

Jeremiah - an overview

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Introduction to Jeremiah

Author

Chapters 1-51 were written by the prophet Jeremiah, helped by his friend Baruch.(45:1). Chapter 52 is the same as 2 Kings 24:18-25:30 and was written by an unknown author, some time after Jeremiah's death. Jeremiah also wrote the Book of Lamentations.

Jeremiah wrote in Hebrew and his book was translated into Greek in the Septuagint version around 200 BC. There are quite a few differences between the Hebrew and Greek versions including omission of 2300 Hebrew words and placing of Chapters 46-51 of the Hebrew version as Chapters 26-31 in the Greek version. Many verses were mistranslated and/or placed in different orders.

Jeremiah was born around 657BC. in the village of Anathoth, about 5km north of Jerusalem. His father was the priest Hilkiah, and he came from the tribe of Benjamin. When God called Jeremiah he felt he was too young to do what God wanted him to do. God said *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."* *"Alas, Sovereign Lord," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am too young."* *But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord. Then the Lord reached out His hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I have put My words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."*

The Lord raised Jeremiah up as a prophet during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, the last kings of Judah. His message was consistently rejected by these kings and by the people. Jeremiah proclaimed God's judgment on the nation of Judah for their apostasy against the Lord and their great sinfulness. He made it clear that the results of this sin would be the destruction of Jerusalem and the taking of the nation into exile in Babylon. Jeremiah became known as the 'weeping prophet' because he felt so deeply about the nations' rejection of the Lord. His life was threatened on numerous occasions and he was often put in prison.

"Jeremiah" means "Jehovah throws" in the sense of laying down a foundation, or "Jehovah establishes, appoints, or sends."

Date

Jeremiah prophesied during the period between 627–586 BC. so the book must have been written during that time. *The word of the Lord came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah, and through the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, down to the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, when the people of Jerusalem went into exile. (1:2,3)*

Purpose

God commissioned Jeremiah as a *prophet to the nations*.(1:5). He was to preach and prophesy so that the prevailing rejection of the Lord in Judah and in the surrounding nations would stop and be replaced by a return to the Lord. Jeremiah did this faithfully, often at great personal expense, so the nations certainly knew what the Lord required of them. To Jeremiah's great sorrow, the people of Judah did not listen to his message, and the Lord poured His judgment on them, as He had promised, resulting in their 70 year captivity in Babylon. Jeremiah also spoke of a future time when the covenant that God had made with Israel would be extended into the New Covenant whereby God's people would inherit the Kingdom of God, through the Lord Jesus Christ. (31:31-37).

Background

Chapter 25 of 2 Kings and Chapter 36 of 2 Chronicles describe the awful events that took place when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonian armies. The fall of Jerusalem and the defeat of Judah was the culmination of a long period of rebellion against the Lord, led by a succession of evil kings. Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC, and the people of Judah taken into captivity in Babylon. This captivity lasted for a period of 70 years as predicted in Jeremiah 25:11 and 29:10. The captivity ended in 538 BC after the fall of Babylon to the Persian king Cyrus the Great, Cyrus then gave the Jews permission to return to their land so they could rebuild their temple. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe the return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple.

It was because of the Lord's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end He thrust them from His presence. 2 Kings 24:20.

Themes

The messages from the Lord that Jeremiah brought were highly relevant for the people of Judah and many have proven to be relevant for all nations through history, including the nations of today.

The main themes in Jeremiah's messages were:

- God will judge nations who sin against Him. If a nation sins against God, God's wrath will be invoked. This applies to all nations, including Jewish and Gentile nations.
- Sin always has consequences. It results in rejection of God, depravity, falsehood and great suffering. Those who sin will always reap the consequences of their sin.
- God can transform anyone who repents of their sin and comes back to the Lord. He will give them a new heart and empower them to live in righteousness.
- The Lord will judge the sin of Judah by sending her people into captivity in Babylon for 70 years. Afterwards the Lord will allow the Jewish people to return to their land, but if they continue to rebel against the Lord He will disperse them throughout all nations. At the end of the age the dispersed people will be gathered back to their land.
- The Lord will send Messiah (the Anointed One) as the Saviour of all. Messiah (Jesus Christ) will bring in a New Covenant and establish a new Kingdom, which will be made up of people (including Jews and Gentiles) who accept His salvation.
- The Jewish nation will go through much tribulation but will ultimately understand the true identity of their Messiah.
- God's purposes will be fulfilled through Messiah (also called *the Lord our Righteousness, the King, the righteous Branch, the Branch of David*).

Jeremiah was an ordinary person called by God to carry out an extraordinary task. The message that God wanted him to bring was highly unpopular so his life was filled with rejection, sorrow and danger. He faithfully obeyed the Lord and tirelessly preached God's messages of sin and judgment; of repentance and hope; of love and salvation. He was not deterred by personal consequences, and stayed true to the Lord right to the end. His response to the Lord, and perhaps the motivation for his life of obedience is stated in Jeremiah 15:16: *"Your words are what sustain me. They bring me great joy and are my heart's delight."*

Jeremiah is rightly recognised as one of the "major prophets".

