

# Through the Bible Book by Book

## Old Testament

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### Jeremiah

**Theme:** Isaiah and Jeremiah both carried messages of condemnation to apostate Israel. But whereas the tone of Isaiah is vigorous and severe, that of Jeremiah is mild and gentle. The former carries an expression of the Lord's wrath against Israel's sin; the latter, an expression of His sorrow because of the same. In rebuking Israel, Isaiah dipped his pen in fire; Jeremiah dipped his in tears.

Isaiah, after his denunciation of Israel's iniquity, burst forth into raptures of joy at the prospect of the coming restoration. Jeremiah had a glimpse of the same happy event, but it was not sufficient to dry his tears or dispel the gloom of his sorrow for Israel's sinfulness. Because of this last fact Jeremiah has been known as "the weeping prophet."

The following will serve as the theme of his book; the Lord's unchanging love toward His backslidden people and His sorrow for their condition.

**Author:** Jeremiah. He was the son of Hilkiah, a priest of Anathoth in Benjamin. He was called to the ministry while still young (1:6), in the thirteenth year of King Josiah, about seventy years after the death of Isaiah. Later, probably because of persecution of his townspeople and even of his own family (11:21; 12:6), he left Anathoth and came to Jerusalem. There and in other cities in Judah, he ministered for about forty years. During the reigns of Josiah and Jehoahaz, he was allowed to continue his ministry in peace, but during the reigns of Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah he suffered severe persecution. In the reign of Jehoiakim he was imprisoned because of his boldness in prophesying the desolation of Jerusalem.

During the reign of Zedekiah, he was arrested as a deserter, and remained in prison until the taking of the city, at which time he was released by Nebuchadnezzar and allowed to return to Jerusalem. On his return, he tried to dissuade the people from returning to Egypt to escape what they believed to be an impending danger. They ignored his appeals and migrated to Egypt taking Jeremiah with them. In Egypt he continued his efforts to turn the people to the Lord. Ancient tradition tells us that, angered by his continued warnings and rebukes, the Jews put him to death in Egypt.

**Scope:** From the 13th year of Josiah to the early part of the Babylonian captivity, covering a period of about 40 years.

## CONTENTS:

Because of lack of chronological order in the prophecies of Jeremiah, it is difficult to give a satisfactory analysis of them.

We suggest the following:

- I. Jeremiah's Call and Commission (Ch. 1).
- II. General Message of Rebuke to Judah (Chs. 2 to 25).
- III. More Detailed Message of Rebuke and Judgment and of Restoration (Chs. 26 to 39).
- IV. Messages after Captivity (Chs. 40-45).
- V. Prophecies Concerning Nations (Chs. 46-51).
- VI. Retrospect: the Captivity of Judah (Ch. 52).

Before continuing the study of Jeremiah, read II Kings Chs. 22 to 25, which will give the historical background of the book.

### **I. Jeremiah's Call and Commission (Ch. 1)**

We shall notice as the contents of this chapter:

1. Jeremiah's origin - from a priestly family living in Benjamin (v. 1).
2. The time of his ministry - from the reign of Josiah to the beginning of the Babylonian captivity (vv. 2, 3).
3. His call - to be a prophet to the nations (vv. 4, 5).
4. His enduement - inspired by the Lord (vv. 6-9).
5. His commission - to prophesy the fall and restoration of nations (v. 10).
6. His message to Israel - to prophesy the coming Babylonian invasion (symbolized by the seething pot) and the imminence of that event (symbolized by the almond tree vv. 11-16).
7. Jeremiah's encouragement - protection against persecution (vv. 17-19).

### **II. General Message of Rebuke to Judah (Chs. 2 to 25)**

The following are the contents of this section:

1. Jeremiah's first message to Judah (2:1 to 3:5).

In this message the Lord reviews Israel's past, reminds them of their past blessings and deliverances, rebukes them for their present backsliding, self-righteousness and idolatry, and pleads with them to return to Him.

