

## PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

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The book was designed to show the exiles the reasons for their captivity. They were not in Babylon because God had forgotten his promises to Israel, but because Israel had been unfaithful to him. The book also taught the captives to wait patiently for the seventy years to elapse and not to seek a quick release through military or political means by trusting in other nations for deliverance. Finally, the book encouraged the captives that after their bondage, there would come a time of restoration and renewal under the new covenant.

## THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE BOOK'S CONTENTS

The long book of Jeremiah, unlike the majority of the other prophets, is not arranged in chronological order. Stories and prophecies from various periods in Jeremiah's life are arranged together. Messages of hope or destruction, personal stories from Jeremiah's life, and historical events appear side by side. Some scholars account for this apparent lack of usual order in arrangement by noting the process leading up to the writing of the book.

Jeremiah had prophesied for twenty years before God told him to write his messages down. Thus, the first compilation of Jeremiah contained some kind of listing ("all the words"; Jeremiah 36.2) or summary version of twenty years of warning and encouraging the nation. When King Jehoiakim heard the prophecy, he burned the scroll, section by section (Jer. 36.22-23), showed no fear of God, and sought to arrest Jeremiah. Jeremiah then rewrote the original prophecy and added even more to it (Jer. 36.32). Thus, some scholars believe the turbulent times, surrounding the writing of Jeremiah, account for the book's seeming lack of order.

The book does have an overall progression and order, however. It begins with the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry (Jer. 1.1-19), then encourages God's people to repent (Jer. 2.1-45.5), shows God's absolute rule over the nations (cf. this aspect of Jeremiah's call in Jer. 1.10), and concludes by describing not only the fall of Jerusalem, but also the elevation of David's son, Jehoiachin, in captivity. This clearly shows that the book was purposely designed to contribute to the ongoing development of God's promises to Abraham's children. Moses, in Deuteronomy, had told them that disobedience would bring destruction, but they also had been told of God's promises to Abraham to bring in a large nation and universal blessing and of God's promises to David to always have one of his sons ruling on the throne of Israel. Jeremiah's structure shows how. The prophecies of destruction were accomplished without destroying the promises of Davidic rule that would someday be perfectly fulfilled in the Messiah.

## BLESSINGS LOST AND GAINED

Jeremiah 1-29 and 34-52 outlined the loss of Israel's blessings under the Mosaic covenant. Israel lost her throne, land, temple, and a good number of her inhabitants because she had violated the conditions of the covenant, but at the heart of the book (Jer. 30-33), is a promised remedy for Israel's covenant violations: a new covenant. Israel, under that new covenant, would have the law placed in her heart, so that she would never again lose God's blessings.

## The New Covenant, Jeremiah 31.31-37

Expositors of all shades of conviction have written in glowing terms of the significance of this portion of the book. It has been acclaimed as one of the most important passages in the entire Old Testament. It is beyond dispute that the passage has had tremendous influence on New Testament doctrine. Many expositors maintain that the concept of the new covenant is Jeremiah's greatest contribution to biblical truth.

At this point, an outline of the remainder of the chapter detailing the fullness of Jeremiah's revelation will be useful:

1. The time of the covenant (v. 31)—"The time is coming"
2. The maker of the covenant (v. 31)—the LORD (vv. 3, 20, 32, 35)
3. The name of the covenant (v. 31)—new (Rom 11.27; Heb 8.6-13; 10.14-18; Matt 26.26-28; Mark 14.22-24; Luke 22.19-20; 1 Cor 11.23-25)
4. The parties of the covenant (v. 31)—"house of Israel" and "house of Judah" (Ezek 37.15-19; Rom 9.4-5 the nation of the covenants)
5. The contrasted covenant (v. 32)—not like the old covenant: based on merit and works, susceptible of infraction, no enablement, did not give life (Gal 3.21)
6. The nature of the covenant (vv. 33-34)—not dependent on external law nor human interpretation; law written on the heart; gives intimate knowledge of and fellowship with God, forgiveness of sins, and peace of heart
7. The immutability of the covenant (vv. 35-37)—the unchanging purpose of God reflected in the fixed order of nature
8. The physical aspects of the covenant (vv. 38-40)—rebuilt Jerusalem in holiness and permanence
9. The Guarantor of the covenant (vv. 31-40)—"declares the LORD or the LORD says" (nine times), as though to swear by himself (Heb 6.17-18).

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