

Aquifer Open Study Notes (Book Intros)

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This resource has been adapted into multiple languages, including English, Tok Pisin, Arabic (عربي), French (Français), Hindi (हिन्दी), Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia), Portuguese (Português), Russian (Русский), Spanish (Español), Swahili (Kiswahili), and Simplified Chinese (简体中文).

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Jeremiah

When God called Jeremiah to warn Judah about its coming destruction, the kingdom was prosperous, free, and secure. However, Judah's situation changed when Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon gained power in the area. Judah suffered under his rule for twenty years before he destroyed Jerusalem and exiled its people to Babylon. During these events, Jeremiah warned of judgment and destruction while sharing his own experiences of the pain and conflict these messages caused. Jeremiah expressed God's heartfelt plea for his people to return to him and receive salvation. He also announced God's promise to restore Israel.

Setting

Before Jeremiah was born, Assyria controlled the ancient Near East. They also controlled Egypt for a while. King Manasseh of Judah became a servant (called a vassal) to Assyria. He pledged loyalty to their gods and worshiped idols for most of his long reign (686–642 BC; see [2 Kings 21:1–7](#)). As a result, Judah became spiritually barren (but see [2 Chronicles 33:10–17](#)). Manasseh's son Amon followed his father's bad example during his short reign ([2 Kings 21:21](#)). When some palace servants in Jerusalem killed Amon, the people quickly made Amon's eight-year-old son, Josiah, king of Judah ([2 Kings 21:23–24](#)).

Josiah served the Lord and rejected his ancestors' support of paganism. In the twelfth year of his reign, he ordered the destruction of pagan idols and altars ([2 Chronicles 34:3–7](#)). In his eighteenth year as king, he funded the temple's repair so the priests and people of Judah could worship the one true God ([2 Chronicles 34:8](#)). During these repairs, they found the Book of the Law (also called the Book of the Covenant). This book had been forgotten during Manasseh's reign. It clearly described Judah's sins, and its teachings became a basis for Jeremiah's prophecies.

Jeremiah was born in Anathoth, a village northeast of Jerusalem. God called Jeremiah to be a prophet in the 13th year of King Josiah's reign (about 627 BC). A few years later, they found the Book of the Law. This discovery caused Josiah to lead a nationwide renewal of faith. He urged the people to follow God's commands.

Josiah died in battle against the Egyptians in 609 BC (see [2 Kings 23:29](#)), marking the end of revival in Judah and the start of its decline. Between 612 and 605 BC, the Babylonians defeated the Assyrians and pushed back the Egyptians. Judah's security and prosperity ended as the Babylonians took control of the region. Between 605 and 586 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon attacked, conquered, and eventually destroyed the kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem.

During this period, the kings of Judah turned away from the Lord and ignored Jeremiah's warnings. King Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, ruled from 609 to 598 BC. He brought back pagan worship in Judah and depended on Egypt for help against Babylon. He strongly opposed Jeremiah's messages. His son, Jehoiachin, ruled for only three months at the start

of 597 BC. When the Babylonians defeated Judah in April 597 BC, they replaced Jehoiachin with his uncle Zedekiah. Zedekiah ruled as a vassal of Babylon from 597 to 586 BC.

Zedekiah was weak and indecisive. He respected Jeremiah and often sought his advice, but he did not have the courage to follow the Lord. Instead, Zedekiah listened to his administrators and broke his agreement to serve the Babylonian king. As a result, the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem in January 588 BC. In July 586 BC, they broke through Jerusalem's walls, destroyed the temple, and burned the city. Many people in Jerusalem were taken captive to Babylon, but a few remained in Judah, including Jeremiah. He recorded what happened to the remaining community after Jerusalem's destruction.

Summary

[Chapter 1](#) explains how God selected Jeremiah to be his messenger. This happened in 627 BC.

[Chapters 2–20](#) cover the period from 627 to 605 BC. These chapters describe the interactions between God, Jeremiah, and the people of Judah. God, through Jeremiah, strongly criticized pagan worship in Judah, warned of an invasion from the north, and announced severe punishment. In [chapters 11–20](#), Jeremiah gains a deeper understanding of God's plans.

[Chapters 21–29](#) cover the period from 605–593 BC. These chapters describe the arguments Jeremiah had with Judah's kings, priests, and other prophets. Jeremiah harshly criticized these cruel leaders.

[Chapters 30–33](#) cover the period from 596 to 588 BC. These chapters offer hope by focusing on the chance for the people of Judah to be restored. They look ahead to a new covenant relationship between God and his people. The vision looks ahead and announces a "righteous descendant" who will bring salvation ([33:15](#)).

[Chapters 34–45](#) covers the period between 605 and 580 BC. These chapters describe the Babylonian army attacking Jerusalem, breaking through the city walls, and destroying the temple, city, and entire kingdom of Judah. [Chapters 34–36](#) explain that Judah's destruction happened because they broke their special agreement (covenant) with the Lord. Jeremiah then describes events after the Babylonians left Judah, from 586 to 580 BC: Gedaliah, the governor, was killed, and the remaining people of Judah fled to Egypt, ignoring Jeremiah's warning not to.