Outline

There is no obvious order to the book of Jeremiah but it can be structured around the following headings:

Chapter 1	The call of Jeremiah.
Chapters 2-25	Messages for God's people.
Chapters 26-29	Suffering of Jeremiah.
Chapters 30-33	The restoration of Israel.
Chapters 34-45	Specific messages and their consequences for Jeremiah.
Chapters 46-51	Messages for the nations.
Chapter 52	Conclusion.

Chapter 1: The call of Jeremiah.

The Lord called Jeremiah to be a *prophet to the nations*. Jeremiah felt he was too young and inexperienced for this great task: “*I do not know how to speak; I am only a child*”. God declared that He would be with Jeremiah and would help him to fulfill his important ministry: “*See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.*”

The Lord then encouraged Jeremiah by giving him two visions. In the first he saw an almond tree and the Lord said He was watching to see that His word was fulfilled. (The word for ‘watching’ sounds like the word for ‘almond tree’). In the second he saw a boiling pot tilting from the north. The Lord said disaster would be *poured out on all who live on the land* coming from the north. (Babylon is north of Israel). This would be *God’s judgment* on His people because of their *wickedness in forsaking Him*.

Jeremiah was not to be terrified by all of this. Rather he was to be like a *fortified city* and *take a stand against the whole land*. They would fight against him, but would not overcome him because God was with him and would rescue him.

Call to ministry

The call to ministry that Jeremiah received gave him comfort, strength and an assurance that God would be with him in the difficult days ahead. It included:

- clear knowledge of what God was calling him to.
- assurance that God was with him.
- overcoming of all his objections.
- confirmation that this was the will of God.
- a general idea of what was to happen.
- an encouragement to get started in the ministry.

This kind of call is typical of that received by many in ministry today. When we receive this kind of call we know what God wants of us, and that He will be with us to bring His call to completion. *Whatever is born of God overcomes the world.* 1 John 5:4.

Chapters 2-25: Messages for God’s people.

2:1- 3:5. God’s people have forsaken Him.

In the opening chapters Jeremiah presents God’s complaints about His people in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. They have strayed from Him and *followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves*. All are guilty of deserting the Lord including priests, leaders and prophets. They have *exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols* and are now experiencing the consequences of their actions. “*My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.*” God had tried to bring them back: *In vain I punished your people but they did not respond to correction.* Now they wonder if God can or will ever help them, yet they continue to *do all the evil* they can.

The Northern and Southern Kingdoms

Jeremiah prophesied into the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

After King Solomon died his son Rehoboam became King of Israel. The 10 northern tribes rebelled and became the northern kingdom of Israel with Jeroboam as their king; while the remaining two tribes became the southern kingdom of Judah, with Rehoboam as their king.

Samaria was capital of Israel. It had 19 kings before it was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722BC.

Jerusalem was capital of Judah. It had 20 kings before it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586BC.



3:6-5:31. God's people must return to Him.

The people of Judah had seen how the people in the northern kingdom of Israel had rejected the Lord and suffered the consequences of their sin. Jeremiah says that *faithless Israel is more righteous than unfaithful Judah*, and counseled both nations to return to the Lord. God is *merciful* and wants them to *acknowledge their guilt* and return to Him. If they do He will give them *shepherds after My own heart* and will lead them *in knowledge and understanding*. God wants to treat them *like sons* and give them *a desirable land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation*. They must *return to the Lord*, put away *detestable idols* and *live in a truthful, just and righteous way*. If they don't a *terrible destruction* will come down on them from the north. (For Israel, this judgment was through the Assyrians; for Judah, it was through the Babylonians).

Jeremiah cries in anguish at the prospect of this destruction and the devastation it will cause to Jerusalem and its people. Yet, they have brought this upon themselves: *Your own conduct and actions have brought this upon you*, so much so that there wasn't one honest person left in the city. They have already experienced much tribulation because of their actions, and have had every opportunity to repent, yet the house of Israel and the house of Judah have been *utterly unfaithful* to the Lord. Therefore, God will bring a *distant nation* in judgment against them. As they have forsaken the Lord and *served foreign gods* in their own land, now they will *serve foreigners* in a land not their own. This will be a truly *shocking thing*, yet, even so, they will not be *completely destroyed*.

6:1-10:25. God will judge His people.

Because God's people have rejected Him, *disaster looms out of the north*. Jerusalem will be destroyed and become *desolate so that none can live there*. The people have stopped listening to the Lord and are so *filled with loathsome conduct they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush*. The people now stand at a crossroads and disaster will soon overtake them in the form of a *great army from the land of the north*. They have had every opportunity to return to the Lord but now He has rejected them. Some thought that they would be protected if they were near the Temple, because God would never allow it to be destroyed. Not true! The only way to be safe is to reform their ways and their actions. (Jeremiah was told to stand at the gate of the Temple as he proclaimed this message, making it even more powerful). God had judged Shiloh where the Tabernacle had stood and had judged the whole camp of Israel in the valley of slaughter. Now He was about to judge His people and the city of Jerusalem in the same way. The coming judgment will be so great that *all the survivors of this evil nation will prefer death to life*. They think they are wise, because they have the Law, but they have rejected the word of the Lord. There will be no harvest; no peace; no safe water to drink; venomous snakes, no place of healing, and no-one who can be trusted. Jeremiah weeps with the realization that his people will be crushed but knows it will be God's work: *See I will refine and test them, for what else can I do because of the sin of My people? I will scatter them among nations that neither they nor their fathers have known, and I will pursue them with the sword until I have destroyed them*.

