

Introduction to Jeremiah

Prepared by Steve Gregg

I. Historical Setting:

- The Assyrians had dominated international politics for 300 years, but were now declining as Babylon and Egypt both sought supremacy.
- The year before Jeremiah received his call (627 BC), Josiah had begun his reforms. Six years later (621 BC), the book of the law (probably Deuteronomy) was found, which may be alluded to in Jeremiah's 11th chapter. Josiah's reforms did not succeed in turning Judah permanently from idolatry. After Josiah's death, a succession of evil rulers led Judah into ultimate destruction.
- In 607 BC, Babylon conquered Assyria, and crushed Egypt two years later at the battle of Carchemish. Between these victories, Babylon had partially destroyed Jerusalem (605 BC), taking certain captives (including Daniel and his three friends).
- Babylonian troops returned to further devastate Jerusalem in 597 BC, taking additional captives (including Ezekiel).
- When Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, Babylonian troops returned in 586 BC, destroying the city and the temple, and leading the rest of the population captive to Babylon.
- Jeremiah lived through all three of these assaults on his homeland, and through the reigns of the last five kings of Judah:

Josiah —born during reign of grandfather Manessah, reigned from age 8 for 31 years (640-609 BC)

Jehoahaz —middle son of Josiah, age 23, reigns for 3 months, taken into captivity in Egypt (609)

Jehoiakim (also called Eliakim) — oldest son of Josiah, age 25, reigns 11 years (609-598 BC)

Jehoiachin (or Jeconiah or Coniah)—son of Jehoiachim, age 18, reigned 3 months (598-597 BC)

Zedekiah — youngest son of Josiah, age 21, reigned 11 years (597-586 BC)

Gedaliah —governor appointed by Nebuchadnezzar, no relation to the Judean kings

II. The Man Jeremiah:

- Seven other men by this name are known in the Old Testament. The Prophet Jeremiah, was a priest (like Ezekiel and Zechariah), from Anathoth, 3 miles NE of Jerusalem, in Benjamin's territory. In addition to this book, he may have been the author of the Books of Kings (Jewish tradition).
- Probably born at the end of Manessah's reign. Called into the prophetic ministry in the 13th year of Josiah's reign (626 BC)—about 100 years after Isaiah—and ministered almost 50 years, through the reigns of the last five kings of Judah, beyond the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. This period is described in 2 Kings 22-25 and 2 Chron.34-36.
- “The Weeping Prophet” (9:1/ 13:17/ 14:17) was called to prophesy while still quite young, he was at first very reluctant. He later became quite bold, however. He was sensitive enough to weep over the sins of his people and the disasters that they were bringing upon themselves, but also courageous enough to preach an unpopular message, which led to his imprisonment (32:2) and attempts on his life (ch.26:16, 24). ***In his message and temperament, Jeremiah can be regarded as a type of Christ.***
- In the beginning, he urged the people to repent, but when this failed, he urged them to surrender to Babylon. For this, he was accused of treason and thrown into a dungeon (38:4-6). He seems to have had only two converts, his scribe Baruch and the Ethiopian eunuch, Ebed-melech (38:7-13; 39:15-18).
- According to God's command, Jeremiah never married (16:1-4).

- When Gedaliah, the Babylonian-appointed governor of Judah, was murdered, many of the Jews fled to Egypt, fearing reprisals from Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah did not agree with this flight to Egypt, but was forced by his companions to accompany them. In Egypt, he continued his prophetic ministry until, according to tradition, he was killed by one of his countrymen. According to an alternative tradition, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt 20 years after the flight to Egypt, and took Jeremiah captive to Babylon.
- According to certain Jewish traditions, Jeremiah took the Ark of the Covenant with him to Egypt. Some rabbis believed Jeremiah would reappear at the beginning of the messianic age and miraculously feed the people with the manna from the golden pot in the ark (cf. John 6:14/ Matt.16:14/ Rev.2:17).
- Jeremiah also wrote Lamentations and might have been the principal author of the books of Kings