2. Jeremiah's second message (3:6 to 6:30).

The Lord reminds Judah of the fact that He cast the ten tribes out of His sight for their idolatry, and that instead of taking warning from the fate of the ten tribes, they have continued in the same

sins (3:6-10). The Lord then appeals to the Northern kingdom (in captivity) to repent, expressing His love for them and, making promises of restoration in the last days (3:11 to 4:2). He then addresses to Judah an exhortation to repentance, and this appeal failing, He pronounces upon them the judgment of the Babylonian invasion (4:3 to 6:30).

### 3. Discourse in the temple gate (Chs. 7-10).

The theme of this discourse is as follows: because of Israel's formality in worship, their idolatry, their violation of GOD's law, their rejection of His messengers, their universal and incurable backsliding, the Lord will give the land of Judah over to invasion and will scatter the inhabitants among the nations.

### 4. The message on the broken covenant (Chs. 11, 12).

The occasion of this message was the finding of the book of the law in the reign of Josiah (II Kings 22:8-23). The main theme of this message is as follows: GOD's curse upon Judah because of the violation of the Mosaic covenant.

### 5. The message of the linen girdle (Ch. 13).

By the symbolic actions of the prophet's putting on a girdle, burying it by the banks of the Euphrates, and then unearthing it! is typified the Lord's election of Israel to be HIS own people, HIS rejection of them for their rebelliousness, and His humbling of them by the Babylonian captivity.

### 6. Prophecies on the occasion of a drought in Judea (Chs. 14, 15).

Jeremiah, recognizing this drought as a judgment of GOD makes intercession for the people (Ch. 14). But so incurable has become Israel's iniquity that intercession will no longer avail, even though Moses and Samuel - two of Israel's greatest intercessors - were to plead for them (15:1-10). Though the whole nation is to be delivered over to judgment, yet GOD will preserve a remnant, of whom Jeremiah is representative (15:12-21).

### 7. The sign of the unmarried prophet (Ch 16:1 to 17:18).

Jeremiah is commanded not to marry, as a sign of the imminence of GOD's judgments, the awfulness of which would make the single estate preferable to the married. As further signs of the same event he is commanded not to mourn (v. 5), for since GOD had taken away peace from His people only a false consolation could be given; he is also commanded not to engage in legitimate merrymaking, for in view of impending Judgment, such would be a mockery (v. 9). Through the calamities prophesied in these chapters, there gleam some rays of hope for Israel (16:15-21).

### 8. The message concerning the Sabbath (17:19-27).

The Sabbath was a sign of GOD's covenant between Him and the children of Israel (Exodus

31:16, 17). So then a violation of the Sabbath day would be equivalent to a violation of GOD's covenant, and would bring the penalty prophesied by Jeremiah (Ch. 17:27).

9. The sign of the potter's house (18:1 to 19:13).

GOD's power to deal with the nations according to His sovereign will is symbolized by the potter's molding of vessels. GOD can mold Israel as a potter can a vessel. If they are rebellious He can mar them; if they repent He can remake them (Ch. 18). Since Israel persists in their apostasy GOD will cast them away. This is typified by the breaking of a potter's vessel (19:1-13).

10. Jeremiah's first persecution (19:14 to 20:18).

Jeremiah's prediction concerning the destruction of Jerusalem angers a priest's son by the name of Pashur, who himself had been prophesying Jerusalem's safety (20:6). He vents his anger on the prophet by inflicting on him the painful punishment of the stocks. For this act of persecution, the Lord pronounces judgment upon Pashur, at the same time repeating the prophecy of the Babylonian captivity. The latter part of chapter 20 reveals the effect of this persecution on the timid nature of Jeremiah. He was tempted to seal his lips and refrain from prophesying. But the fire within was stronger than the fire without; so he continued to preach (20:9).

11. The message to king Zedekiah (Chs. 21, 22).

This was uttered in response to Zedekiah's inquiry concerning Nebuchadnezzar's invasion.