This is what the Lord says:

"Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,"
Jeremiah 9:23,24.

God's people have followed the idolatrous ways of other nations, but *the Lord is the true God; He is the living God, the eternal King. God made the earth by His power; He founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by His understanding*. Any other god or idol is worthless and will ultimately be destroyed by the Lord. Jeremiah prays that God would pour out *His wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge God* for they have *devoured* the people of Israel, and destroyed her homeland.

11:1-17. God's people have broken the covenant He made with them.

God's people were very aware of the covenant God had made with Abraham, and repeated through Moses. (Genesis 12-17; Exodus 19-24).

God told Jeremiah to repeat the main elements of this covenant and its conditions:

'Cursed is the one who does not obey the terms of this covenant - the terms I commanded your ancestors when I brought them out of Egypt, out of the iron-smelting furnace.' I said, 'Obey Me and do everything I command you, and you will be My people, and I will be your God. Then I will fulfill the oath I swore to your ancestors, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey' - the land you possess today.'

The people had not fulfilled their side of the covenant and now God was about to bring on them *all the curses* the covenant stated for disobedience to the Lord. God had *warned them again and again* but now it was now too late for God's people to repent. *Although they cry out to Me, I will not listen to them.* The disasters they were about to experience were simply the fulfillment by God of His side of the covenant.

11:18-13:14. Jeremiah's suffering.

Jeremiah's message was most unpopular! The men of Anathoth told him to stop prophesying against them and plotted to kill him, *but the Lord revealed their plot to me.* Jeremiah was understandably upset about this and asked the Lord *Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do the faithless live at ease?* God answered by repeating that He was going to judge His people. They had forsaken Him and now were about to experience *the Lord's fierce anger.*

God told Jeremiah to buy a linen belt and put it around his waist. He was then told to bury the belt at Perath, and the belt got ruined. God used this to show Jeremiah that He was about to ruin the pride of His people. *These wicked people, who refuse to listen to My words, who follow the stubbornness of their hearts and go after other gods to serve and worship them, will be like this belt - completely useless! For as a belt is bound around the waist, so I bound all the people of Israel and all the people of Judah to Me,' declares the Lord, 'to be My people for My renown and praise and honor. But they have not listened.'*



13:15-16:21. How God will judge His people.

Jeremiah now describes all of the ways that God will judge His people. He weeps bitterly because:

- The Lord's flock will be taken into captivity. *All Judah will be carried into exile; carried away completely.* They will be *scattered like chaff* because they have *forgotten the Lord and trusted in false gods.*
- There will be *no rain in the land* leading to great drought and famine.
- God will stop listening to the cries of His people and instead will *destroy them with the sword, famine and plague.*
- False prophets (which have not been sent or spoken to by the Lord) will perish. God will *pour out on them the calamity they deserve.*
- There will be *great anguish and terror.*
- The peoples' wealth and treasures will be lost as plunder.
- Many will *die of deadly diseases.*
- *Sounds of joy and gladness* will come to an end.
- The people will be thrown out of their land and will have to *serve other gods day and night.* Afterwards they will be restored back to their land.
- God will repay them *double for their wickedness and their sin.*
- The people will learn that the Lord is God, and that He is not to be trifled with.

Jeremiah continues to pray for mercy on behalf of God's people, even while pronouncing God's judgment on them. *Although our sins testify against us, O Lord. Do something for the sake of your Name. For our backsliding is great; we have sinned against You.* He weeps with *pain unending* but recognizes that God is their *only hope.* He reminds the people that they can still repent and God will restore them. He is with them *to rescue and save them from the hands of the wicked and redeem them from the grasp of the cruel.* But the people had sinned so greatly and for so long the Lord didn't accept this. It was now time for God to *remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins.*

17:1-27. Blessings or curses for God's people.

Jeremiah now clearly spells out the blessings and curses of disobeying the Lord. *Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord; whose confidence is in Him. The Lord searches the heart and examines the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.* Keeping the Sabbath day holy is a way that the people can test to see whether their heart is towards or against the Lord.

18:1-20:18. God speaks to Jeremiah at the Potter's House.

Jeremiah was told to go to the potter's house, to receive a message from God. He saw a potter making a marred pot, which was then reshaped into another well-shaped pot. God used this to show Jeremiah He could do what He wanted with His people. *Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel.* God has the right to destroy a nation, and if it repents of its evil, to *relent and not inflict the disaster* He planned.



