

THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

Prophet Yirmeyahu in Hebrew, Jeremais in Latin, and Jeremiah in English, was born in 650 BC in Anathoth and died after 80 years in 570 BC in Egypt. He belonged to a priestly family since he was the son of Hilkiah the priest of Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. He is among the four Major Prophets along with Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

His prophetic ministry was active from the 13th year of King Josiah (626 BC) until the fall of Judah and the destruction of Solomon's temple in 587 BC which is a period of five Kings in Judah: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and lastly Zedekiah.

Jewish writers fix Jeremiah's age to be between 12 and 13 when God first spoke to him since he complains showing that he was just a child who could not speak. This means that he doubted his confidence to declare great things with maturity and confidence before kings, Priests men and women of Judah and the whole world.

The name Jeremiah means Exaltation of the Lord. He is believed to be the author of books: Jeremiah, laments as well as Kings 1 and 2 with the assistance of his Scribe Baruch Ben Neriah. Jeremiah is also understood as Jehovah throws because he was throwing God's word out to the people.

Born in 650 BC, God first appeared to Jeremiah first appeared to Jeremiah around 626 at around 14 years of age and waited for about ten years in 626 BC when Jeremiah was about 24 years old and this was the beginning of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry.

THE CALL OF JEREMIAH TO BE A PROPHET

God's revelation happened to Jeremiah while in Anathoth a small village three miles North of Jerusalem where he lived. It was populated with priests and their families since the time of King Solomon so it was a priestly village.

Jeremiah's father was priest Hilkiah but most likely not the other Hilkiah the high Priest of Jerusalem temple when the book of law was found to enhance King Josiah's reforms but rather a lesser known priest of the same name.

Jeremiah's call and mission had been issued earlier before he was born and even before he was formed in his mother's womb, "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you and before you were born I declared you prophet to the nations..." Jer.1:5.

Jeremiah was called to be a prophet to the nations of the world since Yahweh is a God of all nations, so was to be an international figure; just like Elijah, Elisha and other prophets whose message was not intended particularly for Judah or Israel.

At that tender age hardly 14 years, Jeremiah resisted the call by telling the sovereign God that he didn't know how to speak because he was still too young. He feared the burden of taking God's word to kings, foreign dignitaries, other big personalities plus the nation at large.

Just as Yahweh had overruled Moses' fears even if he an old man of 80 years, Jeremiah's fears were solved by God touching his lips to fill him with what to speak and the assurance of God's presence in all situations.

To make it an interesting experience, God applies two visions as he asked Jeremiah what he was seeing and the answer was branch of the almond tree as God said that he had seen rightly as he was watching over how his word comes to fulfillment.

After this encounter God gives Jeremiah time to grow up into a confident and willing young man in a period of over ten years hence appearing to him again when Jeremiah is above twenty years of age.

Jeremiah was born in the reign of King Manasseh, his first encounter with God happened in the reign of King Josiah; yet the second encounter came in the reign of king Jehoiakim and its when his prophetic ministry became active.

In the second encounter Yahweh still asks Jeremiah what he was seeing and this time it is a boiling pot almost falling and powering from North to South hence to signify that Judah was to be in hot soup originating from the north.

Jeremiah was challenged by God not to be afraid of anybody but to begin prophesying God's word and to do it immediately.

Jeremiah was warned by God that he would face opposition and conflicts from the kings, officials, priests and the general public. He was however assured of God's divine protection. That he could be like an iron pillar.

Six strong words are used to show what Jeremiah is bringing to the people of Judah, Uproot, pull down, destroy, overthrow, build and plant. This shows God's anger against the Judeans though the last two prove that even in anger; hope still exists since God is merciful. Jer. 1:10.

REASONS FOR THE CALL OF JEREMIAH

Jeremiah was called to inform, warn and condemn the following sins of Judah:

The presence of idol worship which was so common among the Israelites; even among religious leaders and almost all people of Judah that it was impossible to find even one just and honest person.

He was called to condemn the rebellious leaders of Judah such as Manasseh, Jeoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah.

The people of Judah were fond of consulting the false prophets instead of depending on God; above all Gods prophets were not allowed to talk to God's people. Therefore Jeremiah came to denounce this kind of life.

