

## *Jeremiah*

The text has five parts that present the record of the prophesying of Jeremiah (born of a priestly line about 645 in Anathoth, just northeast of Jerusalem) from 627 (the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign) to his death in Egypt 582. The story of Jeremiah's life is told in the course of recounting God's dealings with Judah. In 605-604 he dictated his message to Baruch, but King Jehoakim angrily destroyed the scroll (36:1-32). Jeremiah then dictated a second version and kept it safe from destruction. Baruch includes in the text a biography that covered about 25 years of Jeremiah's life (from 609 through 587) – see 42:1-44:30. The final version of the book as it is found in the Bible was apparently prepared by a Deuteronomist editor after the return from exile, perhaps shortly after 538, or perhaps about 500.

### I. Visions and prophecies about Judah and Jerusalem (1:1-24:10)

- 1:1-9 – Jeremiah's call to announce God's word to an unreceptive and obstinate people: not a vision of the LORD's glory but a hearing of His word, like the call of Moses at Sinai (Ex 3:1-4:17).
- 2:1-6:30 – after the 622 discovery of scroll of *Deuteronomy* by Josiah (627-609), Jeremiah prophesies about the way in which God's word will be fulfilled through the Babylonian armies under Nebopolassar (626-605). Note the use of Hosea's image of marriage to symbolize God's covenant and Judah's infidelity (2:1-3:5, 3:19-20, 6:29-30) and injustice (5:26-29, 6:13-14). Condemnation of the prophets of false consolation (4:10, 5:12-13, 5:30-31, 6:13-14). The Deuteronomist reform lost momentum when the Egyptian soldiers of Neicho killed Josiah at Megiddo in 609. Jehoahaz succeeded his father on the throne but within 3 months Necho deposed him in favor of Jehoiakim.
- 7:1-20:18 – the reign of Jehoiakim (609-598), who made an alliance with Egypt and thereby provoked an attack by Nebuchadnezzar, including Jeremiah's tensions with adversaries (7:1-8:3, 11:1-17, 16:1-18, 18:1-12, 19:1-20:6, 21:1-10, 22:1-5), the "Confessions" (11:18-12:6, 15:10-21, 17:14-18, 18:18-23, 20:7-18) and biographical passages (4:19-21, 5:3-5, 8:18-23, 16:19-21). Note the symbolic actions involving the rotten waist cloth, the broken potsherds, the potter's destruction of misshapen artifacts. The Confessions show us his suffering from the alienation that he incurs from having to convey the word of God and his refusal to cover up his resentment, his despair, and even his desire for retaliation. Eventually the prophet repents and accepts the LORD's directive that he learn perseverance and allow the LORD to test his devotion. After Jehoiakim's death Nebuchadnezzar deposed his son Jehoiachin and imprisoned him in Babylon. The crown passes to Zedekiah, a third son of Josiah,
- 21:1-24:10 – the reign of Zedekiah (597-587), including 23:25-40 on false prophets, who arose during the vacillations of the young king. Beware the false promises of peace without repentance, and the claim of divine authority for empty hopes. The court prophet Hananiah promised the return of exiles within just two years, and Zedekiah was taken in by this optimism. When Zedekiah convened a meeting of rulers in Jerusalem in 594 to form an anti-Babylonian alliance, Jeremiah proclaimed that this was folly and that LORD was using the Babylonians to teach Judah a lesson. A promise that the LORD will restore a remnant of His people, to be ruled by a new branch of the Davidic line. How to tell authentic prophecy? God's word as a fire that purifies by refining and testing the prophet; the prophet speaks the word of God even while recognizing inner resistances (23:28-29).

### II. Speeches and actions regarding Judah and the Nations (*Goyim*): 25:1- 35:19

- 25:1-38 – the scroll for Jehoiakim, whom Jeremiah considered to have betrayed Josiah's principles by his extravagant building-projects and his payment of heavy tributes to Egypt. Baruch reads it to the people gathered in the Temple square on a day of fasting in December 604.
- 26:1-24 – Temple sermon (609) against ritual sacrifice without real obedience to God and justice to one's neighbor; arrest and trial, saved by Ahikam, whose father assisted Josiah with reforms.

- 27:1-22 – against the Anti-Babylonian alliance
- 28:1-17 – confrontation with false prophets; symbolic action: wearing a yoke in the public square.
- 29:1-32 – letter to the exiles, urging perseverance during the grace of suffering an exile, for it would be at least seventy years, and thus a time when the Lord would transform them before restoring them to the promised land. Two baskets of figs: the good in Babylonian exile, the rotten in Jerusalem.
- 30:1–31:40 – restoration of Israel and Judah and promise of a New Covenant – God brings Jeremiah to understand the depth of the renewal He will bring about. The commandments will remain the same, but the LORD will write them on the heart of each person, as a living knowledge of God.
- 32:1-44 – buying land in time of siege as a sign of confidence about the restoration God will bring about.
- 33:1-26 – prophecy of healing and recovery
- 34:1-22 – just before his death, Zedekiah announces the release of slaves held to pay off debts
- 35:1-9 – the Rechabites

### III. Jeremiah's sufferings: 36:1–45:5

- 36:1-32 – the scroll mentioned in ch. 25 is read to Jehoiakim who slices it up and tosses it on the waters, in contempt for its message (unlike the reaction of his father Josiah when shown *Deuteronomy*).
- 37:1–38:28 – Jeremiah's dealings with Zedekiah, imprisonment for alleged desertion of the city when he tries to go and inspect the property he purchased (see 32:1-44), punishment in the storage pit for allegedly discouraging the people with the prophecy of Jerusalem's imminent fall.
- 39:1-18 – the fall of Jerusalem in summer 587 and destruction of the Temple
- 40:1–41:18 – murder of Gedaliah at Mizpah
- 42:1–43:7 – advice to those remaining in Judah, flight into Egypt (587-582). After the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah remains with those who were not exiled. The new governor Gedaliah is killed by the cruel Ishmael ben Nethaniah. Johanan ben Kareah leads the survivors of Judah to Egypt, despite Jeremiah's protests, but Jeremiah and Baruch go down to Egypt with other refugees.
- 43:8–44:30 – final words (against goddess worship)
- 45:1-5 – prophecy to Baruch

### IV. Prophecies against the nations: 46:1–51:64.

- 50:1–51:64 – Jeremiah's judgment about Nebuchadnezzar as merely a transitory instrument of God's judgment; once Jerusalem has fallen, the Lord will destroy Babylong for its pride and will eventually redeem His people for their captivity.

### V. Fall of Jerusalem, release from prison: 52:1-34 (see 2 Kings 24:18–25:30)

Jeremiah prefigures Jesus in various ways, including:

- 16:1 – call to prophetic celibacy (Matthew 19:10-12)
- 11:18-23 – rejection by his own people (Mark 6:1-6)
- 7:1-15, 26:1-6 – prophecy of destruction of the Temple (Mark 13:1-4)
- 28:5-17 – prophecy about the fall of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44, 21:20-23)
- 26:10-15 – trial after preaching in the Temple (Mark 14: 57-58)
- 11:18-19 – a lamb being led to the slaughter (Mark 15:5)
- 31:31-34 – preaching the New Covenant – Luke 22:20, 1 Cor. 11:25, Hebrews 8:8-12
- 23:1-6 and 33:15-16 – Jesus as the new branch of David's line