

Jeremiah and Lamentations

Introduction

The following “Witnessing Christ from the Old Testament” study covers the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations. The LDS resources break Jeremiah’s writings into two sections over two weeks. Rather than cover each section individually, this resource will cover some of the major topics and themes found throughout Jeremiah and Lamentations while providing witnessing applications and **Sharing Personally** ideas for the two books.

Follow the links if you want to look at the LDS resources for the two weeks.

- [Jeremiah 1–3; 7; 16–18; 20](#)
- [Jeremiah 30–33; 36; Lamentations 1; 3](#)

LDS Summary:

At first, Jeremiah didn’t think he would make a good prophet. “Behold, I cannot speak,” he protested when the Lord first called him (Jeremiah 1:6). The Lord reassured him, “I have put my words in thy mouth” (verse 9). Jeremiah felt that he was an inexperienced “child” (verse 6), but the Lord explained that he was actually more prepared than he realized—he had been ordained to this calling even before he was born (see verse 5). So Jeremiah set aside his fears and accepted the call. He warned Jerusalem’s kings and priests that their pretended holiness would not save them from destruction. The “child” who thought he could not speak came to feel God’s word “in [his] heart as a burning fire” and could not be silent (Jeremiah 20:9).

Jeremiah’s story is also our story. God knew us, too, before we were born and prepared us to do His work on the earth. Among other things, that work includes something Jeremiah foresaw: gathering God’s people, one by one, to “bring [them] to Zion” (Jeremiah 3:14). And even if we don’t know exactly what to do or say, we should “be not afraid ...; for I am with thee, saith the Lord” (Jeremiah 1:8, 19).

When the Lord first called Jeremiah to be a prophet, He told him that his mission would be “to root out, and to pull down” (Jeremiah 1:10)—and in Jerusalem, there was plenty of wickedness to root out and pull down. But this was only part of Jeremiah’s mission—he was also called “to build, and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:10). What could be built or planted in the desolate ruins left by Israel’s rebellion? Similarly, when sin or adversity have left our lives in ruins, how can we rebuild and plant again? The answer lies in “the Branch of righteousness” (Jeremiah 33:15), the promised Messiah. The Messiah brings “a new covenant” (Jeremiah 31:31)—one that requires more than a superficial commitment or the outward appearance of devotion. His law must be “in [our] inward parts,” written “in [our] hearts.” That is what it really means for the Lord to “be [our] God” and for us to “be [His] people” (Jeremiah 31:33). It’s a lifelong process, and we will still make mistakes and have cause to mourn from time to time. But when we do, we have this promise from the Lord: “I will turn their mourning into joy” (Jeremiah 31:13).

The summaries, **Conversations Starters**, and **Sharing Personally** sections are based on content from pastors Paul Tripp, Aaron Goetzinger, and Nathan Nass.

The Life and Times of Jeremiah the Prophet

Jeremiah, a priest by birth, was born three miles northeast of Jerusalem in the insignificant village of Anathoth. He began his ministry in 627 B.C. during “the 13th year of the reign of King Josiah,” who was Judah’s last godly king. Although he, like Isaiah before him, initially resisted the call to serve, Jeremiah served until the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. during the reign of less-than-faithful King Zedekiah.

Although Josiah was a godly king, by this time, the people of Judah, for the most part, had hardened themselves against the Lord and his Word. The Lord would punish the nation no longer willing to look aside from their sin. Jeremiah would announce and then witness that punishment. Although their numbers were small, Jeremiah also served as God’s prophet to the remnant who still believed.

Jeremiah’s message was clear. God would soon send another world power to punish Judah for its rebellion. God would also punish Judah’s unbelief by permitting false prophets to deceive the people with a message of peace. Jeremiah, however, saw the truth and faithfully shared it in the face of great persecution.

Jeremiah carried out his approximate 50-year ministry during the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires. It was these world powers that God would use to implement the judgment that his prophet and spokesman pronounced. The book begins with prophecies directed against Israel and Judah (**Jeremiah 2–45**) and concludes with prophecies against the nations around them, including Egypt, Philistia, and Babylon (**Jeremiah 46–51**). The first chapter is introductory, and the final chapter, 52, serves as a historical appendix.

Sin and Judgment in Jeremiah

The following summary of Jeremiah’s sin/grace message from [Pastor L.J. Wendland](#) is helpful.

Jeremiah prophesied during the darkest hours of Judah. Idolatry and heathen abominations flourished among a people that had been God’s peculiar treasure. Even when the people performed sacrifices and ceremonies in the Temple, it was all a dead formalism. False prophets taught precisely the opposite of Jeremiah and gained a following. With this flood of immorality and every kind of injustice, the spiritual condition of Judah had reached a low point that hastened the time of their inevitable doom. God had borne patiently with his people, but his endurance limit had ended. The people wouldn’t listen to God or God’s prophet. Judah would be taken into exile by Babylon. For seventy years, Judah would be held captive. Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed.