The people of Judah were sacrificing to pagan gods instead of their God; to make matter even worse, they were practicing human sacrifice.

There was so much shedding of innocent blood especially among the political leaders.

In Judah, there was no honest way of acquiring wealth. The rich for example tampered with their scales thus cheating the poor.

He came to make God's will known to the people. This was because the people of Judah had started looking at the Sabbath as a burden to them. Therefore there was need to re-emphasize on this.

He also came as an agent of justice and harmony in the society. He thus came to promote just hearing in the courts of law and to enhance harmony to the vulnerable people.

The Jews had committed adultery and there was no one, not even the priests to condemn these vices. Therefore it was Jeremiah to counter this problem.

He also came to pass on to the people of Judah God's message of judgment. The Israelites had disobeyed Yahweh and so they deserved God's punishment. This was particularly so during Manasseh's term of office. Therefore Jeremiah came to see God's judgment pass.

The Israelites had taken advantage of the widows and other vulnerable groups. Such people were often mistreated by the rich. Therefore Jeremiah came to console them.

People had refused to pay attention even when God had crushed them, they refused to be corrected and continued in sin with their faces like stones.

They had refused to repent however much God warned them they were just ignoring God's laws right from leaders to the lowliest person.

To tell them how God would not pardon them when even their children had turned away from him sworn to the gods that are not gods at all.

That instead of thanking God for feeding them they just committed adultery by lining up at the brothels.

That Jews were full of treachery against God saying that he won't bother them with any disaster or war or famine hence taking his prophets as windbags.

The people had become so senseless with eyes no longer seeing, ears no longer hearing the evils that annoy their God.

They had forgotten that rain in each spring and assured harvests at right time were coming from God which their sin had robbed and deprived of.

The people were so wicked lying and waiting their victims like hunters waiting in blinds with traps.

Great and rich people were fat and sleek with no limit to their wicked deeds by refusing to provide justice to the orphans and denying the rights of the poor.

Prophets were giving false prophecies which were so horrible and shocking in the nation where priests ruled with an iron hand and unfortunately people liked it that way.

The people of Judah had no more respect for God in their speech actions and thoughts but doing only what was disgusting to their creator.

People were telling lies even when they were under oath which was so annoying to God. Jer. 5:29.

So Jeremiah was to warn the people to change or run out of Jerusalem before a powerful army comes from the North with disaster and destruction since Jerusalem was the beautiful and delicate daughter of God.

THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS IN JUDAH BEFORE THE CALL OF JEREMIAH

THE ERA OF KING MANASSEH THE 14TH KING OF JUDAH

Manasseh was a son of Hezekiah and he succeeded his father as king of Judah at the age of 12. This is the time when the Assyrians had just destroyed the Northern Kingdom in 720 BC when Hezekiah had put Judah under Babylonian protection against Assyria. Since Manasseh inherited the throne at such a tender age it made him an ineffective king who committed more evils than any other king of Judah.

Religiously Manasseh revived the old Baal worship and brought to Judah the pagan Assyrian worship of the gods of the stars. This was last seen during the days of King Ahab in the Jewish land.

In his attempt for Baal worship to flourish, he built pagan altars in the temple of God where God's sacrifices were formerly made but now for the small gods. (2 Kings 21).

Manasseh's level of wickedness went too far when he practiced divination and magic. Here he consulted mediums and fortune tellers. This indicated that he was committed to challenging the covenant demands.

Manasseh was so wicked that he placed the symbols of Asherah (Venus) in God's temple (2 Kings 21:7). His irreligiousness stirred up God's anger which forced him to punish the entire country.

As King of Judah, his apostate state influenced many people into sinning against their God by adopting the syncretism and pagan ways of life the reason why all the people of Judah had to be punished.

He obstinately clung on his determination to keep a deaf ear to whatever prophets from God were telling the people of Judah. He was thus committed to sin more even after warning him of the consequences.

Manasseh shed innocent blood of very many people especially those who protested against his Canaanite influenced life. Blood is said to have flowed over the streets of Jerusalem (2 Kings 21:16).

He deliberately replaced God's worship with that of Pagan gods. He completely lost confidence in God. He believed that by worshipping the pagan gods, he would be relieved of the problems in his kingdom.

