

Jeremiah

Summary

Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in obedience to all I command you, that it may go well with you. But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward (Jeremiah 7:23-24). Jeremiah's prophecy is summed up in this key theme - a strong call to repentance and obedience. The time of Jeremiah's prophesying was a turbulent one in the Middle East with Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon all struggling for regional domination with Judah caught in the crossfire. Thus, the book can be summarized by three distinct segments of Jeremiah's ministry: (1) 627-605 BC when Judah was threatened by Assyria and Egypt, (2) 605-586 BC when Judah (and Egypt and Assyria) were besieged by Babylon, and (3) 586-580 BC when Jeremiah ministered in both Jerusalem and Egypt after Judah's downfall and Babylonian captivity. Unfortunately, the book is not laid out chronologically and is more a collection of his prophecies, rather than a chronologically-arranged historical narrative. Despite the many pleadings and prophecies of Jeremiah, the people of Judah ignored the truth of his message, leading to their captivity and enslavement for nearly seventy years to a rising foreign power. Jeremiah was literally weeping with tears of compassion over their wayward stubbornness in ignoring his call to repent. For this reason, you may often hear Jeremiah referred to as the "weeping" prophet.

Author

The author of this book is the prophet himself - Jeremiah. Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah the priest and was born and raised in Anathoth, a small village about two miles northeast of Jerusalem. His close proximity to Jerusalem allowed him to be well acquainted with life in and around the city.

Date

The book was written during Jeremiah's ministry as a prophet from 626-586 B.C.

Primary Characters

Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1-52)

King Josiah (Jeremiah 3, 22, 25-27, 35-37)

Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 22, 24, 26, 35-37, 52)

Zedekiah (Jeremiah 21, 24, 27-29, 32, 34, 37-39, 51-52)

King Nebuchadnezzar II (Jeremiah 22, 24-25, 27-29, 32, 34, 37-39, 46, 50-52)

Historical Moments

Jeremiah's Call to Ministry (Jeremiah 1)

Jeremiah Prophesies the Babylonian Exile (Jeremiah 25)

The New Covenant (Jeremiah 31)

Jeremiah Taken to Egypt (Jeremiah 43)

The Fall of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 39, 52)

Major Theological Themes

God Patiently Calls His People to a Life of Repentance and Obedience - Jeremiah passionately and persistently called the people of Judah to repent and obey God's commands so that the loving relationship He desired with them could be fully restored. This forms the major theological theme of this book.

If a Call to Obedience Is Ignored, God Disciplines Those Whom He Loves - Despite Jeremiah's repeated warnings, the people failed to repent. God, as a loving act of discipline, allowed His people to be taken captive for a season in order to reflect on their waywardness and return to Him.

Our God Is a Covenant God Who Desires an Eternal Loving Relationship with All People - God allowed His people to be taken captive for their repeated failure to keep His original covenant. God, in His gracious loving kindness, left a remnant of His people behind to stand guard over His holy city, Jerusalem. This paved the way for a new covenant by which all peoples of all nations could enter into an eternal relationship with God, through the coming Messiah.

Lessons Learned from Jeremiah

God Is Loving, but Desires Our Obedience to His Word - Just as in the days of Jeremiah, God still calls His people to repentance, obedience, and relationship with Him. The world we live in paints a picture of love as something that we “feel.” This picture works fine until we don't “feel like it” anymore. Unfortunately, the tragic result of this errant definition is families and lives that are destroyed by abandonment, infidelity, addictions, and many other social ills. While Jesus was certainly compassionate, tender, and even emotional, He gave us a new definition of love (John 13:34), one based on sacrifice, obedience, and service (John 15:12-14). Thus, as you read through Jeremiah's prophecy, you are discouraged from seeing it as a set of rules and judgments given to rob us of our joy, but rather as a wake-up call to restore our joy through the practice of biblical love that has its basis in obedience to the firm truth of God's Word.

Establishing the New Covenant - Jesus Christ came to earth to establish a new covenant (Jeremiah 31) so that all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, birthright, or religious background could enter into an eternal loving relationship with God the Father. Do not miss Jesus in Jeremiah! While it is true that the word “Jesus” does not appear, Jeremiah clearly foretells of a coming king who would reign with wisdom, justice, and righteousness (Jeremiah 23:5,6) over His flock. While this prophecy is written to Judah and its people, the New Testament apostle Paul makes it clear that when we belong to Christ, we have equal right to citizenship in this coming Kingdom as *heirs according to the promise* (Galatians 3:29).

Truth Is Not Always Popular - While Jeremiah is called the “weeping” prophet, he should be more appropriately called the “steadfast prophet” for his consistent forty-year-long drumbeat of truth despite considerable personal hardship and virtually no response from those to whom he proclaimed this truth. Jeremiah's example is a call to steadfastness in our own lives. Do we reach out to others with love and the truth with this type of steadfastness, even when it isn't popular? We should pray for others in the way Jesus prayed for His disciples and for us: *sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth* (John 17:17).