

LifeChange

A NAVPRESS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

*A life-changing
encounter with God's Word*

JEREMIAH & LAMENTATIONS

*As much as we hope to avoid loneliness,
sorrow, and suffering, we must learn how to accept
them when they find us.*

OVER 2.5 MILLION SOLD

LifeChange

A NAVPRESS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

*A life-changing
encounter with God's Word*

JEREMIAH & LAMENTATIONS

*As much as we hope to avoid loneliness,
sorrow, and suffering, we must learn how
to accept them when they find us.*

NAVPRESS 

A NavPress resource published in alliance
with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.



NavPress is the publishing ministry of The Navigators, an international Christian organization and leader in personal spiritual development. NavPress is committed to helping people grow spiritually and enjoy lives of meaning and hope through personal and group resources that are biblically rooted, culturally relevant, and highly practical.

For more information, visit www.NavPress.com.

Jeremiah & Lamentations

Copyright © 2013 by The Navigators

A NavPress resource published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

NAV PRESS and the NAV PRESS logo are registered trademarks of NavPress, The Navigators, Colorado Springs, CO. TYNDALE is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Absence of ® in connection with marks of NavPress or other parties does not indicate an absence of registration of those marks.

Cover photograph of clay pots copyright © Bambuh/Adobe Stock. All rights reserved.

Logo Flower City font copyright © by wubstudio/Creative Market. All rights reserved.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,® *NIV*.® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture verses marked NEB are taken from *The New English Bible*, copyright © 1970, Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press. Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible,® copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. Scripture quotations marked NRSV are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, used by permission, all rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version,® copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NCV are taken from the *New Century Version*,® copyright © 2005 by Thomas Nelson, Inc., used by permission, all rights reserved.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at csresponse@tyndale.com, or call 1-800-323-9400.

ISBN 978-1-61521-765-6

Printed in the United States of America

24 23 22 21 20 19 18
8 7 6 5 4 3 2

CONTENTS

How to Use This Study	5
Introduction—The Book of Jeremiah: Judgment and Hope	11
One—The Prophet’s Calling and Message (Jeremiah 1–4)	17
Two—The Message of Judgment Intensified (Jeremiah 5–10)	29
Three—Dialogues with God (Jeremiah 11–14)	41
Four—Potter and Clay (Jeremiah 15–20)	49
Five—Prophecies Against Judah (Jeremiah 21–24)	61
Six—The Cup of His Wrath (Jeremiah 25–29)	69
Seven—From Sorrow to Hope (Jeremiah 30–33)	79
Eight—Under Siege (Jeremiah 34–38)	91
Nine—Jerusalem’s Fall, and Afterward (Jeremiah 39–45)	101
Ten—Judgment Against the Nations (Jeremiah 46–49)	113
Eleven—Judgment Against Babylon, and an Epilogue (Jeremiah 50–52)	123
Twelve—A People’s Desolation (The Book of Lamentations)	135
Study Aids	151

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Although the LIFECHANGE guides vary with the individual books they explore, they share some common goals:

1. To provide you with a firm foundation of understanding, plus a thirst to return to the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations throughout your life
2. To give you study patterns and skills that help you explore every part of the Bible
3. To offer you historical background, word definitions, and explanation notes to aid your study
4. To help you grasp as a whole the message of Jeremiah and Lamentations
5. To teach you how to let God's Word transform you into Christ's image

As You Begin

This guide includes twelve lessons that will take you chapter by chapter through Jeremiah and Lamentations. Each lesson is designed to take from one to two hours of preparation to complete on your own. To benefit most from this time, here's a good way to begin your work on each lesson:

1. Pray for God's help to keep you mentally alert and spiritually sensitive.
2. Read attentively through the entire passage mentioned in the lesson's title.

(You may want to read the passage from two or more Bible versions — perhaps at least once from a more literal translation such as the New International Version, English Standard Version, New American Standard Bible, or New King James Version, and perhaps once more in a paraphrase such as *The Message* or the New Living Translation.) Do your reading in an environment that's as free as possible from distractions. Allow your mind and heart to meditate on these words you encounter, words that are God's

personal gift to you and to all His people.

After reading the passage, you're ready to dive into the numbered questions for the chapter, which make up the main portion of each lesson. Each of the questions is followed by blank space for writing your answers. This act of writing your answers helps clarify your thinking and stimulates your mental engagement with the passage, as well as your later recall. Use extra paper or a notebook if the space for recording your answers seems too cramped. Continue through the questions in numbered order. If any question seems too difficult or unclear, just skip it and go on to the next.