Just to get a taste of words that are used to describe Judah’s apostasy and sin, consider the following: “But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols” (**Jeremiah 2:11**). “On your clothes men find the lifeblood of the innocent poor” (**Jeremiah 2:34**). “But you have lived as a prostitute with many lovers” (**Jeremiah 3:1**). “My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children: They have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; They know not how to do good” (**Jeremiah 4:22**). “The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way” (**Jeremiah 5:31**). “As a well pours out its water, so she pours out her wickedness” (**Jeremiah 6:7**). “Each pursues his own course like a horse charging into battle” (**Jeremiah 8:6**). “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil” (**Jeremiah 13:23**). “They greatly love to wander; they do not restrain their feet” (**Jeremiah 14:10**). “Judah’s sin is engraved with an iron tool, inscribed with a flint point on the tablets of their hearts” (**Jeremiah 17:1**).

“Your wound is incurable. Your injury beyond healing. There is no one to plead your cause, no remedy for your sore, no healing for you” (**Jeremiah 30:12, 13**).

From time to time, Jeremiah, the prophet of divine judgment, would be given experiences (object lessons) to symbolize spiritual truths:

- the marred girdle (**Jeremiah 13:1–11**);
- the potter and clay (**Jeremiah 18:1–8**);
- the broken bottle (**Jeremiah 19:1–13**);
- the celibacy of Jeremiah (**Jeremiah 16:1–9**);
- the purchase of a field (**Jeremiah 32:6–44**).

Faithful as Jeremiah was to his assignment, the people remained as stubborn and unrepentant as ever.

Grace in Jeremiah

However, Jeremiah didn’t only carry a message of judgment. He also preached a sermon of grace.

In chapter 3, we hear him proclaiming God’s invitation, “Return, faithless Israel, declares the Lord, I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful,’ declares the Lord” (**Jeremiah 3:12**).

In the opening verses of chapter 23, the gracious God indicates that Israel is a flock that he can’t bear to see ill-shepherded. So he promises, “I myself will gather the remnant of my flock ... and bring them back to their pasture ... I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing” (**Jeremiah 23:1–3**).

In chapter 30, the Lord promises: “Jacob will again have peace and security ... I am with you and will save you ... I will not completely destroy you” (**Jeremiah 31:10, 11**).

There are some select verses in chapter 31 also. Jeremiah prophesied, “The people who survive the sword will find favor in the desert; I will come to give rest to Israel” (**Jeremiah 31:2**). “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (**Jeremiah 31:3**). “So there is hope for your future” (**Jeremiah 31:17**).

In the *Book of Consolation* (30–33), God presents a glorious future for Jeremiah and his people. This is a look beyond God’s judgment to the remnant he would preserve. A new covenant would replace the old. The Savior would come! “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess,’ says the Lord” (**Jeremiah 30:3**). These words apply beyond the Babylonian captivity. And in verse 21, there is a reference to a “Leader” or “Ruler” who will rise out of their midst. Who else can this be but the coming Messiah?

In chapter 31, verses 31–34, God promises a new covenant. This is the covenant that God will establish through Christ.

In chapter 32, Jeremiah is to purchase some land at this unlikely time when he is in prison and the enemy is besieging Jerusalem. Here was a promise of hope. It was all because of the Savior to come. This hope Jeremiah could apply to the people and himself personally.

In chapter 33, verses 15 and 16, we have a similar prophecy to that in 23:5, 6. The Messiah, the “Righteous Branch,” will come. What is true of the Messiah is also true of his followers. They would become righteous children. Here is grace. Here is hope. Nothing is earned or merited.

Likely, Jeremiah didn’t always understand; nevertheless, this hope sustained him in his ministry.

Jeremiah and Mormons

Working through Jeremiah with your Mormon friends will take some effort to help them apply the sin and grace messages to their own lives and hearts. But, much like the people of Jeremiah’s day, Mormons are confident that everything is fine in their lives and that things will work themselves out.

Summary of Lamentations

The following summary condensed from the People’s Bible: Lamentations study is beneficial.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. This short book uses five odes, or “laments,” to communicate its convicting and heartbreaking message. The reader who has finished the book of Jeremiah will see that both books have many expressions and pictures in common.

What the Lord had predicted through Jeremiah during some 40 years of prophesying had come true. Jerusalem weeps over its downfall (Chapter 1, 2, 4, 5). Jeremiah, who bore the brunt of its wickedness and rejection of God’s Word, also laments (Chapter 3).