III. Prophets contemporary with Jeremiah:

Habakkuk and Zephaniah (in Jerusalem); Daniel and Ezekiel (in Babylon);
Urijah, son of Shemaiah (in Kirjath-Jearim—Jer.26:20-23)

IV. Jeremiah, a “type” of Christ?

- A) Called before his birth (1:5/ Matt.1:21);
- B) Never married (16:1ff)
- C) Weeping over Jerusalem (9:1, etc./ Luke 19:41);
- D) Yoke-making (27:2/ Matt.11:29);
- E) Warning his generation of impending conquest;
- F) Messenger of the New Covenant (31:31/ Luke 22:20)
- G) Phraseology adopted by Jesus:
 - “rest for your souls” (6:16 / Matt.11:29)
 - “den of thieves” (7:11 / Matt.21:13)
 - “Gehenna” (7:32 / Mk.9:33)

V. The Book of Jeremiah

- The longest of the prophetic books
- Main theme: God’s impending judgment on Judah (e.g., chapters 1-29), and the subsequent Messianic Age (e.g., 23:3-8; chapters 30-33)
- Reveals more of the author’s personal life and inner struggles than any other prophetic book
- Began to be written down about 20 years after the beginning of the prophet’s oral ministry (36:1-2). Dictated to a friend and scribe, named Baruch (36:4-8, 32; 32:13ff; 45:1). The earliest 21 chapters had to be written twice. The original draft was deliberately destroyed in fire by King Jehoiakim (36:22-25), but was re-written and expanded by the prophet (36:32).
- Quoted seven times in other books (Dan.9:2/ Matt.2:18; 27:9/1 Cor.1:31/2 Cor.10:17/ Heb.8:8-12; 10:16f)

VI. Contents

- Visions
 1. The almond branch (1:11-12)
 2. The boiling pot (1:13-15)
 3. The baskets of figs (ch.24)

- Acted Prophecies, or object lessons
 1. The linen sash (ch.13)
 2. The prophet's celibacy (ch.16)
 3. The potter's house (ch.18)
 4. The earthen flask (ch.19)
 5. The yoke (ch.27)
 6. The death of Hananiah (ch.28)
 7. The purchase of the field (ch.32)
- Metaphors
- Jeremiah's prayers
- Historical narrative

VII. Analysis of Structure and Contents

<i>Topical Outline</i>	<i>Alternative Structural Outline</i>
I. The call of Jeremiah to prophesy (chapter 1)	I. Prophecies prior to 586 BC (chapters 1-39, 45)
II. Condemnation of Judah (chapters 2-29)	A. Undated, general (chapters 1-20)
III. The "Little Book of Comfort" (chapters 30-33)	B. Dated, particular (chapters 21-39, 45)
IV. Calamity on Judah (chapters 34-45)	II. Prophecies after fall of Jerusalem (chapters 40-44)
V. Prophecies against heathen nations (chapters 46-51)	III. Prophecies against heathen nations (chapters 46-51)
VI. Historical Appendix (chapter 52)	IV. Historical Appendix (chapter 52)

Historical Timeline

- 631 BC At age 16, Josiah begins to seek the Lord (2 Chron.34:3)
- 627 BC Josiah begins reforms in his 12th year of his reign (2 Chron.34:3)
- 626 BC Jeremiah called to prophetic ministry as a youth (Jer.1:2)
- 621 BC The Book of the Law (Deuteronomy) found in the temple (2 Chron.34:8)
- 609 BC Josiah dies in battle against Neco, who then replaces Josiah's son Jehoahaz with Jehoiakim
- 607 BC Nebuchadnezzar conquers Assyria
- 605 BC Nebuchadnezzar conquers Egypt at Carchemesh, invades Judah and takes Daniel, *et al.*
Jeremiah has Baruch write down the prophecies he had been preaching for 23 years (25:3; ch.36)
- 598 BC Jehoiakim dies and is succeeded (briefly) by his son Jehoiachin (Jeconiah)
- 597 BC Nebuchadnezzar comes and replaces Jeconiah with Zedekiah, takes captives, including Ezekiel
- 586 BC Nebuchadnezzar destroys Jerusalem, blinds Zedekiah, sets up Gedaliah as governor.
Gedaliah is murdered seven months later, and Jeremiah is forced to flee with others to Egypt.