Most of the questions will direct you back to Jeremiah and Lamentations to look again at a certain portion of the assigned passage for that lesson. At that point be sure to use a more literal Bible translation, rather than a paraphrase.

As you look closer at the passage, it's helpful to approach it in this progression:

Observe. What does the passage actually *say*? Ask God to help you see it clearly. Notice everything that's there.

Interpret. What does the passage *mean*? Ask God to help you understand. And remember that any passage's meaning is fundamentally determined by its *context*. So stay alert to all you'll see about the setting and background of Jeremiah and Lamentations, and keep thinking of these books as a whole while you proceed through them chapter by chapter. You'll be progressively building up your insights and familiarity with what they're all about.

Apply. Keep asking yourself, *How does this truth affect my life?* (Pray for God's help as you examine yourself in light of that truth, and in light of His purpose for each passage.)

Try to consciously follow all three of these approaches as you shape your written answer to each question in the lesson.

The Extras

In addition to the regular numbered questions you see in this guide, each lesson also offers several optional questions or suggestions in the margins. All of these appear under one of three headings:

Optional Application. Try as many of these questions as you can without overcommitting yourself, considering them with prayerful sensitivity to the Lord's guidance.

For Thought and Discussion. Many of these questions address various ethical issues and other biblical principles that lead to a wide range of implications. They are well suited for group discussions.

For Further Study. These often include cross-references to other parts of the Bible that shed light on a topic in the lesson, plus questions that delve deeper into the passage.

(For additional help for more effective Bible study, refer to the “Study Aids” section beginning on page 151.)

Changing Your Life

Don't let your study become an exercise in knowledge alone. Treat the passage as God's Word, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray, “Lord, what do You want me to notice here?” “Father, why is this true?” “Lord, how does my life measure up to this?” Let biblical truth sink into your inner convictions so you'll increasingly be able to act on this truth as a natural way of living.

At times you may want to consider memorizing a certain verse or passage you come across in your study, one that particularly challenges or encourages you. To help with that, write down the words on a card to keep with you, and set aside a few minutes each day to think about the passage. Recite it to yourself repeatedly, always thinking about its meaning. Return to it as often as you can for a brief review. You'll soon find the words coming to mind spontaneously, and they'll begin to affect your motives and actions.

For Group Study

Exploring Scripture together in a group is especially valuable for the encouragement, support, and accountability it provides as you seek to apply God's Word to your life. Together you can listen for God's guidance, pray for each other, help one another resist temptation, and share the spiritual principles you're learning to put into practice. Together you affirm that growing in faith, hope, and love is important, and that *you need each other* in the process.

A group of four to ten people allows for the closest understanding of each other and the richest discussions in Bible study, but you can adapt this guide for other-sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and church classes. Both new and mature Christians will benefit from the guide, regardless of their previous experience in Bible study.

Aim for a positive atmosphere of acceptance, honesty, and openness. In your first meeting, explore candidly everyone's expectations and goals for your time together.

A typical schedule for group study is to take one lesson per week, but feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or omit some questions in a lesson if your preparation or discussion time is limited. (You can always return to this guide later for further study on your own.)

When you come together, you probably won't have time to discuss all the questions in the lesson, so it's helpful to choose ahead of time the ones you want to make sure and cover thoroughly. This is one of the main responsibilities that a group leader typically assumes.

Each lesson in this guide ends with a section called “For the Group.” It

gives advice for that particular lesson on how to focus the discussion, how to apply the lesson to daily life, and so on. Reading each lesson's "For the Group" section ahead of time can help the leader be more effective in guiding the group.

You'll get the greatest benefit from your time together if each group member prepares ahead of time by writing out his or her answers to each question in the lesson. The private reflection and prayer that this preparation can stimulate will be especially important in helping everyone discern how God wants you to apply each lesson to your daily lives.

There are many ways to structure the group meeting, and you may want to vary your routine occasionally to help keep things fresh.

Here are some elements you can consider including as you come together for each lesson:

Pray together. It's good to pause for prayer as you begin your time together.

When you begin with prayer, it's worthwhile and honoring to God to ask especially for His Holy Spirit's guidance of your time together. If you write down each other's prayer requests, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, ask about them at the next meeting, and notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes.

