

# Prophets: JEREMIAH

## INTRODUCTION

Jeremiah was a very young and weary prophet who was living in Jerusalem during the final years of the southern kingdom of Judah. He was a prophet to both God's people and the nations. Jeremiah brought messages of both judgment and future hope to Judah but was primarily seeking to warn them of impending disaster.

God's people had broken their covenant with God by worshiping other gods. Furthermore, Israel's leaders had all become crooked, leaving the vulnerable populations without protection. In short, Jeremiah prophesied the downfall of Judah—and then witnessed the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem with his own eyes.

After 20 years of prophesying in Jerusalem, God called Jeremiah to assemble all his writings, so he commissioned a scribe named Baruch. Baruch also included stories about Jeremiah himself, so the book presents as an anthology. Thus, the book of Jeremiah likely recounts events and prophecies from 627–580 BC. It's within this anthology that we learn not only about the messages Jeremiah proclaimed both before and during the exile, but also about Jeremiah's personal journey as a prophet who very few people wanted to listen to.

Jeremiah's ministry was marked by loneliness, rejection, and deep lament. He is often called the “weeping prophet” because of how personally he bore the grief of God's people and the judgment they refused to see coming. His laments are raw, honest, and full of anguish—showing us that faithfulness to God doesn't always look like outward success. Nonetheless, despite the depravity and destruction Jeremiah was prophesying, there are messages of hope woven throughout the book. According to Jeremiah, Israel would one day return home to their land. Their sin would not get the final say.

## IMAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING

When raising young kids, parents might warn them about something over and over again in an effort to keep them from the pain and consequences that would naturally result from their actions. They might even get creative and use object lessons in an effort to get the point across. When the kids do not listen and end up getting hurt, parents may join in their tears out of love for them. Jeremiah is like a persistent parent who no one listened to. He is known as the “weeping prophet” because he grieved over his people's wickedness and the consequences they would face. In his desperation to wake them up, Jeremiah used unforgettable object lessons—he wore a yoke around his neck to show they'd soon be enslaved (Jeremiah 27), smashed a clay jar to represent coming destruction (Jeremiah 19), bought a field during a siege to symbolize hope (Jeremiah 32), and perhaps most memorably, buried a pair of linen underwear until it was ruined, then pulled it out to show how filthy and useless God's people had become because of their stubborn sin (Jeremiah 13). Like a parent who will go to great lengths to reach a child, Jeremiah's warnings weren't angry rants—they were tears of love.

## BOOK ORGANIZATION

JEREMIAH: Weary God, Weeping Prophet + Ruined Loincloth

Chapters 1-29: Broken covenant and coming judgment

Chapters 30-33: Restoration and new covenant

Chapters 34-45: Final days for Jerusalem and Judah

Chapters 46-51: Oracles against nations

Chapter 52: Postscript

## JESUS IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Although Jeremiah is often remembered for his warnings of judgment against Judah and the nations, his prophecies also point forward to Jesus—the promised Messiah. In Jeremiah 23:5–6 and 33:14–16, he speaks of a coming “righteous Branch” from the line of David who will reign as King and bring salvation and justice. This is a clear messianic prophecy, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the descendant of David who rules in perfect righteousness. Jeremiah doesn't just hint at a coming king—he reveals God's plan to raise up a Shepherd unlike any other, one

who will gather and protect His scattered flock (Jeremiah 23:3–4), a contrast to the corrupt leaders of Jeremiah's day.

Jeremiah 31:15 is also quoted directly in Matthew 2:18 as being fulfilled when Herod ordered the massacre of infants in Bethlehem, showing that even the sorrow surrounding Jesus' birth was foretold long before. And perhaps most significantly, Jeremiah prophesied about the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31–34—a covenant not written on tablets of stone but on human hearts. Jesus referenced this very prophecy at the Last Supper when He said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). Through His death and resurrection, Jesus inaugurated the new covenant Jeremiah looked forward to—one marked by internal transformation, forgiveness of sins, and a restored relationship with God.

In a book filled with sorrow, Jesus is the promised hope. He is the righteous Branch, the greater Shepherd, the Man of Sorrows, and the Mediator of the new covenant that brings life where there was once only judgment.