God was *preparing disaster* for His people and Jeremiah was to tell God's people *to turn from their evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and actions.* Even so, God did not expect them to repent because of the stubbornness of their hearts, and the planned disaster would be poured on them. God's people had even tried to destroy Jeremiah for speaking His word to them!

Jeremiah was then told to take a pot to the priests and leaders in the valley of Hinnom. He was to smash the pot before them to show God was about to *smash this nation and this city just as the potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired.* The valley would become a *valley of slaughter.* This was because they were *stiff-necked and would not listen to My words.* The priests and leaders had Jeremiah beaten up and put in the stocks near the temple. He was released next day and told them that God was about to *hand Judah over to the King of Babylon, who would take them away to Babylon or put them to the sword.* Jeremiah complained to the Lord about the treatment he had received, saying that *the word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long.* Yet, when he considered not speaking up for the Lord his heart was *like a fire; a fire shut up in his bones!* In great anguish he praises *the Lord who rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked,* and in the next breath curses the day he was born.

21:1-22:30. God's judgment on the evil kings of Judah.

Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon was attacking Jerusalem, so Zedekiah, King of Judah asked Jeremiah to enquire of the Lord. *Perhaps the Lord will perform wonders for us as in times past so that He will withdraw from us?* God told Zedekiah that it wasn't just the Babylonians who were fighting against him, *God Himself will fight against you.* He was being punished just as his deeds deserved, and now had a choice: stay in Jerusalem and die, or surrender to the Babylonians and live, but in captivity. Later on, when people ask why the Lord did this they will know it was because His people had forsaken the covenant God had made with them; but it was also because of the behavior of their Kings. The kings should have *done what is right and just, and defended the cause of the poor and needy.*

The last three Kings of Judah were Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. *People will mourn for Jehoiakim, son of Josiah; his son Jehoiachin will be despised and none of his offspring will be able to inherit the throne of David as king.* Zedekiah was the king actually defeated by Nebuchadnezzar, when Jerusalem was destroyed and God's people taken into captivity in 586 BC. (Jehoiachin is also called Jeconiah or Coniah see footnote Jeremiah 24:1)



Why Jesus had to be born of a virgin.

God said that none of Jehoiachin's offspring would be able to be King of Israel. Jeremiah 22:30. God had also said that Jesus was to be born in the line of David through Solomon – the same line that was now 'cursed' because of Jehoiachin's sin. 2 Samuel 7:12,13; Matthew 1:11.

So, how could Jesus be King of the Jews in the line of David, when that line was now cursed and no king could come from it? God sorted this problem out in an ingenious way:

- Mary, in the line of David through Nathan, conceived by the Holy Spirit, thus ensuring 2 Samuel 7:12,13 would be fulfilled. Matthew 1:20-23.
- Before Jesus was born Mary married Joseph, becoming legally "Mrs Joseph" in the line of David through Solomon. Matthew 1:24.
- Mary and Joseph's marriage was not consummated until after Jesus was born so the curse did not pass on to Him. Matthew 1:25. The other natural children of Mary and Joseph were born under the curse and so could not be king of Israel.
- Matthew 1:1-16 gives the *legal* genealogy of Jesus through Joseph. i.e. the 'cursed 'Royal line'. It gives David's line through Solomon, including Jeconiah (Coniah, Jehoiachin).
- Luke 3:23-38 gives the *physical* genealogy of Jesus through Mary. It doesn't end by saying Jesus was the son of Mary. That's because women were not included in genealogies and their husband's names were inserted instead. Hence Jesus is *the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli*. Luke 3:23. (Compare Matthew 1:16 where Joseph's father is Jacob). Heli was Mary's father and Joseph's father-in-law.
- Because Jesus was born of a virgin He could be the King of Israel in the Royal line, even though that line was cursed because of Jehoiachin's sin.

For more details and a diagram see:

<http://rosscallaghan.yolasite.com/resources/The%20genealogy%20of%20Jesus%20Christ.pdf>

23:1-8. God will send the "Righteous Branch".

Jeremiah now gives one of the most important prophecies in the whole Bible.

Even though God's people will be scattered throughout the nations as punishment for their sins, God will *gather a remnant* of them and bring them back to their land. He will place shepherds over them who will *tend them* and care for them so that they *will no longer be afraid*. God will *raise up from David's line a righteous Branch* who will rule over them *and in those days Judah will be saved and all Israel will dwell in safety. This is the name by which He will be called: The Lord our righteousness.* (Yahweh Tsidkenu).