Worship. Some groups like to sing together and worship God with prayers of praise.

Review. You may want to take time to discuss what difference the previous week's lesson has made in your life, as well recall the major emphasis you discovered in the passage for that week.

Read the passage aloud. Once you're ready to focus attention together on the assigned Scripture passage in this week's lesson, read it aloud. (One person could this, or the reading could be shared.)

Open up for lingering questions. Allow time for the group members to mention anything in the passage that they may have particular questions about.

Summarize the passage. Have one or two persons summarize the passage.

Discuss. This will be the heart of your time together and will likely take the biggest portion of your time. Focus on the questions you see as the most important and most helpful. Allow and encourage everyone to be part of the discussion. You may want to take written notes as the discussion proceeds. Ask follow-up questions to sharpen your attention and to deepen your understanding of what you discuss. You may want to give special attention to the questions in the margin under the heading "For Thought and Discussion." Remember that sometimes these can be especially good for discussion, but be prepared for widely different answers and opinions. As you hear each other, keep in mind each other's various backgrounds, personalities, and ways of thinking. You can practice godly discernment without ungodly judgment in your discussion.

Encourage further personal study. You can find more opportunities for exploring this lesson's themes and issues under the marginal heading "For Further Study" throughout the lesson. You can also pursue some of these together, during your group time.

Focus on application. Look especially at the “Optional Application” items listed in the margins throughout the lesson. Keep encouraging one another in the continual work of adjusting our lives to the truths God gives us in Scripture.

Summarize your discoveries. You may want to read aloud through the passage one last time together, using this opportunity to solidify your understanding and appreciation of it and to clarify how the Lord is speaking to you through it.

Look ahead. Glance together at the headings and questions in the next lesson to see what’s coming next.

Give thanks to God. It’s good to end your time together by pausing to express gratitude to God for His Word and for the work of His Spirit in your minds and hearts.

Get to know each other better. In early sessions together, you may want to spend time establishing trust, common ground, a sense of each other’s background, and what each person hopes to gain from the study. This may help you later with honest discussion on how the Bible applies to each of you. Understanding each other better will make it easier to share about personal applications.

Keep these worthy guidelines in mind throughout your time together:

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

(HEBREWS 10:24)

Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

(GALATIANS 6:2)

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

(ROMANS 15:7)

THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Judgment and Hope

By worldly standards, the man Jeremiah “was a miserable failure. For forty years he served as God’s spokesman to Judah; but when Jeremiah spoke, nobody listened. Consistently and passionately he urged them to act, but nobody moved. And he certainly did not attain material success. He was poor and underwent severe deprivation to deliver his prophecies. He was thrown into prison and into a well, and he was taken to Egypt against his will. He was rejected by his neighbors, his family, the false priests and prophets, friends, his audience, and the kings. Throughout his life, Jeremiah stood alone, declaring God’s messages of doom, announcing the new covenant, and weeping over the fate of his beloved country. In the eyes of the world, Jeremiah was not a success.

“But in God’s eyes, Jeremiah was one of the most successful people in all of history. Success, as measured by God, involves obedience and faithfulness. Regardless of opposition and personal cost, Jeremiah courageously and faithfully proclaimed the word of God. He was obedient to his calling.”¹

The Man Jeremiah

Jeremiah was a priest from the city of Anathoth (see Jeremiah 1:1; 11:21-23), in the land of the tribe of Benjamin. Anathoth was located about three miles northeast of Jerusalem, at the site of present-day Anata. Ancient Anathoth “was a walled town of some strength, seated on a broad ridge of hills and overlooking the valley of Jordan and the northern part of the Dead Sea.”²

Jeremiah’s ministry occurred about two centuries after that of Isaiah. He began his ministry in about the year 627 BC, and it continued for at least four decades.

“Jewish tradition says that the Jewish refugees stoned him to death in Egypt, because he criticized their life in exile.”³

“He was the most autobiographical of all the prophets, and we know more about him than any other. . . . Jeremiah’s life—private and public—is openly displayed in his book. His brave actions, his tenderheartedness toward

his coreligionists, his deep emotional and spiritual struggles before God—all these and more are clearly presented. His disappointments and sufferings were undeniably as poignant as those of any other Jewish prophet. . . . His life may be characterized as being one long martyrdom.”⁴

Historical Background

In the history books of the Old Testament, the historical narrative of Jeremiah’s time is given in 2 Kings 21–25 and 2 Chronicles 33–36. The prophets Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Ezekiel were also active around Jeremiah’s time.