Evidently when inquiring of the Lord he had not the slightest intention of heeding the counselor commandments that might be given, for the response to his inquiry is a message of severe judgment upon him (vv. 1-7).

The Lord then addresses the people offering to such who are willing to listen to Him, a means of escape from the coming destruction (21:8-10). He then offers a way of escape to the royal house from the coming judgment - an escape that can be affected by their executing judgment and righteousness (21:11-14).

As examples of the sureness of divine retribution, the Lord reminds Zedekiah of the fate of the three kings preceding him; probably repeating messages that had been delivered to them: Shallum, or Jehoahaz, (22:11); Jehoiakim (22:18); Jeconiah, or Jehoiachin (22:24).

12. The Lord has been speaking about the unrighteous kings of Israel. He now promises the coming of the righteous King, the Messiah who shall restore Judah and Israel (23:5-6).

Chapter 23 contains for the most part a denunciation of the false prophets, who, instead of exhorting the people to repentance by the warnings of impending judgment, were lulling them into a false security with promises of peace and safety.

13. The sign of the figs (Chap. 24).

Under the figure of good and bad figs is shown the future of those Jews of the first deportation in the reign of Jeconiah and those of the final captivity in the reign of Zedekiah. The former would be restored and replanted in Palestine; the latter would be given up to the sword and would be scattered among the heathen.

14. Chapter 25:1-14 contains a prophecy of the seventy years captivity of Judah, this to be followed by the destruction of Babylon, Israel's oppressors.

15. Under the figure of a wine-cup of fury is set forth GOD's judgment of the nations (25:15-38).

### **III. More Detailed Messages of Rebuke and Judgment and of Restoration (Chapters 26 to 39)**

The following are the contents of this section:

1. Jeremiah's repetition of his message concerning the destruction of Jerusalem endangers his life. However he is protected from the fury of the priests and the people by the judges of the city (Ch. 26).

2. Under the figure of yokes is set forth the subjugation of Judah and the surrounding nations by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (Chs. 27, 28).

This message, which was given in the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, was directed against those false prophets who were encouraging the people to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, and who were promising a speedy return of the exiles of the first deportation.

3. The message to the captives of the first deportation (Ch. 29).

This letter was written to instruct the exiles to prepare to make their home in Babylon for a period of seventy years, and to warn them not to give heed to those prophets who were falsely predicting a speedy return.

4. After contemplating Israel's present captivity and coming deliverance, the prophet gazes into the future and sees Israel delivered from the final tribulation at the end of the age, restored to their land, under Messiah the son of David, cleansed from their sins and enjoying the blessings of the New Covenant that GOD will make with them (Chs. 30, 31).

5. As a sign of the coming restoration of the land, Jeremiah is led by the Lord to purchase a portion of land from one of his relatives (Ch. 32).

Upon seeing the condition of the city surrounded by the Chaldeans, Jeremiah's faith seems to fail concerning the promise of restoration. Whereupon in his perplexity he goes before the Lord in prayer (vv. 16-25). Jeremiah is assured that nothing is too hard for the Lord, who is able to pardon and purge Israel's iniquity and restore them to their land (vv. 26-44).

6. Chapter 33 continues the theme of Israel's restoration. Their final restoration is assured by the Lord's promise (vv. 1-14), by the Lord's Branch, the Messiah (vv. 15-18), and by the Lord's faithfulness in keeping His covenant (vv. 19-26).

7. Chapter 34 contains a prophecy of Zedekiah's captivity and a denunciation of the people of Jerusalem for the breaking of a covenant. The law of Moses required that Hebrew slaves be released after seven years' service. This command had long been violated. It seems that Jeremiah's preaching and fear of the coming captivity had stirred the people's consciences to the extent of making them willing to sign a covenant to release their slaves. But when Nebuchadnezzar withdrew his armies for a time, and the danger of invasion seemed to be past, the people showed the shallowness of their motives by breaking their agreement. Since they had made captives of others, they, too, would become captives, decreed the Lord.

