

## LITERARY OVERVIEW

- **Title/Author:** Jeremiah “the LORD hurls, casts forth” or possible “the LORD establishes, appoints” (if connected to the casting of the lot). One of the greatest prophets in Israel, and one from whom we receive more autobiographical material than perhaps any other prophet. This includes external history as well as internal thoughts and conflicts. Jeremiah is often referred to as the weeping prophet, and he is seen as gentle by nature, and sympathetic to those who suffer. This tenderness does not mean that he lacks boldness and courage. He is faithful when no one else is. He speaks the truth in love, and the truth needed in his day was difficult. Jeremiah laments primarily because of his love for his people and the reality of their coming judgment, even though they will not respond to his message.
- He was the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth (a village 3 miles Northeast of Jerusalem) of the tribe of Benjamin (1:1).
- Jeremiah was called as prophet at about 20 years old in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of King Josiah (627 B.C.) He functioned as a prophet of Yahweh under four kings of Judah (Josiah, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah). After the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., of which he was a 1<sup>st</sup> hand witness (see the book of Lamentations), he continued to prophecy in Egypt. This means that he labored as a prophet for about 50 years total.
- When he began to preach, Josiah was a king, and compared to the other kings was a pretty good one. After the days of Josiah Jeremiah faced increasing hostility and persecution, eventually facing problems from his own village and family. During his lifetime almost everyone rejected his message, and last three kings that he prophesied to were not receptive to his message. We only have record of two men who were sympathetic to him (his scribe Baruch and an Ethiopian eunuch named Ebed-Melech who rescued Jeremiah from a dungeon where he had been left to die).
- Jeremiah spoke during very difficult times marked by idolatry, oppression of the poor, sexual immorality, luxurious living, and all manner of general decadence. This moral decline included the political leaders, the priests, and false prophets. The people did not struggle under this, but loved to have it so.
- As things worsened, Babylon was at the threshold of Jerusalem and eventually sieged it. At this point Jeremiah is encouraging the people, by God’s command, to not resist but to receive the discipline of the LORD and voluntarily surrender. Jeremiah is charged as a traitor, and thrown into prison. Eventually he is released, and allowed to prophecy again.
- When groups of Jews are displaced to Babylon, Jeremiah is given an option to remain in Jerusalem or go into Babylon (they apparently treated him in a friendly way because they thought that his message of submission was a sign of his sympathy for their cause). A group of Jews who were left in Palestine eventually fled to Egypt for help, compelling the prophet to go with them (against his Divine threats). He continued to prophecy there, and probably died in Egyptian exile. According to some Jewish traditions, he was stoned to death at the hand of his own people.
- There are significant parallels between the ministry of Jeremiah and that of the Lord Jesus as suffering prophet rejected by His people.

*At first he rejoiced when God spoke to him; but soon these words of God were to his heart a source of pain and of suffering. He would have preferred not to utter them; and then they burned in his breast as a fire. He personally stood in need of love, and yet was not permitted to marry. He was compelled to forego the pleasures of youth. He loved his people as nobody else, and yet was always compelled to prophesy evil for it, and seemed to be the enemy of his nation. This often caused him to despair. The enmity to which he fell a victim, on account of his declaration of nothing but the truth, he deeply felt. In this sad antagonism between his heart and the commands of the Lord, he would perhaps wish that God had not spoken to him; he even cursed the day of his birth. Such complaints are to be carefully distinguished from that which the Lord through His Spirit communicated to the prophet. God rebukes him for these complaints, and demands of him to repent and to trust and obey Him. This discipline makes him all the more unconquerable. Even his bitter denunciations of his enemies originated in part in his passionate and deep nature, and show how great is the difference between him and that perfect Sufferer, who prayed even for His deadly enemies. But Jeremiah was nevertheless a type of that Suffering Saviour, more than any of the Old Testament saints. He, as a priest, prayed for his people, until God forbade him to do so.<sup>1</sup>*

- **Date:** Prophetic ministry from about 627 B.C. to some time after 586 B.C. (the fall of Jerusalem).
- **Setting:** Mostly Jerusalem as the capital city of the Southern Kingdom, also known as Judah (the Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen in 722 B.C.).
- **Form/Genre:** A mixed anthology (collection of literary pieces) of prophetic literature including narrative, covenant lawsuit, jeremiad (bitter lament or prophecy of doom), doom poem, satire, sermon, oracle of judgment, oracle of salvation, personal memoir, soliloquy (a form of discourse where the author is speaking to themselves to reveal their thoughts), predictive prophecy, epistle, prayer, rescue narrative, murder story, etc.. Think about the book as a scrapbook of 50 years of ministry, not laid out chronologically, but thematically.
- **Main Characters:** God, Jeremiah, the nation of Judah

<sup>1</sup> *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, BibleWorks Electronic Edition.

- **Minor Characters:** The last four kings of Judah, Hananiah and Shemaiah (false prophets), Pashhur (a persecuting priest) and Nebuchadnezzar (2<sup>nd</sup> king of Babylon, conqueror of Judah).
- **Purpose:** To the primary audience, a rebuke of sin which is bringing imminent judgment from the LORD and a great promise of a New Covenant that He will make with His people.
- To us, a reminder of God's disposition toward particular sins, His jealousy for His glory, and the glory of the greater Prophet found in the Lord Jesus Christ who established the New Covenant by His own blood.
- We are also taught by Jeremiah's example of how to be faithful to the Lord in an increasingly godless culture, speaking the truth even when we are not particularly "courageous" by nature. He shows us how a zeal for the glory of God will alone enable us to do the write thing and not compromise though others stand against us.
- Jeremiah is a prophet particularly relevant for a post-Christian culture.
  
- **Challenges:** Probably the greatest difficulty is not to get "worn out" by the repetition of the book, and not expect a narratival flow.

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## OUTLINE<sup>2</sup>

- I. INTRODUCTION (1:1-19)
- II. ISRAEL'S COVENANTAL ADULTERY (2:1-6:30)
- III. FALSE RELIGION AND AN IDOLATROUS PEOPLE (7:1-10:25)
- IV. JEREMIAH'S STRUGGLES WITH GOD AND JUDAH (11:1-20:18)
- V. JEREMIAH'S CONFRONTATIONS (21:1-29:32)
- VI. RESTORATION FOR JUDAH AND ISRAEL (30:1-33:6)
- VII. GOD JUDGES JUDAH (34:1-45:5)
- VIII. GOD'S JUDGMENT ON THE NATIONS (46:1-51:64)
- IX. CONCLUSION: THE FALL OF JERUSALEM (52:1-34)

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<sup>2</sup> Summarized from the *ESV Study Bible*, Crossway Publishers.