In the first two chapters, the believers in Jerusalem spoke. They moaned over the destruction of Jerusalem, yet they also confessed their sins and acknowledged God’s justice in punishing the city. It was not the believers’ fault that Jerusalem was destroyed, but they had to suffer along with their fellow citizens. In this chapter, Jeremiah speaks. He, too, has had to suffer. The people who brought suffering into his life were not the Babylonians but his fellow Jews. In chapter 3, Jeremiah uses his sufferings as a picture of the sufferings of his fellow believers in Jerusalem.

As we read Lamentations, we must realize that we are dealing with two groups of people going through the suffering God is sending to his people. The first group is the majority. They are the unbelievers in Judah who had been rebelling against God by worshipping idols for centuries. In their case, everything God is doing to Judah and Jerusalem is pure punishment. The other group is where Jeremiah and his fellow believers fall. For them, everything that is happening to Judah and Jerusalem is chastisement. On the other hand, God is using these difficulties to refine and purify the faith of the believers.

The book of Lamentations is like a mountain rising out of a dark and dreary swamp. In chapter 1, we had scarcely climbed out of the bog but were on our way to the top. In the middle of chapter 3, we arrived at the top of the mountain where we saw, in hope, the future mercies of the Lord. In chapter 4, we were heading down the hill once more, with only a little hope expressed at the end of the chapter. But now, in chapter 5, we are once again close to the dark and dreary swamp. But remember, we like to end our books at the end. The Hebrew writer often “ended” them in the middle. The way chapter 5 ends is not how the story will end. It will end with the hope and confidence expressed in chapter 3.

Lamentations and Mormons

Although Lamentations might not at first appear to be a book of great value in witnessing to Mormons, it shows Christian witnesses how God works in the lives of sinners and unbelievers to draw them to himself in repentance and mercy. Sometimes it is only a tiny remnant that will listen, but for those souls saved, we rejoice.

As you read through Jeremiah and Lamentations over the next few weeks, consider how God talks to his people about righteousness and what he is doing to save them for himself.

Think also about the different types of Mormons with whom you interact. Are there some who need to hear more messages of sin and judgment? Are there others in need of hearing about God's amazing grace? How will you speak differently to each?

Conversation Starters

- **Jeremiah 1:5** is familiar to many Mormons as Joseph Smith used it to back the teaching of pre-mortality. What did God mean when he said, "that from the womb, he knew, had chosen, and set apart" Jeremiah?

Mormons believe that **Jeremiah 1:5** is a proof passage for the preexistence of man. However, when you read the verse in its context, there is more significant support for proving that **God is omniscient**. Understanding how God works through time and space goes well beyond our human comprehension.

(For further reading, see [Does the Bible Support the LDS Teaching of Preexistence?](#))

- In **Jeremiah 2**, Jeremiah called the people "apostates." What made them such, and why did they deserve judgment?

Mormons are familiar with the term [apostate](#), as it is what Mormonism calls those who have left the Mormon religion. How might this word in this context strike them differently than it does Christians?

- The judgment that Jeremiah prophesies in chapter 3 might seem harsh. Why did God have every right to judge Judah in this manner?
- In **Jeremiah 4:4**, Jeremiah warned the people of Judah not to depend on the fact that they had been "circumcised in their bodies." Instead, he told them to "circumcise their hearts." Their lack of doing so brought God's judgment on them. So how does the same warning apply to us? (See **Titus 3:3–8**.)
- In **Jeremiah 7**, Jeremiah condemns the people for false trust in the Temple. What was at the root of their false trust? Why weren't their sacrifices and offerings pleasing to God?
- What was God teaching Jeremiah and the people through the many visual illustrations?
 - The marred girdle (**Jeremiah 13:1–11**)
 - The potter and clay (**Jeremiah 18:1–8**)
 - The broken bottle (**Jeremiah 19:1–13**)

- The celibacy of Jeremiah (**Jeremiah 16:1–9**)
- The good and the bad figs (**Jeremiah 24:1–10**)
- The purchase of a field (**Jeremiah 32:6–44**)
- The burnt scroll (**Jeremiah 36:19–26**)
- Jeremiah chapters 30–33 present great consolations for God’s people. What hope do these chapters present for Judah and us? How do they point to the Messiah to come?
- Sometimes God lets people’s lives “fall apart” to teach them important lessons. Give examples of this from the Bible, history, or personal observation. How did God use these events to draw people to himself?
- Which of Jeremiah’s laments in the book of Lamentations do you connect with the most?

Sharing Personally

When I read parts of the Bible like the Book of Jeremiah, sometimes I have difficulty relating to the events and the people. For example, the people of Judah in Jeremiah’s day have turned so far from the Lord, his ways, and his Word that they are no longer recognizable as the once-chosen people of God. At first, it’s easy for me to say they deserved everything that happened to them for all the ways they have disregarded and disgraced the Lord. But if I do that, I fail to see that my sins before God are just as disgraceful and equally deserving of death and damnation.