“The book of Jeremiah is so filled with historical, biographical, and autobiographical material that his life can be synchronized with dates and known events to a degree unparalleled in the writings of other prophets.”⁵

At the beginning of Jeremiah’s ministry, the sudden decline of Assyrian power in the Middle East, along with the strong and reforming leadership of Judah’s King Josiah, seemed to signal a positive future for God’s people. “But the next generation was destined to experience the most catastrophic reversal of fortune in the nation’s history, leading to ultimate destruction and captivity in 586 BC at the hands of the Neo-Babylonians, who by that time had emerged as the undisputed rulers of the ancient Near East. Into these turbulent and tragic times Jeremiah was called to be God’s spokesman.”⁶

Jeremiah’s lifetime was “one of those tempestuous periods when the world at large goes into convulsion: in this case with Assyria’s empire falling apart, and Egypt fighting in vain to keep Babylon from picking up the pieces—among which, ominously, was little Judah.”⁷

“The book of Jeremiah is a tragedy. . . . It is about the unraveling of a nation. It is the sad story of the decline of God’s people from faith to idolatry to exile.”⁸

Jeremiah’s Message

“Better than anyone else, Jeremiah reveals the spiritual fractures beneath the comfortable surface of daily life.”⁹

“Jeremiah’s message moved through phases that do not correspond exactly to the structure of the book:

- “(a) He called Judah to repent and avoid judgment that would otherwise come.
- “(b) He announced that the time for repentance was past, since judgment was now determined against the people. Judgment is the dominant note in the book, and is understood as the invocation of the final curse of the covenant, namely, loss of the Promised Land (Leviticus 26:31-33; Deuteronomy 28:49-68).
- “(c) The Lord would save His people, or a remnant of them, through the exile. . . . This promise of eventual deliverance was Jeremiah’s answer

to the false prophets who had constantly challenged his message of judgment.

“Jeremiah also had a message of salvation, but only on the other side of judgment. That message is crystallized in the prophecy of the new covenant. The new covenant . . . speaks of the empowerment of God’s people to obey Him. Although it is promised in national terms, it is something new, which the New Testament shows to be fulfilled in the greater ‘Israel of God’ (Galatians 6:16) through Christ.”¹⁰

The Book’s Style

Jeremiah’s “discourses are like the frames of a moving picture; each presents the same characters but in slightly different positions. Indeed, the frames may be somewhat mixed up. Thus, the progression in the book is not straightforward and flowing. The transitions between the frames are abrupt and the repetitions frequent.” Thus, Jeremiah “is sometimes charged with lack of originality, but this is a superficial judgment. The power of his imagination gives new depth and poignancy to the tradition out of which he speaks. His great poetical skill is seen especially in his vivid presentations of human loneliness and suffering. Jeremiah’s poetry attains depths of pure emotion that reach every reader.”¹¹

“Jeremiah’s poetry is lyrical; indeed, some would call him the greatest lyrical poet of all the prophets. His poetry consists of tender elegies, full of pathos. He has been termed ‘the poet of the heart.’ He uses imagery and figures with dramatic effect.”¹²

“The leading characteristic of his style is a certain simplicity. His writing is direct, vivid, unornamented, incisive, and clear. Though not the lofty language of Isaiah, it has its own attractiveness. There is an unstudied truthfulness as the prophet’s most intimate thoughts come pouring out of his anguished soul.

“Prominent in Jeremiah’s style is the note of sorrow. With good reason he has been called the ‘weeping prophet.’ The plight of his people never left him, and he could not respond to it dispassionately. Among his writings are some of the most tender and sympathetic passages in the Bible. When he denounces, he does so with real anguish of soul. A vein of sorrow and sadness runs throughout the book. Touch the work where you will, and it will weep.

“Students of the prophecy observe Jeremiah’s fondness for repetition. . . . This . . . is understandable in view of the sameness of the message God commanded him to preach. The people kept on in the same sins, and Jeremiah did not alter the penalty God required him to pronounce against them. If his style is occasionally monotonous, it is a style that reflects the tragic mood of his message. He leaves his readers with an inescapable impression of the monotony of sin and of its inevitable judgment.”¹³

Jeremiah and Christ

“The life of no other prophet has so close an analogy to the earthly life of our Lord. Jeremiah has been rightly called the most Christlike of the prophets. Certain disciples saw in Jesus of Nazareth the prophet Jeremiah returned to life (Matthew 16:14). Here are some analogies between Jesus and Jeremiah:

“Their historical settings were similar. Jerusalem was about to fall; the temple was soon to be destroyed; religion was buried in formalism; there was need for emphasis on the spiritual life. . . .