Many aspects of this prophecy have been fulfilled and some are yet to be fulfilled:

- The *righteous Branch* is the Lord Jesus Christ, the *King of the Jews* (John 19:3), and the *King of kings and Lord of lords* (Revelation 17:14; 19:6). Jesus was righteous in every way. 2 Corinthians 5:21. The name 'Jesus' means 'Yahweh saves'. At salvation He who is righteous makes all those who believe in Him to be righteous in God's sight.
- Jesus was born in the line of King David: the "Royal line". Matthew 1:6, 16 (Matthew gives the genealogy of Jesus' legal 'father' Joseph); Luke 3:23-32. (Luke gives the genealogy of Mary, Jesus' mother).
- Jesus was a Jew, and was descendent of the remnant of Jews who returned to Israel after the captivity.
- After AD 70 Jews were dispersed throughout the world. In 1948 the State of Israel was established and Jews have been returning to their homeland ever since
- *All Israel* has not yet been saved because the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah. God is still working to bring about the salvation of Jews. This will be accomplished before Jesus returns again.
- Throughout history Israel has certainly not dwelled in safety. This will only come to pass when Jesus returns.

Why is Jesus called “the Branch”?

Jesus is called “the Branch” in Isaiah 11:1, Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15 and Zechariah 3:8, 6:12-13.

Isaiah 11:1-3 introduces the concept of Jesus as “the Branch”: *A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him - the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord - and He will delight in the fear of the Lord.* Jesse was David’s father, so this prophecy is saying that Jesus’s roots are to be in King David’s royal family, and that the Spirit of God would rest upon Him. i.e. He would be the anointed One, the Messiah or Christ.. 2 Samuel 7:12,13; Isaiah 53:2; Romans 15:12; John 1:32,33. David’s successors sinned terribly against the Lord (resulting in the captivity in Babylon), but God promised that there would be a remnant of Jews who would stay true to Him, and through whom His purposes would be worked out. Amos 9:11-15, Acts 15:15:6,17. Jesus, from this remnant, is the One God chose to bring this about. He came to bring salvation and unity for all of God’s people (Jews and Gentiles) Ephesians 2:13-17; bring peace to peoples’ hearts Isaiah 9:6; John 16:33; build God’s temple in their hearts 1 Corinthians 3:16,17; Ephesians 2:20-22; and establish and rule in God’s eternal Kingdom. Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15; Zechariah 3:8, 6:12-13; Luke 1:32,33; 1 Timothy 6:16; Hebrews 1:8; Daniel 7:13,14; Isaiah 9:7. So from one small root (David’s family), Jesus would come as “the Branch” to fulfil all of God’s purposes for His creation.

We are now in the final days before Jesus comes again to bring all of this to full completion. Jesus now says He is the vine and we are the branches: the ones through whom He will complete His work of earth (in the power of the Holy Spirit). *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in Me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me”. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in Me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples”.* John 15:1-8.

23:1-40. God’s judgment on false prophets.

Jeremiah now grieves because those who are supposed to speak for the Lord, *both prophet and priest are godless.* They speak their *own words*, without consulting the Lord at all and are leading God’s people *astray with their reckless lies.* They must stop saying their words are *the oracle of the Lord* thus distorting the *true words of the living God.* God will bring *everlasting disgrace* on these false prophets and cast them out of His presence when Jerusalem is destroyed. God’s judgment is always especially harsh on those who abuse their authority and cause harm to His people. e.g. James 3:1.

24:1-25:38. How God’s wrath will be poured out.

When the Babylonians conquered Judah some of the people surrendered and were taken into captivity in Babylon; some fought and died in Judah; some fled to Egypt and some made a compromise with the Babylonians. God showed Jeremiah two baskets of figs to reveal what would happen to these groups of His people.

- One basket of figs was *very good*, and represented the exiles from Judah, who were sent away to Babylon. *My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord. They will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with all their heart.*
- The other basket of figs was very poor and represented King Jehoiachin and the officials who made compromises with the Babylonians and those who fled to Egypt. God will make them *abhorrent and an offense to all the kingdoms of the earth, a reproach and a byword, a curse and an object of ridicule.* They will experience *sword, famine and plague* until they are destroyed from the land.

God had spoken to His people through Jeremiah for 23 years, yet they would not listen. They had provoked God and brought His judgment on themselves. God's final judgment would be:

"Because you have not listened to My words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and My servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," declares the Lord, "and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

"But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the Lord, "and will make it desolate forever. I will bring on that land all the things I have spoken against it, all that are written in this book and prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations. They themselves will be enslaved by many nations and great kings; I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands."

The *cup of God's wrath* would be poured on Jerusalem and all the people of Judah so they become an *object of horror and scorn and cursing*. It will also spill over to all the surrounding nations, including Babylon. *The tumult will resound to the ends of the earth for the Lord will bring charges against the nations: disaster spreading from nation to nation.* This began in 586 BC. when the Babylonians conquered Judah; destroyed Jerusalem and took many Jews into captivity.

Chapters 26-29: The suffering of Jeremiah.

Early in the reign of Jehoiakim Jeremiah was prophesying in the courts of the temple when *the priests, the prophets and the people* seized him and said he should be sentenced to death for prophesying against Jerusalem. A few people supported Jeremiah, recognizing that *he had spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God*. They gave examples of other prophets who had spoken like Jeremiah and how their prophecies had come to pass. One had even fled to Egypt and then been hunted down and killed because his message was so accurate. Jeremiah's few supporters recognized they were about to *bring a terrible disaster* on themselves. Jeremiah himself continued to prophesy because *in truth, the Lord has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing*.

