Jeremiah

Pathways of Discipleship Bible Survey

ELM GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH

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Title and Meaning
- Derives its title from the author, whose name means “Jehovah throws,” in the sense of laying down a foundation or “Jehovah establishes, appoints, or sends.”
- Jeremiah gives more details of his life than any other prophet; tells of his ministry, reactions of his audiences, testings, personal feelings

Author & Date
- Jeremiah authored the book, using a scribe (Baruch) as an assistant
- It’s likely that Jeremiah dictated to Baruch, who copied and protected the prophet’s message

Background
- Jeremiah the Prophet
  - Served as both a priest and a prophet
  - Son of a priest—Hilkiah
  - From the village of Anathoth (today, Anata), about three miles northeast of Jerusalem
  - Called to prophetic ministry at an early age (1:6)
  - He remained unmarried as an object lesson to Judah; symbolized the barrenness of the land under judgment (16:1-4)
  - Known as the ‘weeping prophet’; lived a life of conflict because of his teachings and predictions of judgment by the Babylonians
  - He was threatened; opposed by his own family, priests and other prophets, king Jehoiakim
  - Jeremiah died in Egypt as a refugee some time after the Babylonian exile
- Historical Setting
  - Background details of Jeremiah’s times are found in 2 Kings 22-25 and 2 Chronicles 34-36
  - Jeremiah and the Babylonian crisis
    - The period of Assyria decline
    - Nabopolassar establishes the Neo-Babylonian Empire (626 B.C.)
    - Babylon allies with the Medes and captures Ashur (614 B.C.), Nineveh (612 B.C.), and Haran (609 B.C.)
    - Battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.)/Nebuchadnezzar
    - The Babylonian domination of Judah
      - 605 B.C.
      - Battle of Carchemish
      - Neb. Won the battle against Assyrians and Egyptians
      - He took control of Syria-Palestine
      - Took back group of children of most wealthy and prominent citizens of Jerusalem
- Daniel
- 597 B.C.
- Neb. Took Jerusalem but doesn’t burn it down
- 2nd wave of exile
- 10,000 of Judah’s citizens taken
- Ezekiel
- 586 B.C.
- Judah and Zedekiah revolted
- Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem
- Jeremiah given option to stay in the land; he stays with the poor people in the land

- The kings of Judah during Jeremiah’s ministry. Jeremiah ministered during the reign of the last five kings of Judah
  - Their ungodliness is one of the reasons God brings the judgment of the exile; last four kings after Josiah
  - Josiah (640–609 B.C.)
    - A godly king who instituted many positive religious reforms; last godly king
    - Was killed at Megiddo in battle against the Egyptians trying to stop the Egyptians from moving north to assist the Assyrians in their war with Babylon
  - Jehoahaz (609 B.C.)
    - Son of Josiah and an ungodly king who did not follow the Lord
    - Removed from the throne after ruling only three months (by the king of Egypt)
  - Jehoiakim (609–597 B.C.)
    - Another son of Josiah who was an ungodly king
    - Rebelled against Babylon twice during his reign.
    - He was temporarily taken prisoner (602 B.C.) the first time and allowed to return to the throne.
    - Nebuchadnezzar marched against Jerusalem the second time (598 B.C.), but Jehoiakim died or was killed before Nebuchadnezzar could take the city.
    - Hated Jeremiah for Jeremiah’s message of judgment and warning that God would use the Babylonians to punish Judah for their sins (see Jeremiah 26 and 36)
  - Jehoiachin (597 B.C.)
    - Son of Jehoiakim and an ungodly king
    - Reigned only three months before Nebuchadnezzar removed him from the throne and took him away as a prisoner to Babylon
    - He was mentioned in Babylonian documents
  - Zedekiah (597–586 B.C.)
    - A son of Josiah and an ungodly king
    - Placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar after he took Jerusalem and removed Jehoiachin in 597 B.C.
    - Jeremiah suffered great persecution from the royal officials during Zedekiah’s reign because he was advising submission to Babylon (see Jeremiah 21; 32:1–2; 37:11–21; 38:7–13, 28)
Zedekiah was a weak leader. He regularly sought Jeremiah’s advice (cf. 21:1–2; 37:1–3, 16–17; 38:14–21), but he lacked the courage to stand up to the royal officials who hated Jeremiah’s message of submission to Babylon. Zedekiah allowed the royal officials to keep Jeremiah in prison, but Zedekiah also looked out for Jeremiah and protected him from the officials who wanted to put Jeremiah to death (cf. Jeremiah 37:21; 38:16, 24–27).

Zedekiah also gave the orders for Jeremiah to be rescued from the cistern after the officials left him there to die (cf. Jeremiah 38:7–13).

Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon (with encouragement and promises of assistance from Egypt). After a two-year siege, Nebuchadnezzar captured and destroyed the city of Jerusalem and took away large numbers of people as exiles.

King Zedekiah escaped the city with his two sons but they were captured by the Babylonian army in the plains of Jericho.

The Babylonians executed Zedekiah’s sons, blinded Zedekiah, and took him away as a prisoner to Babylon.

Zedekiah died in captivity.