“Both had a message for Israel and the world.

“Both were conscious of the world of nature about them and used many figures from it. . . .

“Both were conscious of their call from God.

“Both condemned the commercialism of temple worship and did so in a similar way (Jeremiah 7:11; Matthew 21:13).

“Both were accused of political treason.

“Both were tried, persecuted, and imprisoned.

“Both foretold the destruction of the temple (Jeremiah 7:14; Mark 13:2). . . .

“Both wept over Jerusalem (Jeremiah 9:1; Luke 19:41).

“Both forcefully condemned the priests of their day.

“Both were rejected by their kin (Jeremiah 12:6; John 1:11).

“Both were tenderhearted. . . .

“Both loved Israel deeply. . . .

“Both knew the meaning of loneliness (Jeremiah 15:10; Isaiah 53:3).

“Both enjoyed unusual fellowship with God. One of the unique features of Jeremiah’s life was that he could be so free and honest in communion and conversation with God (Jeremiah 20:7; see John 11:41-42).”¹⁴

Structure of the Book

The book of Jeremiah contains more words than any other book in the Bible.

The arrangement of Jeremiah is thematic rather than strictly chronological. “Subject-matter counts for more than chronology in the arrangement of the book. . . . What he was given to say, rather than when it was said, must be our great concern.”¹⁵

1. *Life Application Bible*, various editions (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988 and later), introduction to Jeremiah.
2. Merrill F. Unger, *New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody, 2006), s.v. “Anathoth.”
3. J. I. Packer, Merrill C. Tenney, and William White Jr., eds., *Nelson’s Illustrated Encyclopedia of Bible Facts* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 581.
4. Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 357–358.
5. Feinberg, 364.
6. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 985.

7. Derek Kidner, *The Message of Jeremiah*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1987), 23.
8. Philip Graham Ryken, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 26.
9. Ryken, 15.
10. *New Geneva Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), introduction to Jeremiah: “Characteristics and Themes.”
11. Packer, Tenney, and White, 346.
12. Feinberg, 368.
13. Feinberg, 367–368.
14. Feinberg, 360–361.
15. Kidner, 29.

JEREMIAH 1-4

The Prophet's Calling and Message

1. For getting the most from Jeremiah, one of the best guidelines is found in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, words Paul wrote with the Old Testament first in view. He said that *all* Scripture is of great benefit to (a) teach us, (b) rebuke us, (c) correct us, and (d) train us in righteousness. Paul added that these Scriptures completely equip the person of God “for every good work.” As you think seriously about those guidelines, in which of these areas do you especially want to experience the usefulness of Jeremiah? Express your desire in a written prayer to God.

2. Near the middle of this book of Jeremiah — in 23:29 — God says that His Word is like fire and like a hammer. He can use the Scriptures to burn away unclean thoughts and desires in our hearts. He can also use Scripture, with hammer-like hardness, to crush and crumble our spiritual hardness. From your study of Jeremiah, how do you most want to see the “fire-and-hammer” power of God’s Word at work in your own life? Again, express this longing in a written prayer to God.

Optional Application: After His resurrection, when Jesus was explaining Old Testament passages to His disciples, He “opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). Ask God to do that kind of work in *your* mind as you study Jeremiah, so you’re released and free to learn everything here He wants you to learn — and so you can become as bold and worshipful and faithful as those early disciples of Jesus were. Express this desire to Him in prayer.

3. Think about these words of Paul to his younger helper Timothy: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). As you study God’s word of truth in Jeremiah, he calls you to be a “worker.” It takes *work* — concentration and perseverance — to fully appropriate God’s blessings for us in this book. Express here your commitment before God to work diligently in this study of Jeremiah.

4. Glance ahead throughout the pages of Jeremiah. If your Bible includes topic headings, note all of these. Allow your eyes also to take in any particular phrases or sentences in the text that catch your attention. What are your overall impressions of this book?