8. The message concerning the Rechabites (Ch. 35).

The Rechabites were descended from Hobab, the brother-in-law of Moses. They were Kenites and migrated with Israel to Canaan (Numbers 10:29; Judges 1:16; 4:11-17; 5:24; I Samuel 15:6). They are held up as an example to the Jews, and the disobedience of the Lord's divine law by the latter is contrasted with the Rechabites' unwavering obedience to the simple rules of living laid down by their ancestor.

9. The writing of Jeremiah's prophecies in the days of Jehoiakim (Ch. 36).

In a final attempt to bring Israel to repentance the Lord commanded Jeremiah to commit to writing all the prophecies he had uttered since the beginning of his ministry, in order that the same might be repeated to the people. Jehoiakim's treatment of this writing was typical of the attitude of the nation at large and a sealing of their doom.

10. Jeremiah's imprisonment (Ch. 37).

The Chaldean army that was besieging Jerusalem raised the siege in order to meet the armies of the king of Egypt who was advancing to attack them. Zedekiah, fearing lest, in the event of the Chaldeans overcoming the king of Egypt, they should return and besiege Jerusalem, sent to inquire of Jeremiah concerning the matter (v. 3).

The Lord's answer was that the Chaldeans would certainly return and destroy the city.

Jeremiah taking advantage of the departure of the besieging army, prepared to visit his native town, and in so doing was arrested as a deserter to the enemy. When the Chaldeans returned, as Jeremiah had previously prophesied, Zedekiah again came to inquire of him. Again he was met with a discouraging reply. His treatment of Jeremiah (v. 21) shows how honest reproof in the end gains more than flattery.

11. While Jeremiah was still in the court of the prison (37:21) a deputation came to Zedekiah asking that Jeremiah be put to death because of the prophet's persistence in preaching that Jerusalem was doomed to destruction and that only those surrendering to the Chaldeans would

escape. This message, they claimed, was weakening the courage of the people. Jeremiah was then cast into a dungeon, but was transferred to the prison court on the intercession of Ebedmelech. There he had a secret interview with Zedekiah in which he assured that monarch that his only chance of escape was his surrender to the Chaldeans (Ch. 38).

12. Chapter 39 records the fall of Jerusalem, the final captivity of Judah, the death of Zedekiah, the deliverance of Jeremiah by Nebuchadnezzar, and the reward of Ebed-melech.

#### **IV. Messages After the Captivity (Chaps. 40 to 45)**

1. Offered the choice of going to Babylon with the prospect of worldly advancement or returning to his own people, Jeremiah nobly chose the latter. He returned and dwelt with Gedaliah whom the king of Babylon had appointed governor of the land. To the latter was brought news of a plot against his life, which he unwisely ignored (Ch. 40).

2. The plot of which Gedaliah had been notified was carried out and he was assassinated by Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah. The latter gathered the remnant of the people that were in Mizpah and prepared to flee to Moab, but his attempt was frustrated by Johanan and the captains of the forces that were with him. Fearing that the Chaldeans would take vengeance on the remnant for the murder of Gedaliah, Johanan prepared to lead the people to Egypt (Ch. 41).

3. Though the leaders had made up their mind as to their plans they inquired of the Lord as to what course they should pursue. The Lord's answer was that their safety depended on their staying in Judea, and that their going to Egypt would mean their destruction (Ch. 42).

4. Since this advice was contrary to their plans and intentions, the leaders ignored it and in the face of the Lord's prohibition they went into Egypt, taking the remnant of the people with them. While in Egypt Jeremiah foretold by a type the conquest of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar (Ch. 43).

5. Chapter 44 contains Jeremiah's last message to Judah. The remaining prophecies of the book concern the Gentiles. It was not long before the remnant had yielded to the lure of Egyptian idolatry, and when rebuked for this by the Lord, brazenly expressed their intention of sacrificing to the Queen of Heaven, i.e., Venus. Because of this attitude on their part, their restriction is prophesied and as a sign of this, invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar is predicted.

