

LAMENTATIONS: JEREMIAH'S JOURNAL OF WOES

STUDY ONE

As the Prophet Laments, We Reflect

Selections from Jeremiah 1

It takes a special person, like Jeremiah, to minister in a treacherous time like the time in which he lived. Even now, during our days, we need special voices to speak forth because many people in our land have lost their heart. They have lost their way. Where is the visionary? Where is the prophet? We need voices who can lift our eyes above our times and show us that there is a sovereign God at work. He knows what He is about.

—Charles R. Swindoll

EVERYONE'S journey will involve seasons of woe. Whether these seasons occur because of our frail bodies, fractured societies, failed decisions, or nature's chaotic forces—woes come in a variety of colors. Some explainable. Others unexplainable.

We all face a great temptation during these seasons of woe. Woes can easily grip our hearts and narrow our minds, and then paralyze us by hurling an unbearable weight of lament upon our shoulders. This fallen world often necessitates our lamenting. Lament is appropriate. Yet only with God's perspective and through God's power can we find hope and direction in our laments.

In this series, we'll discover how to find such supernatural hope and direction as we trace the laments of a prophet whom God raised up during the darkest episode in the history of ancient Israel.

Jeremiah wrote a whole book lamenting the exile of God's people and the destruction of God's city. In doing so, he affirmed the tears produced in our journeys while also pointing our gaze to the Sovereign Lord who providentially rules the world. To begin this series, we examine the remarkable and instructive call of this prophet of God.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

We open the Word of God to seek Christ's presence and glean truth for life. Therefore, we must pray. Just as the Spirit inspired the Word, He also ignites the Word in our hearts so that it produces authentic, life-giving change.

So consider what you wish to gain from your time in this eight-part study on Lamentations. Ask our Father in heaven to bless your time exploring His Message.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

We don't know the year of Jeremiah's birth, but we do know the year of his call: 627 BC during the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign. Jeremiah prophesied for approximately forty-five years, mostly in Jerusalem and some in Egypt after Jerusalem's destruction in 586 BC.

Jeremiah authored the longest book in the Bible which also takes his name. Yes, it has more words than the Psalms—even with ninety-eight fewer chapters! Because similar themes arise in both Jeremiah and Lamentations, take a few minutes to review Pastor Chuck Swindoll's book chart on Jeremiah on the following page.



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Selections from *Jeremiah 1*

JEREMIAH

| | Judah's Sin and Judgment | Prophecies against the Nations | A Sobering Ending |
|---------------------------|--|--|---------------------------|
| | <u>Jeremiah's call</u> <u>Idolatry</u> <u>Corrupt leadership</u> <u>Moral compromise</u> | <u>Exhortations to Judah</u> <u>Promises of restoration (30-33)</u> <u>Fall of Jerusalem and aftermath (39-45)</u> | <u>Jerusalem in ruins</u> |
| | CHAPTERS 1-45 | CHAPTERS 46-51 | CHAPTER 52 |
| Theme | Judgment is coming; repent! | | |
| Key Verses | 7:23-24; 8:11-12, 21; 9:23-24; 31:1-40 | | |
| Christ in Jeremiah | The fountain of living waters (2:13); the righteous Branch, the coming Shepherd, the LORD our righteousness (23:4-6); the New Covenant (31:31); Redeemer (50:34) | | |

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What themes do you see in Jeremiah you hadn't noticed before?

God raised up Jeremiah to give Jerusalem a final warning of the consequences of their rejection of God. Had the people of God in Jerusalem softened their hearts, turned to God, and followed His ways, God would have spared them. But they didn't. Jeremiah heralded warning after warning, yet they stiffened their necks. The city fell. Jeremiah lamented.

After decades of rejection and hardship, Jeremiah recorded his laments for people he loved who lived in a city he loved. God remained with Jeremiah every minute just as He had promised him when He called him . . . just as He promises us when He calls us—even during seasons of woe.



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Observation: The Prophet's Call

Reading—slow, thorough, assiduous reading—just about sums up observation. We tune into the words of the text because the Spirit inspired those words. Do that now with the words that record Jeremiah's call, *Jeremiah 1*. Write down the key subjects addressed in this chapter.

Reluctance to the Call

How did Jeremiah express reluctance to God's call (*Jeremiah 1:6*)? How did God respond to Jeremiah's reluctance (*1:8–9, 17–19*)?