Chronological Outline:

- I. Josiah's reign (639-608 BC)
 - Chapter 1— thirteenth year of Josiah (626 BC)
 - Chapters 2—20 (except for chapter 13)
 - Chapter 11—when the book of the law was found (621 BC)
- II. Jehoiakim's reign (608-597 BC)
 - Chapter 26 at the beginning of his reign
 - Chapters 25, 36, 45-49—in the fourth year of his reign
 - Chapter 35—during his reign sometime
- III. Jehoiachin's reign (597 BC...three months)
 - Chapters 13 and 22:24-30 (probably)
- IV. Zedekiah's reign (597-586 BC)
 - Chapters 23-24; 27-29; 49:34-39 —beginning of his reign
 - Chapters 50 and 51:54-64 —fourth year (593 BC)
 - Chapters 30-31 —between 597 and 588BC
 - Chapters 21-22, 34, 37 —ninth year (year of siege, Jeremiah at liberty)
 - Chapters 32-33 —587 BC (Jeremiah in prison)

Chapters 38-39 —eleventh year (586, Jerusalem destroyed)

V. In Jerusalem under Gedaliah — Chapters 40 – 43:7

VI. In Egypt — Chapters 43:8 – 44

Chapter-by-chapter

- 1 The prophet's call, visions: the almond branch and the boiling pot
- 2 The aggrieved husband; broken cisterns chosen over the fountain of living waters
- 3 Call to repentance and promise of restoration
- 4 The lion is coming from the thicket
- 5 My people love to have it so
- 6 Be afraid. Be very afraid.
- 7 Temple gate sermon—Shiloh, Tophet
- 8 Is there no balm in Gilead?
- 9 Weeping of the prophet and of the people, the need to know God
- 10 Do not learn the ways of the heathen
- 11 The covenant
- 12 Running with footmen or with horses?
- 13 The linen sash, the full wine bottles
- 14 The drought
- 15 Jeremiah complains about his lot
- 16 Jeremiah must not marry
- 17 Cursed is he who trusts in man; blessed is he who trusts in the Lord
- 18 Potter's house
- 19 Earthen flask, prophecy of Tophet
- 20 Jeremiah put in stocks
- 21 Message to Zedekiah: Surrender to Babylon
- 22 Prophecies concerning three kings of David's line—Shallum, Jehoiakim, Coniah
- 23 The righteous branch, Vs. the false prophets
- 24 Figs, good and bad
- 25 The seventy years; the cup of wrath
- 26 Temple court prophecy stirs up legal trial
- 27 The yoke of Babylon
- 28 The death of Hananiah
- 29 The letter to the exiles
- 30 Restoration of the exiles
- 31 The new covenant
- 32 Buying a field
- 33 The righteous Branch and the certainty of God's covenant with David
- 34 Slaves released, then recaptured
- 35 Rechabites
- 36 The book burned and rewritten
- 37 Jeremiah imprisoned in the cistern
- 38 Jeremiah rescued from starvation by Ebed-melech
- 39 Jerusalem falls, Jeremiah released from prison
- 40 Gedaliah governs
- 41 Gedaliah assassinated
- 42 Jeremiah advises against fleeing to Egypt
- 43 Jeremiah forced to flee to Egypt against his will
- 44 Jeremiah denounces the idolatry of the Jews in Egypt
- 45 Comfort to Baruch
- 46 Judgment on Egypt
- 47 Judgment on Philistines
- 48 Judgment on Moab
- 49 Judgment on Ammonites, Edom, Syria and others
- 50-51 Judgment on Babylon
- 52 Historical appendix

Chapters arranged chronologically

Josiah's reign (626-609 BC)