A Moving and Powerful Message

In the first half of this book, Jeremiah “labors to develop the theme of national sinfulness from the statement of the prophet’s credentials to the final judgment. As a unit it forms a somewhat disjointed whole with varying kinds of literary forms interwoven: oracles of hope and doom and autobiographical, biographical, and conversational (dialogue) narrative. . . . Thus he

interweaves and repeats the theme of national sinfulness and coming judgment, often going back over material already presented, as a fugue does in music. The effect is powerful and moving.”¹

5. In one sitting if possible, read attentively through all of Jeremiah 1–4, taking notes and underlining or highlighting as you go. What impresses you overall as the key features and themes of this part of the book?

The word of the LORD came to me, saying . . .
 (1:4). “This verse is the heart of the prophetic experience.”²

6. What do chapters 1–4 reveal most about God’s heart for His people and His relationship with His people?

7. What do these chapters identify most clearly and specifically as Israel’s wrongdoing? What exactly were God’s people most guilty of, and most in need of repentance for?

Optional

Application: In what ways, if any, do you have a share in any sin that's like those which God speaks so strongly against in these opening chapters of Jeremiah? Whatever you identify regarding this, confess it before the Lord.

For Thought and

Discussion: What do you see as the most important thing mentioned about the man Jeremiah in the three-verse opening to this book?

8. In particular, how would you summarize what these chapters teach us about the sin of idolatry?

9. What do these opening chapters of Jeremiah teach us most about repentance, from God's perspective?

10. Verses 2 and 3 of Jeremiah 1 mention the kings under whose reigns Jeremiah lived and ministered. What are the most important things you already know about these kings and their reigns?

"The three kings named here [in 1:2-3], Josiah the reformer, Jehoiakim the tyrant, and Zedekiah the weathercock, touched three extremes of royal character that created changes in the spiritual climate which were fully as violent as those of the political scene."³

In the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah (1:2).

This "was one year after the beginning of that king's reformation movement (2 Chronicles 34:3)."⁴ This time of Jeremiah's call also "coincided approximately with the death of the last great Assyrian ruler, Ashurbanipal, an event

which signaled the disintegration of the Assyrian empire under whose yoke Judah had served for nearly a century. Against the waning power and influence of the Assyrians, Judah asserted its independence under Josiah, and for a time the prospects for a secure national future appeared promising.”⁵

11. As the Lord calls Jeremiah to ministry in 1:4-19, what do you see as the most important things the Lord communicates to Jeremiah—and the things that will be most valuable for him to remember throughout his ministry?

I appoint you . . . to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant (1:10). “The prophet’s job description includes six tasks, and four of them are negative. Two to one, his words to the nations will be words of judgment. . . . This verse is not only Jeremiah’s job description, it is also a helpful plot-summary of his book. He lives in such evil days that judgment will outnumber grace two to one.”⁷

A pot that is boiling . . . tilting toward us from the north (1:13). This “seething cauldron, tilting dangerously as the fire settled, made a terribly appropriate picture of the menace from the north (the old invasion route of Assyria, soon to be that of Babylon); and it remains as apt as ever to the human scene where, from one quarter after another, human aggressiveness lets loose a scalding stream of havoc.”⁸

Get yourself ready! . . . I have made you a fortified city. . . . I am with you and will rescue you (1:17-19). “Jeremiah is given strong encouragement for his hard task, because his message would be neither welcome nor popular with his people. To fulfill his duties, nothing less than utter commitment to God and to his

For Further Study: What do you see as the highlights of the reign of King Josiah (who’s mentioned in Jeremiah 1:2), as you find his reign narrated in 2 Kings 22–23 and 2 Chronicles 34–35? Note especially the reforms Josiah fostered. “There can be little doubt that this national repentance warmed the heart of the young prophet [Jeremiah], and for a time at least he may have actively supported the reformation by speaking on behalf of its ideals (see Jeremiah 11:1-8, which may be derived from this period). . . . The condition of Jeremiah under Josiah was probably the happiest of his career.”⁶

For Thought and Discussion: What truths and principles from Jeremiah's calling (in chapter 1) do you see as especially applicable to Christian preachers and teachers today?