Then in the reign of Zedekiah Jeremiah prophesied to the Kings of the surrounding nations. He gave them the *same message* that he had given to the kings of Judah: that they would be conquered by Babylon for a period, until Babylon itself was conquered by other stronger nations. Like Judah, their only hope was to ignore the false prophets who were saying this could not happen. If they served the King of Babylon at least they would live.

The false prophet Hananiah contradicted Jeremiah's message, saying that the Lord would *break the yoke of the King of Babylon* within two years and the Jews would be able to get back the precious articles taken from the temple. Jeremiah pointed out that it is easy to prophecy what the people want, but someone is a true prophet *sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true*. Hananiah took the yoke off Jeremiah's neck to signify the breaking of the yoke of Babylon, but Jeremiah prophesied that Hananiah would die because he had *preached rebellion against the Lord*, and he did so. The true prophet triumphed!

After God's people had been taken into exile in Babylon Jeremiah sent a letter to them. The letter said the exiles should settle in Babylon and try to prosper there. After seventy years God would fulfill His *gracious* promise and bring them back to their own land. *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. Then you will call on Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."*

Jeremiah 29 11-14 shows that God is in control of our lives; even though we may not understand what He is doing at any particular time. We can trust Him regardless of our present circumstances because His plans for us give us a future and a hope.

Jeremiah did not go into captivity with the exiles, but remained in Jerusalem. He prophesied that those who refused to go into captivity and the remaining false prophets who were trying to deceive the people would be judged harshly by the Lord and *become an object of horror, scorn and reproach*. Shemaiah sent a letter from Babylon to Zephaniah the priest who was looking after the remains of the temple in Jerusalem. He said Jeremiah was a false prophet and should be reprimanded but Jeremiah denounced Shemaiah saying he was the false prophet and the Lord would *surely punish* him. It was not easy being a prophet of the Lord in those days!

Chapters 30-33: The restoration of Israel.

This section is sometimes called “The book of hope”. It contains a few words of judgment (32:28-35), but is primarily positive, focused on the restoration of Israel, after her return from exile in Babylon. It includes important prophecies concerning Israel in the end times before Jesus returns again.

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 ancestors to possess,' says the Lord."

The prophecies in Chapters 30 and 31 apply to the period after the captivity in Babylon, but they also stretch over to the future period when the Jewish people would be scattered throughout the world, then return again to their homeland.

- Foreigners will no longer enslave God's people, Instead, *they will serve the Lord their God* under a King from the line of David (Ultimately, this King was to be the Lord Jesus).
- Israel will be scattered among the nations to a *distant place*, but God will still be with His people and *will not completely destroy* them. This scattering will be part of God's punishment because their *sins were so many*, but in due time He will *restore them to health and heal their wounds*. The Jewish people were scattered throughout the world after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 in fulfillment of this prophecy. Remarkably, they have retained their identity as Jews for nearly 2000 years and continue to do so.
- The city of Jerusalem will be rebuilt and *songs of thanksgiving and the sound of rejoicing* will be heard again within her walls.
- The number of God's people will increase and He will bring them honour among the nations. The Lord will be *the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be My people*.
- A remnant of God's people will be gathered *from the ends of the earth* and will return to Israel with great weeping yet much joy. *'He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.'* They will replant the land and enjoy much fruitfulness. *They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more. Then young women will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and My people will be filled with my bounty.* This prophecy was fulfilled in 1948 when Israel became a nation, and its fulfillment continues to this day.
- God will make a *new covenant* with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. This new covenant will be: *I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."* (This prophecy is quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12 where the writer shows that Jeremiah is referring to a new covenant which has Jesus as its High Priest, and which is for all who put their faith in Him. *By calling this covenant "new" He has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.* Hebrews 8:13.



In Chapter 32 God tells Jeremiah to buy a field and put the deed for purchase in a safe place. At the time Jerusalem was under siege by the Babylonians, Jeremiah was being held as a prisoner in the temple

courtyards, and no-one was allowed to buy or sell property. God re-iterated His reasons for sending His people into exile, and that in due course He would bring them back to their land: *I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish them in My furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. They will be My people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear Me and that all will then go well for them and for their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear Me, so that they will never turn away from Me. I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all My heart and soul.* Jeremiah buying the field was symbolic of the day when God would restore the fortunes of God's people so that, once again, land could be bought and sold. Jeremiah rejoiced in the Lord declaring *Ah, Sovereign Lord, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for You.*

Chapter 33 is a magnificent prophecy of how God will restore Jerusalem after her destruction by the Babylonians and re-establish a good relationship with His people. *I will heal My people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security. I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and will rebuild them as they were before. I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against Me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against Me. Then this city will bring Me renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it.'* In those days God will fulfill His promise and make the *righteous Branch sprout from David's line; He will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Savior.'*

Chapters 34-45: Specific messages and their consequences for Jeremiah.