- 1 The prophet's call, visions: the almond branch and the boiling pot (626 BC)
- 2 The agrieved husband; broken cisterns chosen over the fountain of living waters
- 3 Call to repentance and promise of restoration
- 4 The lion is coming from the thicket
- 5 My people love to have it so
- 6 Be afraid. Be very afraid.
- 7 Temple gate sermon—Shiloh, Tophet
- 8 Is there no balm in Gilead?
- 9 Weeping of the prophet and of the people, the need to know God
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- 13 The linen sash, the full wine bottles
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- 15 Jeremiah complains about his lot
- 16 Jeremiah must not marry
- 17 Cursed is he who trusts in man; blessed is he who trusts in the Lord
- 18 Potter's house
- 19 Earthen flask, prophecy of Tophet
- 20 Jeremiah put in stocks

Jehoiakim's reign (609-598 BC)

At the beginning (609 BC):

- 26 Temple court prophecy stirs up legal trial

Fourth year (605 BC):

- 25 The seventy years; the cup of wrath
- 36 The book burned and rewritten
- 45 Comfort to Baruch
- 46 Judgment on Egypt
- 47 Judgment on Philistines
- 48 Judgment on Moab
- 49 Judgment on Ammonites, Edom, Syria and others

Sometime during his reign (609-598 BC):

- 35 Rechabites

Zedekiah's reign (597-586 BC)

At the beginning (597 BC):

- 23 The righteous branch, Vs. the false prophets
- 24 Figs, good and bad
- 27 The yoke of Babylon
- 28 The death of Hananiah
- 29 The letter to the exiles
- 49:34-39

Fourth year (594/3 BC):

- 50-51 Judgment on Babylon (51:59)

Ninth Year (588 BC):

- 21 Message to Zedekiah: Surrender to Babylon
- 22 Prophecies concerning three kings of David's line—Shallum, Jehoiakim, Coniah
- 34 Slaves released, then recaptured

37 Jeremiah imprisoned in the cistern

Around this time

30 Restoration of the exiles

31 The new covenant

Tenth year (587 BC):

32 In prison, Jeremiah buys a field

33 The righteous Branch and the certainty of God's covenant with David

Eleventh year (586 BC):

38 Jeremiah rescued from starvation by Ebed-melech

39 Jerusalem falls, Jeremiah released from prison

In Jerusalem under Gedaliah (586/5 BC):

40 Gedaliah governs

41 Gedaliah assassinated

42 Jeremiah advises against fleeing to Egypt

In Egypt:

43 Jeremiah forced to flee to Egypt against his will

44 Jeremiah denounces the idolatry of the Jews in Egypt

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Chronology of Jeremiah

<i>Chapters</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<i>Reign of Josiah</i> <i>639-608 BC</i>		
1	13 th of Josiah	
2 through 20 (except 13)	Reign of Josiah	
11	621 BC	When the book was found
<i>Reign of Jehoiakim</i> <i>608-597 BC</i>		
22	Beginning of Jehoiachim's	
25; 36; 45-49	Fourth of Jehoiachim (605 BC)	
<i>Reign of Jehoiachin</i> <i>597 BC (three months)</i>		
13 and 22:24-30 (probably)		
<i>Reign of Zedekiah</i> <i>597-586 BC</i>		
23-24; 27-29; 49:34-39	Beginning of Zedekiah's	
50 and 51:59-64	Fourth of Zedekiah's (593 BC)	
30-31	Between 597 and 588 BC	
21; 34; 37	Ninth year (588 BC)	Year of siege; Jeremiah at liberty
32-33	Tenth year (587 BC)	Jeremiah in prison
38-39	Eleventh year (586 BC)	Fall of Jerusalem
<i>Time of Gedaliah</i>		
40—43:7	586 BC	In Jerusalem, after the fall
<i>After the flight to Egypt</i>		
43:8—ch.44		In Egypt

- 1 The prophet's call, visions: the almond branch and the boiling pot
- 2 The agrieved husband; broken cisterns chosen over the fountain of living waters
- 3 Call to repentance and promise of restoration
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