## **BIBLE STUDY SPECIFICS: HOW TO APPROACH THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH**

### **OBSERVATION**

- Take note of who is speaking in each passage: God, Jeremiah, or Baruch. It can be easy to get confused. Pay close attention.
- While Jeremiah is a pre-exilic prophet, the stories of Jeremiah continue into the exile period. Make sure to pay attention to your "when" observations.
- Identify the literary types: prophecy, poetry, narrative, laments, and object lessons are all used in this book. Ask, "What genre am I reading right now?"
- Look for repeated themes and key words—like "turn," "judgment," "hope," or "remnant"—to trace the major ideas in each section.
- Be on the lookout for visual imagery and object lessons. Jeremiah often dramatizes his messages with symbolic acts. Ask, "What is this picture meant to communicate?"
- Track the emotional tone. Jeremiah often switches from bold proclamations to personal grief and even dialogue with God. Noticing this helps you see his heart—and God's.

### **INTERPRETATION**

- Narrative Context: The book was dictated by Jeremiah to Baruch, a scribe, and was written in different stages (Jeremiah 36:32). The intended audience was the people Jeremiah was prophesying to, in the hope that they would listen to the warnings and turn away from their wickedness (Jeremiah 36:1–7).
- Historical Context: Jeremiah lived and prophesied during the final decades of the southern kingdom of Judah, continuing into the early years of the Babylonian exile. The events described in this book overlap with those recorded in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, so cross-referencing those historical narratives will help you piece together the full picture. A good study Bible or timeline chart will serve you well here.
- Cultural Context: Culturally, Jeremiah was swimming against the current. His messages stood in stark contrast to the religious corruption, political arrogance, and moral decay of the day. False prophets were saying "peace" when judgment was coming. The people had grown numb to sin, and Jeremiah's faithfulness made him an outcast. While you may relate to his discouragement or rejection, resist the urge to immediately jump to personal application. First, ask: *What was God saying to them, then?* before asking *What does this mean for me, now?*
- Theological Context: Jeremiah reveals the tension between God's justice and mercy, judgment and hope. Understanding how these attributes coexist in God's character is key to interpreting the book accurately—and it prepares us to see how Jesus fulfills Jeremiah's prophecies and mediates the new covenant.

### **APPLICATION**

- Instead of asking, "Is there a command to obey?" try asking "What commands did Israel fail to obey?" and "What commands might I be failing to obey today?"

- One of the biggest sins seen in God's people throughout the book of Jeremiah is idolatry. While idolatry today may look different than it did back then, it still exists. Are there any idols—things you turn to or seek after more than God—in your own life? How can you turn away from those idols and turn to God?
- Are you receptive to everything God tries to tell you in His Word? Or do you, like the people in Jeremiah's time, read it and then ignore parts of it? What would God have you start or stop doing?

## PRAYER

- God chose Jeremiah even though he felt unqualified. Pray that God would equip you for what He wants you to do. Ask God to give you a willing heart to serve others and do what is right.
- Confess any areas where you have strayed from God's commands and pray for His help in changing your ways.
- Ask the Spirit to help you identify any idolatry in your life and ask God to help you put Him first.
- Remember, the goal of Bible reading is connection, not completion. As you study, make sure that you're not letting yourself get buried in dense passages and going on an intellectual journey without meeting with Jesus. If you find yourself struggling to connect, try meditating on one singular verse and praying or journaling through it.

## CHURCH HISTORY: WHAT HAS CHURCH HISTORY SAID ABOUT THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH?

In reference to Jeremiah 31:31: "Nowhere, or hardly anywhere, except in this passage of the prophet, do we find in the Old Testament Scriptures any mention so made of the New Testament as to indicate it by its name. It is no doubt often referred to and foretold as about to be given, but not so plainly as to have its name mentioned. Consider, then, carefully what difference God has testified as existing between the two Testaments—the old covenant and the new." – Augustine,<sup>i</sup> 430

"Jeremiah was sick at heart, for he prophesied but he was not believed; he entreated and persuaded, but his affectionate appeals were rejected; he saw the nation hastening to destruction, and he could not avert the doom: all this made him cry out in the anguish of his soul, 'I am the man that hath seen affliction.' Hence he could not have lived if he had not found sanctuary in his God. He often stole away into secret places that he might pour out his breaking heart before the Lord, and commit himself to the tender care of him whom he so faithfully served." – Charles Spurgeon,<sup>ii</sup> 1884

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<sup>i</sup> <https://catenabile.com/com/5e936151d87c4a70874ae30e>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/our-sanctuary>