Optional Application: How does Jeremiah's calling relate to your own calling in life — to what God has called you to do? What are the similarities? What are the differences?

strength would suffice. With God, Jeremiah would be invincible. In his darkest hours these words sustained him mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.”⁹

12. How do you especially see God's grace, protection, and provision for Jeremiah coming through in chapter 1?

Worthless (2:5). Their worthlessness involved “exchanging the real for the unreal, the eternal for the ephemeral. ‘Worthlessness’ here is hebel, the ‘vanity’ of Ecclesiastes 1:2, etc.”¹⁰

In 2:1-3, “there is the freshness of spring in the Lord's first words to Israel, recapturing the ardor of young love — that readiness of the beloved to go anywhere, put up with anything, so long as it could be shared with her partners. . . . To begin on such a note was the way to awaken any spark of longing or compunction that might still lie dormant in the hearers (for affection can disarm us where a scolding only rankles). . . . Whatever else was wrong with Israel — and there was no lack of it — the violated marriage was fundamental.”¹¹

Those who deal with the law did not know me; the leaders rebelled against me (2:8). “A holy calling does not make a holy man. The priests of Jeremiah's day were handling the Scriptures, studying the Bible, and teaching God's Word, but they did not know God himself (see John 5:39-40). Their ministry was a dead ritual rather than a living relationship.”¹²

Broken cisterns that cannot hold water (2:13).

“The best cisterns, even those in solid rock, are strangely liable to crack . . . , and if by constant care they are made to hold, yet the water collected from clay roofs or from marly soil has the color of weak soapsuds, the taste of the earth or the stable, is full of worms, and in the hour of greatest need it utterly fails.”¹³

On your clothes is found the lifeblood of the innocent poor (2:34).

“With God dethroned, nothing is unthinkable: not even murder— here quite literally, since the regime of King Manasseh (in whose reign Jeremiah was born) had ‘filled Jerusalem from one end to another with innocent blood’ (2 Kings 21:16; to which we may add the question, What of our own society’s murders of convenience? What is more innocent than an embryo?)”¹⁴

13. What do you see as the particular messianic significance of the promises in Jeremiah 3:14-17?

Return, faithless people . . . for I am your husband (3:14).

“That is the divine call, the free invitation of God to come to him for salvation. It is the free offer of the gospel that is offered to all men, women, and children in Jesus Christ. But notice what the Lord goes on to say.” I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion (3:14). “That is divine election, God’s choice. God’s choosing stands behind God’s calling.”¹⁶

For Further Study:

In Jeremiah 2:21, God speaks of His people as “a choice vine” that He has planted. How is this image of God’s people further developed in the following passages? Psalm 80:8-15; Isaiah 5:1-7; Ezekiel 15:1-8; John 15:1-11.

For Further Study:

As further background on God’s question about divorce in Jeremiah 3:1, what do you learn from the regulations given in Deuteronomy 24:1-4? “This law, which forbade a divorced couple to reunite, was aimed against what would amount to virtually lending one’s partner to another—for if an authoritarian husband could dismiss his wife and have her back when the next man had finished with her, it would degrade not only her but marriage itself and the society that accepted such a practice.”¹⁵

"Now, surprisingly, God presses home the point by a change of tone from judgment to grace. . . . Notice the great vista opened up in verses 15-18. Characteristically, God is not content with short-term answers to a crisis, but looks on to perfection. . . . What is said here of the shepherds (i.e., rulers) and of the ark and the nations reveals the scale of this transformation, with God's people ideally governed (3:15), his earthly throne no longer a mere ark but his entire city (note the astonishing boldness of verse 16); his Jerusalem the rallying point of all nations, now converted; and his divided Israel home and reunited. It brings us right into the era of the new covenant, and indeed to the new heavens and earth and the 'New Jerusalem' of Revelation 21-22, whose 'temple is the Lord God' (Revelation 21:22), and whose open gates admit 'the glory and honor of the nations' (Revelation 21:26).

"If so distant a prospect was worth unveiling to the old Israel, six centuries before Christ, it must be doubly relevant to us who have reached its foothills."¹⁷

14. From chapter 4 of Jeremiah, how would you summarize the warnings given by the Lord to His people?

"The visions come thick and fast in chapter 4, bombarding us with the terrors of invasion."¹⁸

"Jeremiah 4 is a living nightmare of divine judgment. The terrible things that befall Judah for refusing to turn back to God are jumbled all together."¹⁹

Break up your unplowed ground and do not sow among thorns (4:3). "He exhorts the people of Judah to break up their neglected and untilled hearts, which had become as hard as an uncultivated field. . . . The plow of repentance and obedience was needed to remove the outer layer of weeds and thorns that had resulted from idolatry."²⁰