He re-established the high places for the worship of small gods which his father Hezekiah had destroyed and completely removed from the land of Judah.

He worshiped and served the armies of heaven by taking the sun, moon and stars as small gods instead of worshiping Yahweh.

He put altars in the two courtyards of God's temple to honour small gods which was so disgusting and provocative in Yahweh's face.

He burned his sons as offerings in Ben-Hinnon valley to Molech the Canaanite god yet Yahweh never accepted human sacrifice even if it was for himself.

He was fond of provoking God by doing things that God considered evil that every time they would correct him about what annoys God, then he would do it the more.

He had no ear for God's voice though the prophets because he would never listen to them whenever God would send them to warn him about the consequences of his sinfulness.

He is said to have murdered prophet Isaiah slaying him into two halves when Manasseh ordered his men who tied Isaiah in a sack and pushed it in the hollow of a tree which they sawed into two equal pieces around 7BC.

He persecuted his people and shed innocent blood till he flooded Jerusalem with blood of those innocent people especially those that tried to correct him in his sin.

He supported and personally participated in temple prostitution which among other sins portrayed him as the wicked of all the kings of Judah.

MANASSEH REPENTS WHEN EXILED TO ASSYRIA

Two outstanding surprises about Manasseh are that he was able to repent and return to God and that God accepted his newness of life. This happened when the monstrous Manasseh who caused, tears, grief, agony, pain, death, deprived others liberty, denied others mercy, loathed God, sent fear upon others and enjoyed shedding innocent blood was now facing similar troubles after being separated from his evil companions began to cry for God's mercy and confessed all his sins as he saw his end very close.

He magnificently humbled himself when in trouble of exile in Assyria where he was imprisoned by Esarhadon the successor of Sennacherib. God used the Assyrian king to punish Manasseh when he faulted the paying of his tributes against the Assyrian grant.

He began seeking God's face as soon as he realized that he no one else to run to when he totally deprived of liberty and separated from his evil advisors and family.

He consistently prayed to God for forgiveness upon losing hope of ever escaping the wretched prison unless by divine intervention hence remembering God's abundant love.

Due to his infinitive mercy, God was really moved by Manasseh's humbled nature and pure change of heart while condemning himself for all his past so God came to his rescue back to Jerusalem.

He learnt and accepted that the Lord is God which he proved by sticking only to God throughout his days of trouble as he kept crying for the abundant mercy of God hence proving his remorse and new born character.

As soon as he was given a second chance, Manasseh changed from a gross sinner to a saint-like man by carrying out various reforms against his past first of all by firing and distancing himself from his evil advisors.

He reinforced the outer wall on west side of David's city so as to increase the protection of Judah's capital and palace from any intruders.

He encircled the Ophel as the highest fortified area in the city and raised it to with an intention of strengthening the protection of God's people.

.

He eliminated all the foreign gods and idols from the places that he had placed God's temple and everywhere else so as to put a final end to idol worship.

He removed all the altars he had built for the purpose of worshiping in Jerusalem and on the mountains to ensure that small gods are removed from Judah.

He set up an altar to the Lord made a peace offering on it as a sign of proving before God and all the people of Judah how much he had changed and became a new creature of God.

He ordered all the people of Judah to serve the lord God of Israel hence calling them back from the sinfulness where he had misled them.

NB. Manasseh was succeeded by his son Amon at 22 and ruled for only two years as the 15th king of Judah before he was assassinated by his officials or servants because of his very sinful nature and the heavy Assyrian influence he had. So the people of Judah made Josiah the successor as the 16th king of Judah after killing the servants who had assassinated Amon.

KING JOSIAH'S RELIGIOUS REFORMS (2 KINGS 22, 23)

He was the 16th and the 2nd youngest King of Judah or Southern Israel at 8 years because the youngest king, Joash took throne at only 7 years. Josiah or Yosiyahu in Hebrew (640-609 BC) is also referred to as the lost Messiah of Israel who began seeking God in his 8th year as King when he was only 16 years old and began reforms in the 12th year when he was just 20 years old before the discovery of the Law book in his 18th year made his reforms stronger.

Josiah brought about the following religious changes in the life of the people of Judah;

Josiah started with the re-institution of the worship of Yahweh in Judah. Even though Manasseh had tried to carry out reforms against his own reign, his death came before perfection and as soon as the successor was assassinated because he was already taking people back into pagan worship.