Thankfully, even though I have been unfaithful and have wandered from God and his ways, he has been faithful to me and has sought me out like a shepherd. Furthermore, God has sent his son to take my punishment so that I would not have to live in exile from him for eternity.

Jeremiah 17:5–8

Have you been feeling frustrated lately? Empty? Discouraged? Maybe it’s because you’ve been putting your trust in people—especially in yourself. “This is what the LORD says: ‘Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives’” (**Jeremiah 17:5–6**). Ugh. Is that why I’m so disappointed? Trusting in man? Trusting in myself?

There’s another option—a better one! “But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit” (**Jeremiah 17:7–8**). Don’t trust in yourself; trust in Jesus, your Savior, and find in him your confidence and strength even in the droughts of life.

Jeremiah 17:9, 14

“Follow your heart.” That’s the motto for a lot of people’s lives here on earth. It sounds good, right? Follow your heart! And then God has to drop this bombshell on us: “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (**Jeremiah 17:9**). Those are hard words to hear. What

do you think? Is that true? If you were to really follow your heart—to live for every sinful desire that your heart produces—where would you end up? Should you really follow your heart? No!

Don't follow your heart. Follow Jesus! Just a few verses later, Jeremiah prays: "Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise" (**Jeremiah 17:14**). God understands our hearts, and that's exactly why he sent our Savior Jesus. God sent Jesus to save you. He sent Jesus to love you. He sent Jesus to guide you. For every time your heart has led you astray, Jesus has forgiven you. Don't follow your heart today. Follow your Savior!

Jeremiah 20:14–18

They call Jeremiah the Weeping Prophet. There's a reason. God set Jeremiah aside to announce judgment to a people who refused to listen. He saw the destruction of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, and his people taken into exile. Is it any wonder he struggled with despair?

Read this passage from the book that bears his name:

Cursed be the day I was born!
May the day my mother bore me not be blessed!
Cursed be the man who brought my father the news,
who made him very glad, saying,
"A child is born to you—a son!"
May that man be like the towns
the Lord overthrew without pity.
May he hear wailing in the morning,
a battle cry at noon.
For he did not kill me in the womb,
with my mother as my grave,
her womb enlarged forever.
Why did I ever come out of the womb
to see trouble and sorrow
and to end my days in shame? (**Jeremiah 20:14–18**)

Jeremiah vents his full frustration to God. He would rather not live than face what he faces. Notice that he also keys in on shame, an emotion many with depression struggle with. I wonder if the thought tempted him that if he were a better prophet, perhaps some of the people would listen. Do you ever struggle with that thought? If you would just try harder, everything would go better?

It doesn't work that way, though. And if you have any doubt that Jeremiah experienced depression, go read Lamentations. These are the words of a devastated man, bitter words from a bitter heart.

Faithfulness does not mean a person can escape depression. Working hard will not keep the gloom away. Sometimes a depressed person can feel that their emotional state is their own fault. That if they worked harder, more faithfully, trusted more, and just let go and let God, perhaps they could escape the pit their hearts have dug for them.

Don't fall for that variation of the theology of glory. The theology of glory says that if you believe hard enough, life will be easy. It is a lie. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble. Take heart! I have overcome the world" (**John 16:33**).

You may be faithful in some things. You may work hard at others. And yet you may still experience depression. The world is broken, and your body may be broken in a way that causes you to have depression. Take heart! Jeremiah wasn't saved because of his faithfulness. He wasn't saved by clinging to an undying optimism or a practical, even-headedness. He was saved because of God's faithfulness to him and to all the promises he made.

You aren't loved because you control your depression. You aren't accepted because you work hard at serving others. You are saved because God is faithful to you. He is faithful to all the promises he has made to you. Even on your darkest day, God is faithful to you. You are loved. You are forgiven. You belong to him.

Jeremiah 29:11

Stuck. Trapped. Hopeless. Is that how you feel? Life can suffocate us and deflate us and leave us feeling like there's no hope. Here's what makes it worse: When you know that it's all your fault! How often don't we feel stuck, trapped, and hopeless, with no one to blame but ourselves? That's how God's people felt 2,500 years ago. Their country had been destroyed. They had been taken as exiles to Babylon. Here was the worst part: They knew it was all their fault because of their sins against God. Stuck. Trapped. What hope did they have?

A lot! God wrote to those exiles through the prophet Jeremiah: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (**Jeremiah 29:11**). As much as they had sinned, as bad as their current situation seemed, they weren't forgotten. They were loved. They were forgiven. In fact, God still had plans for them. Big plans! What were God's promises meant to give them? Hope. Hope for the future. No matter what you've done, no matter how trapped and stuck you feel, you aren't forgotten either. You are loved. You are forgiven. God still has plans for you. Big plans! May that give you hope. Hope for the future!