Circumcise your hearts (4:4). "The hard encrustation on their hearts must be cut away. Nothing less than removal of all natural obstacles to the will of God would suffice. Outward ritual must be replaced by inward reality (see Deuteronomy 10:16; Romans 2:28-29)."²¹

I said, "Alas, Sovereign Lord! How completely you have deceived this people . . ." (4:10). "It is the first of many glimpses into his troubled mind; and his surprise at his own vision of verses 5-9 chimes in with the New Testament's dictum that such prophecies came not by the impulse of man but from God (2 Peter 1:20-21)."²²

They know not how to do good (4:22). "Good, in Scripture, is not only plain and simple ('very near,' Deuteronomy 30:14); it has heights and depths which we must be taught even to see (as in, for example, the Sermon on the Mount) and inspired to love and do."²³

"Jeremiah's psalm style is especially evident in his second psalm of lamentation (Jeremiah 4:19-31)."²⁴

For Thought and Discussion: What are your impressions so far of the man Jeremiah? How would you describe his personality and character?

I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty; and at the heavens, and their light was gone (4:23). “While the Genesis story was all expectancy, this is the opposite: an abandonment, a reversion, and a divine unmaking . . . (4:25-26).”²⁵ In 4:23-26, “the striking repetition of ‘I looked’ . . . ties this poem together and underscores its visionary character, as the prophet sees his beloved land in ruins after the Babylonian onslaught. Creation, as it were, has been reversed.”²⁶

I will not destroy it completely. (4:27). Notice how this promise is repeated at 5:10,18 and with particular emphasis at 30:11. This statement “shines very brightly. It is a constant theme, not only here but throughout the prophets. Without it the Old Testament would not have been worth writing, and the New Testament would never have materialized. Its context here [in 4:23-27] of a silent, devastated world makes the point that only God’s ‘Yet . . .’ has rescued or will rescue anything at all from the battlefield that we have made of his creation.”²⁷ Here we see both God’s wrath as well as His mercy—and “both of these . . . reflect his intense commitment to us—both the seriousness with which he takes us and the determination to complete the work of grace that he has begun.”²⁸

15. What would you select as the key verse or passage in Jeremiah 1–4—one that best captures or reflects the dynamics of what these chapters are all about?

16. List any lingering questions you have about Jeremiah 1–4.

For the Group

In your first meeting, it may be helpful to turn to the front of this book and review together the “How to Use This Study” section.

You may want to focus your discussion for lesson 1 especially on the following core biblical concepts, all of which are dealt with extensively in Jeremiah. (These themes will likely reflect what group members have learned in their individual study of this week’s passage—though they’ll also have made discoveries in other areas as well.)

- sin
- judgment
- repentance
- grace
- salvation

The following numbered questions in lesson 1 may stimulate your best and most helpful discussion: 4, 5, 6, 9, 12, 13, 15, and 16.

Look also at the questions in the margins under the heading “For Thought and Discussion.”

1. J. I. Packer, Merrill C. Tenney, and William White Jr., eds., *Nelson’s Illustrated Encyclopedia of Bible Facts* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 346.
2. Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 383.
3. Derek Kidner, *The Message of Jeremiah*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1987), 23–24.
4. Kidner, 29.
5. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 985.
6. Bromiley, 985.
7. Philip Graham Ryken, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: From Sorrow to Hope*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 26.

Optional

Application: On the basis of God’s truth revealed in Jeremiah 1–4, perhaps the Holy Spirit has helped you sense a new and higher reality in your life that God is inviting you to. If this is true for you, express in your own words the reality that you long for, and use it as a springboard for prayer.

8. Kidner, 27.
9. Feinberg, 386.
10. Kidner, 31.
11. Kidner, 30.
12. Ryken, 40.
13. W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book* (New York: Harper, 1886), 287; in Kidner, 32.
14. Kidner, 34.
15. Kidner, 35.
16. Ryken, 55.
17. Kidner, 36–37.
18. Kidner, 39.
19. Ryken, 73.
20. Feinberg, 405.
21. Feinberg, 405.
22. Kidner, 42.
23. Kidner, 42.
24. Packer, Tenney, and White, 346.
25. Kidner, 40.
26. *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), on Jeremiah 4:23-26.
27. Kidner, 43.
28. Kidner, 40–41.