During the siege of Jerusalem Jeremiah prophesied that King Zedekiah would be captured but would not be killed, and that he would *die peacefully*. In response, Zedekiah proclaimed freedom for all slaves but the people quickly took back their slaves in disobedience to Exodus 21:2. This angered the Lord and He said that what His people had done to the slaves would be done to them. They would lose their freedom and their towns would be *laid waste so that no-one can live there.* (Chapter 34).

During Jehoiachin's reign God told Jeremiah to invite a Recabite family to a side room of the temple and to offer them some wine. The Recabites were a nomadic family descended from the Kenites, 1 Chronicles 2:55. Their leader Jonadab loved the Lord and refused to take the wine. Jeremiah used this as an example for God's people. The Recabites had followed the Lord's ways, and they weren't even Hebrews, yet God's people had consistently disobeyed Him. The Lord then promised that the Recabites would always serve Him. (Chapter 35).



In the 4th year of Jehoiachin's reign Jeremiah dictated *all that God had spoken concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations*, and his words were recorded by Baruch on a scroll. Jeremiah was not allowed near the temple so Baruch took the scroll and read it to the people. When the officials heard what was on the scroll they ordered Jeremiah and Baruch to hide, then took the scroll to the King. When the scroll was read to him King Jehoiachin threw it in a fire and burned it up. The Lord rebuked the King saying that He would bring disaster on him, and on Jerusalem and the people of Judah, according to the words on the scroll. He then told Jeremiah to remake the scroll. (Chapter 36).

Zedekiah was made king of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. He didn't *pay any attention to the words the Lord had spoken through Jeremiah*, but he did ask Jeremiah to *pray to the Lord for us*. The Babylonians withdrew for a while, because Judah had requested support from the Egyptian army. When the Egyptians went home God's people were at the mercy of the Babylonians. Jeremiah was thrown into prison where he *remained a long time*. Zedekiah asked him what was going to happen and Jeremiah told him that they were about to be delivered into the hands of the king of Babylon. Jeremiah asked why he was in prison and he was freed so he could be in the courtyard of the temple. There he disturbed the officials because he continued to prophesy that God's people would go into captivity in Babylon and they



threw him into a deep muddy cistern. When the King heard about it he had Jeremiah pulled out, and again asked what they should do. Jeremiah replied : *'If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared and this city will not be burned down; you and your family will live. But if you will not surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be given into the hands of the Babylonians and they will burn it down; you yourself will not escape from them.'* (Chapters 37,38).

Jerusalem fell on the *ninth day of the fourth month of Zedekiah's eleventh year*. Zedekiah fled from the city but was captured and his sons and officials were killed and his eyes were put out. He was then taken to Babylon in shackles. The walls of Jerusalem were broken down, the city set on fire and her people taken into exile in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar said that Jeremiah was to be looked after and could do what he wanted. Jeremiah decided to remain *among his own people*. This fulfilled the prophecy he had received earlier where God said *"I will rescue you on that day; you will not be given into the hands of those you fear. I will save you; you will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life, because you trust in me"*.

God had decreed disaster for Jerusalem, and now He had brought it about. He had *done just as He said he would*. *All this happened because the people sinned against the Lord and did not obey Him*.

Gedaliah was appointed *as governor of the land* to take care of the remnant who had not been deported to Babylon. He was soon assassinated and Ishmael made the people of the remnant his captives. They soon rebelled and began to flee towards Egypt. On the way they asked Jeremiah where they should go. He said he would tell them honestly what the Lord said, and would *hold nothing back*. The people replied that they would *act in obedience* to everything the Lord told them, *whether it is favourable or unfavourable*. (A good attitude!). They said they knew it would *go well* with them if they obeyed the Lord. Jeremiah said it would be a *fatal mistake* to flee to Egypt. If they did so they would receive the *same disaster* God had poured on Jerusalem – they would *die by sword, famine and plague*. The people *disobeyed the Lord's command to stay in the land of Judah* and fled to Egypt where they *provoked the Lord to anger* by following the Egyptian gods and burning incense to the "Queen of Heaven". God's judgment was poured on the remnant and they were handed over to Pharaoh in the same way the exiles had been handed over to Nebuchadnezzar. It is not enough to say "We will obey the Lord". It must always be followed through with genuine obedience. (Chapters 39-45).

Chapters 46-51: Messages for the nations.

This section contains a number of messages *concerning the nations* around Judah. They are similar in style to Isaiah 13–23, Ezekiel 25–32, and Amos 1:3–2:16 and were written at different times, but collated together as part of Jeremiah's writings.

- Egypt (Chapter 46)

This prophecy describes Egypt's defeat at Carchemish near Babylon (605 BC), and the invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar in 568 BC. This resulted in the occupation of Egypt by Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar's judgment on all rebels, including Jews who wouldn't comply with his requirements. The end of this section (46:27,28) repeats parts of the Book of Hope (Jeremiah 30:10-11).

