

Jeremiah

As a prophet, Jeremiah nor his message were ever loved or accepted during his lifetime. Up to the end he was treated with contempt and vitriol from his fellow Judeans. Yet, he pressed on in faith. He never gave up. He persevered and endured.

In this endurance, we can learn a valuable lesson from Jeremiah. God honors those who persevere in faith and accomplish the task he has given them. Most people do not possess this type of endurance. They lack the long-term commitment, determination, and willingness that are necessary to stick with a task against all odds. They are swayed by the majority opinion and the difficulty of their tasks. As a result, they fall away and fail to receive God's blessing for their faithfulness.

Who Was Jeremiah?

Not only did Jeremiah endure, he also wept over the sins of his people and their rejection of God's message of judgment and grace, a message which he proclaimed during the reigns of Judah's last five kings from 627-586 BC¹. His heart was torn because, as a priest from Anathoth (1:1), he wanted nothing more than to see God's people repent from their sins and turn to him in faith. Their repentance would have saved them from the coming destruction of God's judgment and simultaneously brought pleasure to God. Instead, they remained cemented in their unfaithfulness and sin. Jeremiah wept over their hardness of heart, and thus became known as the weeping prophet.

A Simple Blueprint

Jeremiah's prophecy can be broken down simply into two major parts: chapters 1-45 and chapters 46-52. The following outline helps us understand the flow of thought in these two major sections.

- I. God's Judgment on Judah (1:1-45:5).
 - a. The Call of Jeremiah.
 - b. Jeremiah condemns Judah for her sins.
 - c. Jeremiah prophesies Destruction.
 - d. Jeremiah accuses Judah's leaders.
 - e. Restoration is promised.
 - f. God's promised judgment arrives.

- II. God's Judgment on the Nations (46:1-52:34).
 - a. Prophecies about foreign nations.
 - b. The fall of Jerusalem.

Five Major Lessons from 5 Key Passages

Perhaps our greatest challenge to reading and interpreting Jeremiah properly is the struggle to find a cohesive and overarching theme through which we can filter what we read. The editors of the

¹ The kings were: Josiah (640-609), Jehoahaz (609), Jehoiakim (609-598), Jehoiachin (598-597), and Zedkiah (597-586).

English Standard Version Study Bible have helpfully suggested that we think of Jeremiah as a prophet who “exhibits many great themes that stress God’s judgment on covenant infidelity and worldwide sin, as well as God’s determination to restore an international people through the establishing of a new covenant.”² I think we can point to five major lessons from five different passages to support this thematic premise. They are:

1. Jeremiah 1:4-10 – Jeremiah’s call into prophetic ministry gives us wonderful insight into just how much God cares for us. He cared for us before anyone knew we existed or even acknowledged our lives. He created us in our mother’s womb. He planned our lives while we were being formed. In short, he cares for us more than we care for ourselves.
2. Jeremiah 17:9-10 – God is the only living sovereign who made the world (10:1-16) and entered into a covenantal relationship with Israel through which he promised blessing to them (2-8:13). He does this by ruling the present and the future (1:4-16; 29:1-10), protecting his chosen ones (1:17-19), saving those who turn to him (12:14-17), and keepig his promise. We, however, are the opposite of him. Our hearts are deceitful above all else, and we are prone to idolatry (10:1-6). This idolatrous tendency is revealed in Israel’s fall away from God. They worshipped idols (2-6), defiled the Temple with an unwillingness to repent (7:1-8:3), and oppressed one another (34:8-16). Yet, God remained faithful to his promises.
3. Jeremiah 29:1-14 – God will redeem his faithful remnant. This is important because it tells us that though God’s people don’t always appear to be sitting in the lap of his gracious blessing and plan, he definitely has a plan to redeem them. But this redemption is only promised to the faithful remnant, i.e.: those who remained faithful to Him while in captivity. He promised to restore them by bringing them back from the land to which he had exiled them. In the present, his promise to ultimately save and redeem the faithful remnant remains the in place.
4. Jeremiah 31:31-34 – God is a covenant making and keeping God. The covenant he made with Israel (Mosaic) was a binding relational agreement between him and the Israelites. It was based on deeds done by God and the promises he made. Israel accepted this covenant by faith in God for the purpose of living for God as his unique people in the world. And, though all the Israelites were included in the covenant, only the faithful received the full benefits of it. They demonstrated their faithfulness through obedience to him. Jeremiah, being one of the faithful, prophesied of a new covenant (which we now know) that God will make with his people through the Messiah. Participants in this covenant will experience partnership with God through personal faith and obedience, as they will have the Word of God ingrained in their hearts by the Holy Spirit.
5. Jeremiah 46-52 – But, the world is not ready for the new covenant at the end of the prophecy. So, God has to prepare it through judgment, a judgment that falls on Jerusalem and the nations of the world for sin and wickedness. The nations Jeremiah names are: Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Edom, Damascus, Kedar and Hazor, Elam, Babylon, and Jerusalem. The good news for the Jews and culmination of the prophecy is that the destruction of Babylon means freedom for God’s people!

² *ESV Study Bible* (Crossway, 2008), 1364.