Having served for only 8 years as a King when he was 16 years old, Josiah began seeking the God of his ancestors so that all the people of Judah would receive God's voice and instructions properly especially through the true prophets.

When he marked 20 years of age in his twelfth year as King he began removing all the high places that were used for the worship of small gods from Judah and even outside Judah by going to Northern Israel which was now under the Assyrians.

He tore down all the images of Asherah in cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon and Naphtali which were outside Judah to ensure that all Israelites not only those in Judah could be forgiven by God.

In his 18th year as King of Judah at 26 years of age, Josiah ordered for the repair of God's temple by which the Law book as written by Moses was found. The temple had been transformed into a centre of pagan worship thus Josiah had to eradicate all signs of tendencies from Judah.

He carefully listened to the Law book as Shaphan read it to him. This was to ensure humility and proper understanding of God's word and begin putting it action thereafter.

So he asked Hilkiah to consult God which proves his obedience and readiness to work according to God's word from the Prophets. When Prophetess Huldah responded that God was angry and bound to punish Judah in accordance with the curses of the Law book, Josiah tore his clothes in repentance.

Josiah was so faithful and repentant in that his faithfulness in God enabled the people of Judah at that time to overcome God's punishments. This was after Josiah's expression of his repentance by humbling himself, tearing his clothes and weeping on hearing the impending punishment contained in the law book that was discovered in the temple.

Even though through God had promised not to punish Judah during Josiah's time, Josiah still joined the rest of the people in repentance and fasting. This was a sign that Josiah seriously wanted to save his people from God's wrath.

He restored people's confidence in their God which his predecessors had neglected. This was seen in sending Shaphan Hilkiah and others to go and consult the Lord and find out his opinion about the book of law. This Godly attitude Josiah showed made people to make a comeback to the consultation of God's prophets.

Josiah made a covenant with the Lord to obey him to keep his laws and to put in practice the demand attached to the law book. This was a step towards the purification of God's people and a foundation of the new religious order in Judah. All the people towards the end pledged to abandon paganism and take on Yahweh's demands.

He purified the worship of Yahweh by putting to destruction all objects that were used in the worship of Baal, Asherah and stars which were stationed in the temple. He therefore restored the idea of theocracy in his kingdom.

He abolished all carved images made for the worship of small gods as he went crashing them from wherever they had been made so to restore and maintain religious sanity among God's people.

He removed from office all the priests that his predecessors had ordained to offer sacrifices to the pagan starts in the temple and other cities of Judah and burned the bones of Baal Priests at their altars so as to purge Judah and Jerusalem.

He removed the symbols of the goddess Asherah and burnt it down and scattered its ashes in the public burying ground. He broke into pieces the Asherim and ground all the carved images to dust and scattered the residues in the graves.

He destroyed the quarters of temple prostitutes, from these quarters women wove robes used in the worship of Asherah.

He tore down all the altars of Baal from his presence which his predecessors had set up for such worship and making of sacrifices and chopped down the incense altars that accompanied the Baal altars.

Josiah also re-instated the true consecrated priests of the Levites in clan and tribe and restored the altars of God in the temple thus people were able to sacrifice to their God which brought them closer to God.

After destroying the pagan places of worship and withdrawal of the pagan priests from their offices, Josiah killed all these priests from the very altars where they served. It was intended at completely wiping out pagan worship in Judah.

As a sign of spiritual renewal in Judah, Josiah was able to revive the Jewish religious festivals and reorganized the Passover on the 14th day of the 1st month of the year for the first time as Moses had instructed, an indication that the true worship of God had been restored in Judah.

Through his high priest Hilkiah, Josiah was able to teach God's laws contained in the discovered book to all his subjects. This was to prevent them from going against the demands of God and to remain holy.

He removed all the mediums and fortune tellers and other household gods in Judah. This therefore identified Josiah as a reformer of their social and religious life.

JEREMIAH'S TEMPLE SERMON (JEREMIAH 7:1-15)

The temple sermon is one of Jeremiah's best known passages coming next to the passage of the New Covenant. It is possible date is believed to be shortly after the death of King Josiah whose son Jehoahaz ruled for only three months when Neco the Egyptian Pharaoh who killed Josiah exiled him and made Eliakim his brother king changing his name to Jehoiakim but this one was so worthless in his reign of seven years.