- The Philistines (Chapter 47)
- Moab (Chapter 48)
- Ammon (Chapter 49:1-6)
- Edom (Chapter 49:7-22). The prophecy regarding Edom's demise is further developed in the Book of Habakkuk and its fulfillment is graphically seen today in the ruins of Petra, in modern day Jordan.
- Damascus (Chapter 49:23-27)
- Kedar and Hazar (Chapter 49:28-33)

These messages condemn pride, cruelty, and idolatry in the various pagan nations and cities.

- Elam (Chapter 49:34-39)

The Elamites were a people living east of Babylon. They had minimal contact with Judah, so this is the only prophecy anywhere against them. Jeremiah predicted that Elam would be destroyed then restored. Ezekiel described the Elamites as among the inhabitants of Sheol (Ezekiel 32:24).

- Babylon (Chapters 50,51)

The Babylonians had treated Jeremiah with kindness and respect but he still proclaimed the word of God to them in an uncompromising way. Babylon will be *laid waste* by a *nation from the north* (Persia) and will end up *completely desolate* and will *never again be inhabited* (True even today!). God's vengeance will be poured on Babylon and He will *do to her what she has done to others*. The *arrogant one will stumble and fall and no-one will help her up*. This took place in 536 BC when Cyrus, King of Persia diverted the course of the Euphrates River creating a distraction that enabled him to take the city without a fight.

In those days God's people will *seek the Lord their God* and once again *bind themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten*. God's people must *flee from Babylon* and return to their own land. Through this God will vindicate Himself and once again show His love to the people of Judah and Israel. Jeremiah extols the Lord as the only One who has the power to do this because *He is the One who is the Maker of all things, including the people of his inheritance - the Lord Almighty is His name*.

Jeremiah wrote all of the words that God had given him about God's judgment on Babylon on a scroll. He sent Seraiah to Babylon and told him to read them out aloud. He was to then say: *'So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring on her. And her people will fall.'*

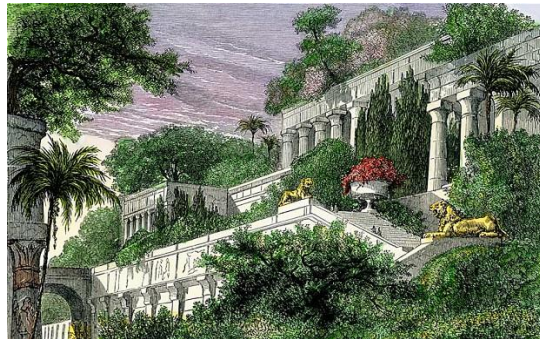
These prophecies were all accurately fulfilled showing, once again, that no nation can stand for evil and escape the wrath of Almighty God.

Babylon

Babylon was the capital of the Babylonian Empire which ruled in the Middle East from 606 -536 BC. Jeremiah predicted that the mighty Babylonian Empire would fall and it did so when Cyrus, King of Persia conquered it and established the Persian Empire.



Hanging gardens of Babylon



Babylon means "gate of god". The city lay on the Euphrates River in modern-day Iraq. It was famous for its beautiful 'hanging gardens'.

Babylon began with the tower of Babel (meaning "confusion" Genesis 11:9) and the system of confusion and rebellion that it spawned has always been at the centre of opposition to God's work, even to this day. (Political, economic and religious confusion reigns throughout the world, in direct opposition to the work of the Holy Spirit. Terrorist organisations like ISIS and radical opposition to the State of Israel are centred in the area of ancient Babylon). The book of Revelation describes Babylon as *the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth* and predicts her ultimate fall when Jesus returns. Revelation 14:8; 17:5; 18:1-24..

Chapter 51 concludes "the words of Jeremiah."

Chapter 52: Conclusion.

Chapter 52 restates the main events that took place related to Jeremiah's prophecies. It describes Zedekiah's rebellion; the fall and destruction of Jerusalem; and how Judah was taken into captivity in Babylon. *4600 people in all* were taken to Babylon. Jehoiachin was released from prison in Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar's death and he lived out his natural life as the Lord had said he would.

Parts of Chapter 52 are from Chapter 39 and are repeated in 2 Kings 25 and 2 Chronicles 36.

Discussion questions

Why did God send His people into exile for 70 years? How did God try to prevent this from being necessary? What was the result of the exile? Did God's people learn from their time in exile? What can we learn from this about the ways that God works in our lives?

Jeremiah contains many prophecies. Which prophecies have been fulfilled regarding: Judah? the nations? Jesus the Messiah? The Church? The future? Which ones have yet to be fulfilled?

What does Jeremiah say will lead to a nation being blessed? How does this relate to the way our nation is governed and carries out its business?

Identify all references to Jesus in Jeremiah. How do these references help your understanding of Jesus as Messiah?

Do a character study of Jeremiah. How did he deal with the adversity he endured? What was his heart like toward the Lord? What was his heart like toward God's sinful people? How did he communicate his message? What qualities did he demonstrate that you admire?

Why do good people (like Jeremiah) sometimes suffer greatly, while others seem to have little suffering? What can you learn from Jeremiah about how to handle suffering?

What have you learned from your study of Jeremiah? How will you apply this in your life?