6. Chapter 45 contains a message to Baruch delivered about 18 years before the fall of Jerusalem. The occasion for the message is stated in verses 1-3. The persecution arising from his writing and reading of the prophecies of Jeremiah in the reign of Jehoiakim had evidently discouraged him (v. 3), and perhaps had thwarted some of his cherished plans and ambitions. (v. 5)

The Lord tells him that since He is bringing evil on the whole land of Judah, Baruch is not to seek any advancement or good for himself there, but rather to rejoice in the fact that his life will be protected wherever he goes.

#### **V. Prophecies Concerning the Nations (Chs. 46 to 51)**

The following nations are addressed:

1. Egypt (Ch. 46). This chapter contains three distinct prophecies. The defeat of Pharaoh-necho, king of Egypt, by the king of Babylon at the battle of Carchemish, on the Euphrates. (vv. 1-1.2).

It was on his way to Babylon that this Egyptian king encountered and slew King Josiah (II Chronicles 35:20-24). The conquest of Egypt by the king of Babylon (vv. 13-26). The restoration of Israel (vv. 27, 28).

2. Philistia and Tyre (Ch. 47). The invasion of these countries by Nebuchadnezzar is foretold.

3. Moab (Ch. 48, compare Isaiah Chs. 15, 16). Judgment in the form of invasion and devastation by the Chaldeans is pronounced upon Moab for the following reasons: their trusting in their works and treasures (v. 7); their living in ease and luxury (v. 11); their rejoicing at Israel's misfortunes (v. 27); their magnifying themselves against the Lord (v. 42). Their restoration in the last days is prophesied (v. 47).

4. Ammon (49:1-6). Ammon is to be judged for seizing the land of Gad when the ten tribes went into captivity (II Kings, Ch. 17), when Judah not Ammon was heir to that territory (v. 1); also for her pride of land and riches and her carnal security (v. 4). This same nation assisted the Chaldeans in their attacks on Judah (II Kings 24:2) and later exulted at her fall (Psalm 83:1-7). For Ammon restoration is promised in the latter days (v. 6).

5. Edom (49:7-22). The Lord pronounces the sentence of utter destruction upon a nation which always was Israel's implacable enemy (Numbers 20:18; Ezekiel 25:12-14; Ch. 35; Amos 1:11; Obadiah, Ch. 1).

6. Damascus, capital of Syria (49:23-27). This city was invaded by Nebuchadnezzar five years after the destruction of Jerusalem.

7. Kedar and Hazor (49:28-33). Kedar was the country of the Arabs; Hazor, a neighboring country.

8. Elam (49:34-39). The judgment of dispersion is pronounced against this nation, perhaps for helping Nebuchadnezzar against Judah. Their restoration is promised in the latter days, which promise may have found a partial fulfillment on the day of Pentecost when Elamites heard the Gospel (Acts 2:9).

9. Babylon (Chs. 50, 51, compare Isaiah Chs. 13, 14, 47). In the preceding chapters we learned that the Lord used Babylon as a scourge upon Israel and upon the surrounding nations. But the fact of her being used by the Lord will not save her from judgment for her sins (Jeremiah 27:7). Compare GOD's dealings with the Assyrian nation (Isaiah 10:4-34; 37:36-38). For the record of the fulfillment of the prophecies found in Jeremiah 50, 51 read Daniel Ch. 5. Remembering what was said concerning the law of double reference, we may regard the fall of Babylon as typical of the overthrow of Antichrist's kingdom and his capital, possibly a rebuilt Babylon. With Jeremiah 50, 51 compare carefully Revelation Chs. 17, 18.

## **VI. Retrospect: the Captivity of Judah (Chap. 52)**

The account of the destruction of Jerusalem recorded in II Kings Chs. 24, 25; II Chronicles Ch. 36; and Jeremiah Ch. 39 is repeated here. It is fitting that the record of the event that drew so many tears from Jeremiah and which well-nigh broke his heart, form the conclusion of his book.

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