Jeremiah 7 gives an account of the prophecy which Jeremiah gave concerning the temple of God in Jerusalem. After its construction the temple was dedicated to God as his house from where he was to be worshipped and where his sacrifices would be organized from.

However, by Jeremiah's time, the temple had lost its original purpose for which it was dedicated to God. It was used as a centre of obscenity and thus greatly defiled. At this time, many worshippers were using it the way they wanted; besides most of them were unworthy to enter it.

In the Temple sermon, Jeremiah was sent to accuse God's people of false religion and idolatrous practices which include:-

They were worshiping God in the temple while letting immigrants, widows and orphans to suffer in their midst by torturing them, killing them, denying them justice and paying no attention to their daily needs like lack of food, where to sleep etc..

Jeremiah accused the Jews of injustices that there was no justice or righteousness in the nation because the poor, widows and orphans would never win any case even if they were the innocent ones.

Covenant and corporate life was morally bankrupt in Judah hence deserving God's judgment because the people of Judah were now behaving worse than the people in pagan nations by looking at sin as normal and what is normal something foolish.

They were looking at the temple as their greatest haven or lucky charm yet their tensest vulnerability due to their sinfulness. That's why Jeremiah preached in that very place to expose how vulnerable it was.

They never believed that what had happened to their brothers of Israel in 721 BC was soon coming to them. False Preachers were misleading them Shiloh was destroyed because God's temple was not in Israel but in Judah which is protected by God.

They had a popular belief in the temple itself to guarantee their security even if they were grossly disobedient and corrupt. The people of Judah felt very secure that God could not allow his temple and city to be destroyed which was a dangerous misconception because God was ready to destroy them.

Falsely they were stressing God's covenant of the everlasting temple and dynasty of David even if they were continuously annoying God thus Jeremiah prophesied that the temple, the City of Jerusalem and all Jews would be destroyed by Babylon.

They were comforting themselves with the destruction of Israel taking Judah to have been spared for being special so they were considering themselves to be untouchables because of the temple by trusting in the temple rather than in God that as long as they had God's dwelling place, they were safe no matter what.

They were persistently violating the covenant faith because of the temple as their insurance by living in idolatry while hiding in the temple and falsely praying in the temple yet God was not ready to listen to their hypocrisy.

The Jews believed that the temple of God had special powers which would protect it and their city against any danger. This popular misconception therefore made them to do whatever they wanted, something which Jeremiah criticized in his sermon.

They were committing murder, they were committing adultery, they were walking after other gods, and they were practicing customs and rituals of the temple just for the sake.

Jeremiah also denounced the mistreatment of the foreigners, orphans and widows as well as killing the innocent people. To Jeremiah flocking in the temple may not help when such evil acts are still in existence among the people.

To Jeremiah it looked like people were worshipping the building (temple) instead of worshipping God. Jeremiah says, this may not help them instead it just annoys God.

Jeremiah expected all people to live to the true teaching of the covenant faith by living a sinless life. However, what was happening in Judah was disappointing.

Jeremiah added that the temple of God was being used as a dwelling place for robbers and all sorts of sinners which greatly shocked the people because such accusations from Jeremiah were least expected in that place. Most of the people were expecting a good message from the prophet.

Jeremiah prophesied that if God's temple continued to be treated in such a sinful manner, it would surely be destroyed as God did to Shiloh. Still this shocked many people who took it as blasphemy.

The prophet added that despite God's call upon the people to go back to him, most of them deliberately refused to change. This would therefore make God punish them.

He further said that people's sins and unwillingness to go back to God would bring them God's judgement. He foretold that they would be killed and others exiled as was the case to their relatives of Israel.

They were misusing Jehovah's house which was called by his name, they kept going about their external worship as if God was not seeing them, they were remaining unrepentant while expecting God's protection through the temple, yet they were offering meaningless sacrifices by having no trust and obedience in God.

Jeremiah therefore called upon the people of Judah to put God's temple to its rightful use and to have a reflection of the teaching of the law as it was given to them by God.

Jeremiah added that their burnt sacrifices meant absolutely nothing to God. Therefore what was necessary at this moment was to heed to the teaching of God's prophets. This would relieve them from the suffering.