[Chapters 46–51](#) cover the period from 605 to 593 BC. These chapters are a collection of God's judgments on Judah's neighbors. Each nation, whether large or small, would face punishment for idolatry (worshiping false gods) and cruelty to God's chosen people. Some nations were promised that God would help them in the future. Israel was promised freedom from exile and a return to the promised land.

[Chapter 52](#) covers the period between 586 to 561 BC. This chapter describes the final days of Jerusalem, essentially repeating [2 Kings 24:18–25:30](#).

Author and Date

In the fourth year of King Jehoiakim's reign (605 BC), Jeremiah gave a series of messages to Baruch. Baruch wrote them on a scroll that was eventually delivered to the king ([Jeremiah 36:1–26](#)). The king destroyed this scroll, but Jeremiah and Baruch rewrote the messages and added much more ([36:32](#)). The contents of this second scroll probably make up chapters [2–20](#). Much of the rest of the book of Jeremiah seems to have been written later and added to the growing collection. The book includes events up to Jeremiah's arrival in Egypt, so it seems likely that the book was essentially complete by 580 BC.

Manuscripts (Handwritten Documents)

Two different versions of Jeremiah exist. Both versions have unique collections of messages. The first version, the Hebrew Masoretic Text, was kept by the Babylonian exiles and forms the basis for most English translations of Jeremiah. The second version was preserved by Egyptian refugees and became the foundation for the Greek translation, known as the Septuagint. Jewish scholars in Alexandria, Egypt, created the Septuagint around 250 BC. The Septuagint is about 2,700 words shorter than the Hebrew Masoretic Text and rearranges some content.

Literary Features (How the Story Is Told)

The Messenger System

The text of Jeremiah features a communication method called a "messenger system." This system was common in ancient Near Eastern royal governments and is still used today. A country's ruler chose someone to deliver verbal and written messages to other countries. The messenger carried the ruler's authority while delivering the message. The recipient could accept or reject the message and send a reply. If the recipient rejected the message, he might harm the messenger and prepare for war (see [2 Samuel 10:1-19](#)). The messenger would then report back to their ruler, who would decide how to respond.

Justice System

Many messages in Jeremiah use a courtroom setting and language. The book starts with the Lord saying, "I will bring my case against you... I will even bring charges against your children's children in the years to come" ([Jer 2:9](#)). The Lord acts as plaintiff, judge, and executioner. As plaintiff, he presents charges and evidence of Judah's sins. After the defendants present their arguments, the Lord, as judge, gives the sentence and then, as executioner, carries it out.

Stories

Jeremiah includes stories where the prophet interacts with kings, officials, priests, other prophets, and ordinary people during crises. The book also has many personal stories. These sections often end with a decree, usually written as a poem.

Meaning and Message

In Old Testament Israel, there was a conflict between idol worship and worship of the Lord. Jeremiah often reminded the people that they had made a covenant with God. This promise meant they should worship and love only God with their whole heart. In an important passage ([Jeremiah 10:1-16](#)), Jeremiah focuses on the foolishness of idol worship compared to the majesty, glory, purity, and power of the God of Israel.

The people of Jerusalem and Judah faced a big conflict. Jeremiah warned them that if they kept worshiping idols, they would lose their city, temple, loved ones, wealth, and freedom. The people refused to listen and tried different ways to escape their troubles. They fought back, made alliances with other nations, and became angry. But these choices only led to war, hopelessness, and death. Even then, they could not choose a different path. Giving up belief in idols and rituals, and the excitement of pagan festivals and sexual freedom, seemed too hard. The people could not believe that God would let the temple and city of Jerusalem be destroyed. It seemed impossible to them. So, only a few repented and turned back to God.

The Lord passionately offered a path back to his salvation. The people needed to do three things:

- remove harmful idol worship from their lives,
- fully submit to the Lord, and
- follow his rules about right and wrong behavior.

Even after their land was destroyed and many people died or were taken away, God promised to protect some faithful people who would serve him. He promised these captives would return home and live in peace and prosperity.

The clearest description of God's mercy is in chapters [30-33](#). These chapters promise a new covenant and a new king. Instead of destroying, God would plant and rebuild ([1:10; 31:28](#)). However, only a few people repented during Jeremiah's time.

In all of this, the prophet Jeremiah felt a strong conflict between the Lord's command in [1:17-19](#) and his own wishes. The Lord commanded him to "Go... and tell," but the prophet wanted to keep peace with his neighbors (see [20:8-9](#)). He felt a

strong connection with his people, and the harsh words of judgment and destruction he had to speak deeply affected him. More than any other Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah showed us his compassion as he struggled to obey ([15:16-18](#); compare [Matthew 26:36-42](#)).