Jeremiah and the aftermath of exile

Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah as governor of Judah (Jeremiah 40:1–6)

Jeremiah chooses to stay with the poor contingent remaining in the land after the fall of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 39:14; 40:6)

Gedaliah assassinated by Ishmael, a member of the house of David (Jeremiah 41:1–3)

Facing Babylonian reprisals, a military officer named Johanan leads a group of refugees into Egypt. Jeremiah counsels against leaving the land to go down to Egypt, encouraging the people to submit to the king of Babylon. Rejecting Jeremiah’s counsel, Johanan kidnaps the prophet and takes him away to Egypt (see Jeremiah 41:16–43:7)

Judah’s spiritual condition

Flagrant idol worship (Jer. 2); child sacrifice and idolatry began before and continued into Jeremiah’s time

Religious insincerity, dishonesty, adultery, injustice, tyranny against the helpless, slander became the norm, not the exception

His message was one of impending judgment for idolatry and other sins; preached it for over 40 years to no avail

Message and Themes

The purpose of the Book of Jeremiah — Jeremiah is written for the people of Judah living in the context of the Babylonian exile. Many of the people of Judah were taken away as exiles to Babylon. Others (especially the poor of the land) remained in the land of Judah. Others, including Jeremiah himself, ended up living as refugees in Egypt. There are a few basic purposes behind this book written to Jews living through the time of the exile.

To explain why God brought the judgment of exile

Not because armies of Babylon were more powerful than the Lord

Reason was because the people didn’t listen to the Word of the Lord

To offer hope for the future (30–33)
- New covenant
- Past sins forgiven and law written on your heart
- To warn the exiles that continued sin and disobedience will bring further judgment from God
- To uproot and to tear down (45:4), then to build and to plant (24:6)

**Impending Judgment upon Judah**

- Jeremiah warned of the judgment of God in the form of Babylonian invasion
- This would be like America being at war and someone being on the news proclaiming favorable messages about our enemy; seems like a traitor
- His perspective on Babylon
  - God is fighting with the Babylonians (21:3-7)
  - Nebuchadnezzar is God’s servant (25:9)
  - Exile will last a lifetime/70 years
  - It’s hopeless to resist the Babylonian army
  - The hope for the future lies with the exile in Babylon, not the Jews who remain in the land (24)
  - This is a temporary situation; God will punish Babylon after He has punished Judah

**God’s willingness to spare and bless the nation if they repent**

- Seen most graphically in 18:1-11

**Key phrases** – the book uses the recurring expressions “to uproot and tear down, to build, and to plant” to summarize the dual aspects of Jeremiah’s ministry (cf. Jeremiah 1:10; 12:14–15, 17; 18:7–10; 24:6; 31:27–28; 42:10; 45:4).

- Jeremiah’s ministry of “tearing down” in judgment (cf. 45:4)
- Jeremiah’s ministry of “building up” in hope of restoration (cf. 24:6)

**Judah’s rejection of the prophetic word and the fall of Judah (Jeremiah 26–45)**

- Hard to read this chronologically; moving back and forth
- Point is not to give us a biography, but to give us repeated examples of how the people didn’t listen to the word of the Lord in every stage of Jeremiah’s life
- All the people, leaders, etc.
- The key phrase – “they did not listen/obey” (26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 34:14, 17; 35:14, 15, 16, 17; 36:31; 37:14)

  - Ch. 26: hear it, but decide that Jeremiah deserves to die
  - Ch. 27-28: Hananiah refuses to accept that the exile will last 70 years
  - Ch. 29: Prophets and people in exile refuse to listen to Jeremiah’s letter
  - Ch. 36: Jeremiah’s scroll read to King Jehoiakim—refuses to listen
  - Ch. 37: Zedekiah, his attendants, and all of the people do not listen
  - Ch. 39: Royal officials do not want Jeremiah to keep preaching “submit to Babylon”
  - Ch. 38: Zedekiah refuses to follow Jeremiah’s counsel to surrender to Babylon
  - Ch. 40: settle in land and serve king of Babylon; Ishmael refuses to listen and kills Gedeliah
  - Ch. 42: don’t go down to Egypt
  - Ch. 43: Johanan and the people enter Egypt in disobedience of the prophet’s word
• The treatment of Jeremiah as reflection of the nation’s failure to obey
  • 26: People and religious leaders want Jeremiah put to death
  • 27-28: false prophets call Jeremiah a liar
  • 36: Jehoiakim cuts up scroll of Jeremiah’s prophecies, probably would have liked to have done that to Jeremiah
  • 37: Jeremiah accused of treason, imprisoned and beaten
  • 38: Officials have Jeremiah thrown into cistern and leave him to die
  • 43: Jeremiah kidnapped and taken to Egypt
• The promise to the exiles (30–33)
  • Restoration by forgiving the past and writing the law on their hearts
  • Give them the desire and ability to obey him so they won’t have to be judged like before
• How?
  • Prophets emphasize that there will be a new ministry of God’s Spirit in the future
  • NT says that Jesus came to make the new covenant a reality
    • We are experiencing the first installment of the new covenant
    • Ministry of the Spirit creates a desire and empowerment in us
    • There is a now, and a not yet
  • Jeremiah lets them know they aren’t experiencing it because of their continued sin

Structure of Book
• Jeremiah 1–25
  • Messages of judgment against Judah
  • Army of Babylon is coming against you
• Jeremiah 26–45
  • Judah’s rejection of the prophetic word
  • Demonstrated by their treatment of Jeremiah and refusal to obey
• Jeremiah 46–52
  • The Oracles against the nations
  • God will judge Babylon (and other nations) after God has used Babylon to punish Judah for their sin
• The centrality of the Book of Comfort in Jeremiah 30–33
  • Hope for the future
  • Promise of a New Covenant

Resources
Zondervan Handbook to the Bible
Lasor, Hubbard, and Bush: Old Testament Survey
Longman and Dillard: An Introduction to the Old Testament
Lecture Notes from Liberty Theological Seminary, Dr. Gary Yates
Holman Illustrated Study Bible