Let me tell you something: we are always inadequate. Everyone God calls is inadequate. In fact, those who think that they are the "end-all, be-all," are those who need a whole lot of discipline before they're going to be called. A great place to begin is at rock bottom. See how the sovereign God replies? "Don't waste your time telling Me what you're not. Don't lose the plan here hiding behind your inadequacies." —Chuck Swindoll



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The Nature of the Call

How did God preview for Jeremiah the nature of his divine call (*Jeremiah 1:10–16*)?

The call of God never involves a life of blanketed ease and five-star comfort. His call will frequently take us through many woes as we voluntarily walk through various kinds of suffering for the welfare of others. But as we walk that path, we receive unique and special blessings unavailable anywhere else. We explore those blessings next.



Interpretation: God's Promises for the Call

Interpretation leads us to explore timeless truths about God by mining them from historical circumstance.¹ Here, we use special resources like Bible dictionaries and commentaries to help us understand the language and times of the author. We recommend Netbible.org as a free, excellent tool to aid your study of God's Word.

When God first spoke to Jeremiah, He uttered words of comfort to inspire Jeremiah's confidence (*Jeremiah 1:5*). Summarize those words below. Describe how the timeless truths in these promises inspire equal comfort and confidence in Jesus' followers today.

God did not pick Jeremiah at random, as if He were blindly picking a number out of a bowl. Back in eternity past, God ordained that Jeremiah would be born and become His prophet. God calls us in a similar way. He did not choose us randomly but by special selection according to His foreknowledge and grace.



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You and I are not random. We were chosen before we were conceived, and we were appointed before we were born to fulfill something very important that God is doing. We step into history, as God has been at work. We're a part of that divine calling. When we realize that, our whole direction of life changes. —Chuck Swindoll

Look at *Jeremiah 1:7–9* and *17–19*. What three things did God tell Jeremiah not to do? What accompanying promises did God give Jeremiah to strengthen Jeremiah so he could obey God? What timeless truths can we draw from those promises for our day?

Those who say yes to God's call access special blessings like a heightened awareness of God's presence, increased resolve from God's power, unique insight into God's will, and added comfort from God's protection. Jeremiah would need all such blessings because of the extreme pain and difficulties that awaited him and would eventually lead him to pen his journal of woes.



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Correlation: An Exile's Perspective

The Israelites did not listen to Jeremiah's warnings from God. They kept the pattern of disobedience which they had established throughout their nation's long history. Eventually, God's patience wore thin. He raised up Babylon to sack the nation.

Psalm 137 gives us a glimpse of the pain experienced by those exiled to Babylon. Read the [psalm](#). Describe the intensity of the pain of their exile. How does it preview our exploration of Jeremiah's Lamentations?

During their long darkness of exile, they had ample time to reflect on the cause of their woe. Some woes we can't explain, but the exiles had reams of scrolls that recorded the warnings against rebellion coupled with the promises that come from obedience and faith. The Jews in Babylon knew the cause of their pain.



Application: Letting Grief Teach Us

The pain of failure often leads us to ponder amid our grief. In his sermon, Pastor Chuck gave two examples of how we reflect when we grieve.

- 1) *When we grieve others' failures, we reflect on the possibilities that might have been.* We ponder things like the joyous celebrations and deep conversations we might've had together if only they'd used the wisdom of God in their decision making.
- 2) *When we grieve our own failures, we regret losing the pleasures we once enjoyed.* The fruit of folly never tastes as good as it promises us.

Let the pain of lament drive you to the feet of Jesus Christ. Often, only through lament can we gain a proper view of the world . . . how life and its joys exist as a vapor, how desperate each person is for the eternal hope and true healing that God offers us freely through His Son. At the height of his pain, Jeremiah experienced how hope can be found in God alone.



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How should you respond to what you learned in God's Word? Do you need to trust God and pursue His call upon your life despite the woes? Do you need to take your laments to the feet of Jesus so you can move forward in life? Think it over. Pray. Record your response below.

Jesus never calls us into difficulties without promising the strength to walk through them or the hope that we'll get past them. As the apostle Paul said:

For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.
(2 Corinthians 4:17–18 NASB)



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for giving me purpose and strength and hope. Death and pain and woe do not have the final word. In each, I will more than conquer through Jesus who loves me, who experienced the worst of woes on my behalf, and who promises me the greatest of victories, eternal life. In His precious name I pray, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To review Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method, visit the website sts.insight.org or grab a *copy* of the book for your library. Chuck also uses the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. It's one of his favorites.

