremiah 1-6).

Our Heavenly Father calls us also not to trust in human abilities or in outward appearances (Jeremiah 7-17). As the Judeans are putting false hope in the wrong things, Jeremiah reminds us that our only 'boast' is in God, his kindness to us, and his desire to give us grace and understanding. Our own idols today are also unable to do satisfy our deepest needs.

The familiar image of the potter and the pots introduces the next section, as God reminds us that his ways are higher than ours (Jeremiah 18-28). To have the spiritual benefits of being close with God, he calls us to give him a soft heart, and let him mold us instead of molding ourselves.

Hope & A Future (Overview Of Jeremiah 29-52)

As the Judeans harden their hearts, God gives them chance after chance to turn back to him; when Jerusalem's fall becomes inevitable, we also see God's promises of redemption and restoration. The next section (Jeremiah 29-33) is sometimes called "the book of consolation", since in these chapters we can see the heart of God, and they also help us understand better the rest of Jeremiah.

At this point, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon has raided Jerusalem and has taken many captives into exile*. So Jeremiah writes to reassure the exiles, encouraging them to live faithfully in Babylon; we also see the prophecy that after seventy years in Babylon, they would have the chance to return (29:10, see also 25:11-12, and Daniel 9:2). God's desire is to give them hope and the future of returning to him, and God promises to make a New Covenant (31:31-34). Jesus has brought us this better covenant, including personal closeness with God and the promise of eternal life.

* Nebuchadnezzar's first raid was in 606 BC (when Daniel was taken captive), and his second raid was in 597 BC (when Ezekiel was taken captive). The Babylonians soon invaded Judah a third time in 586 BC, when they destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and took the largest group of captives.

Even in the final years of Judah and the fall of Jerusalem, there are more chances for the hard-hearted as well as mercy for the faithful (Jeremiah 34-45). Human nature is weak, yet our Redeemer is strong, gracious, and understanding (Jeremiah 46-52). Our Heavenly Father's promise to "restore their fortunes" takes a deeper, more spiritual form, through the message of Jesus. The prophet reminds us all to "ask the way to Zion," to seek God with a humble and contrite heart, so he may give us redemption, hope, and rest for our souls (50:33-34).

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What's the Point...of Jeremiah? **Caleb Dillinger**

Jeremiah earned the nickname “the weeping prophet” for his story, told in this book attributed to his name, and a short book we’ll discuss next called Lamentations. Jeremiah’s story is a tougher story, but as you read his book, you’ll notice it is indeed a blend of prophetic messages and storied events.

Consider the beginning: Jeremiah is a young man, not quite ready to be a speaking mouthpiece for God. He protests (chapter 1 verse 6), but the Lord assures him he will be with him (verses 7-8).

The next several chapters reflect Jeremiah preaching to Israel, declaring their sin, but also urging them to repentance to find forgiveness. Jeremiah practically begs the people of Israel to stop sin, even going so far as to mention it would help people, not just themselves. But there is no indication they repent, so by chapter 12 Jeremiah cries out to God in frustration, asking why bad people like the Israelites aren’t punished, and good people (like himself) suffer. God responds: “after I have plucked them up, I will again have compassion on them, and I will bring them again each to his heritage and each to his land” (Jeremiah 12:15). God doesn’t rush to judgment and punishment because he is giving people time to repent, and those who do repent and are faithful, will be protected at the end of time.

While that’s all well and good, Jeremiah must still live his faithful life on earth. And while he does, he ends up being physically beaten, receiving death threats, being banned from worship in the temple (since it was corrupt and he preached against corruption), being thrown in jail, and even being tossed in a cistern to be left to starve to death (God uses other faithful people to save him). At the end of all of Jeremiah’s preaching, Jerusalem, God’s holy city, falls to attack and invasion because of their lack of faith. As you read through Jeremiah, there aren’t that many bright spots. Hence the name, “weeping prophet”.

So, what’s the point of reading Jeremiah today? First, it reminds the faithful that no matter the evil of others, God will protect the faithful and take them home to eternity. Second, it reminds those who feel insignificant that God can and will use them to his glory if they trust him. Third, Jeremiah reminds the faithful that they can endure all things through faith in God, even significant physical attacks. That’s the point of reading something as heavy as Jeremiah. You will see God at work, you will hear God’s compassion, and you witness faithfulness on display.