After burning their children as sacrifices at the high place of Topheth in the valley of Ben-Hinnom they would come to the temple of God, so that valley would become their slaughter ground.

NB. The temple sermon however sparked off the persecution of Jeremiah and made his life extremely hard because he was always in pain both physically, mentally and spiritually as the prison became his permanent home, torture, warning people who never bothered to change yet he was seeing the forthcoming troubles on the nation. So he suffered throughout the reign of Jeoiakim, Jehioachin and Zedekiah up to his death in Egypt where he is said to have been stoned to death by Jewish rebels who took him by force to Egypt.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF JEREMIAH'S PREACHING AT THE TEMPLE (JER 26:7-16)

All the people, Priests and prophets, laid hold of Jeremiah saying that you shall die for prophesying in the name of Yahweh saying that this temple shall be like that of Shiloh and this city to become desolate Jer. 7:9.

All people gathered around Jeremiah blaming him of being a false prophet who was interested in pronouncing not only lies but scaring information so he had to die as per Deuteronomy 26:7-9.

Jeremiah was arrested immediately after his speech by the worshippers who were in the temple who felt bitter about his sermon.

Officials came from the king's house and listened as the Priests and Prophets emphasized how Jeremiah deserved a death sentence for his prophecy against the temple and the city before their ears.

The temple and palace officials responded by initiating court proceedings and presented charges against Jeremiah strongly concluding that he had to die.

It should be noted that this just gave Jeremiah a chance to reinforce his message without backing down but stressing that all people needed to amend their ways because he was telling them from God's mouth and so was innocent of their charges.

"Do with me as seems good and right to you, but know for certain that if you put me to death, you will be bringing innocent blood upon this city and its inhabitants since the Lord sent me in truth to change so as to change his mind instead of bringing the pronounced disaster.

He was charged with treason for saying that the temple and the city would be destroyed yet they were under God's protection so he was a Babylonian agent.

Jeremiah was accused of blasphemy (i.e.) speaking and acting against the name of God in what he had said about the destruction of the temple.

Jeremiah was tried and sentenced to death by the priests and prophets who were working in the temple. This was because Jeremiah had spoken evil against their city. However, he was not killed because of Ahikam's support. (Jeremiah 26:24).

Jeremiah was referred to as a trouble maker within the religious setting of Israel and therefore a confusing false prophet.

It led to the death of Uriah from Kiriath Jearim who had also spoken in the name of God about the destruction of the city and Judah. He was killed because for him he failed to defend himself the way Jeremiah did (Jeremiah 26:20-21).

Jeremiah earned great enmity from the people of Jerusalem but he was supported by only a few sons of the priests.

He was stopped from teaching in the temple for he was branded as a confusor who could not be allowed to enter the temple ever again.

The city of Jerusalem was besieged by the Babylonians under their leader Nebuchadnezzar who began exiling the people of Judah taking them in three shifts till the whole nation collapsed as Jeremiah had prophesied.

Just as Jeremiah prophesied, the temple of Jerusalem which was Judah's' biggest treasure and pride was also destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC (Jeremiah 52:12FF).

JEREMIAH AT THE POTTER'S HOUSE 18:1-12.

After the people of Judah had refused to repent, God told Jeremiah to go to a potter's house and this sign meant the following;

In this sign God was the potter and the clay were the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

The pottery was an important craft work and the potter was a very important person who made domestic utensils from clay just as God's creative work brought out the people of Judah as God's products.

As the clay was in the potters hands, so were the people of Judah in God's control.

As the potter moulded the clay, he would find out that some items were not perfect and so he would change his mind about them either by re-shaping or destroying them.

The potter would shape the clay into any object he wanted, in the same way God had brought out the people of Judah as He wanted them.

In the potter's hand, clay would not dictate its shape / an object to be made, thus the people of Judah had no option but to do what God wanted them to do.

The potter expected and wanted perfect objects thus God expected good, loyal and faithful people of Judah.

As the potter would mould the wet clay and get perfect objects, he would be happy. This is the way God would spare people who would turn to Him faithfully.

According to Jeremiah, God would reshape the people of Judah and Jerusalem and make them perfect because they were his people..

The purpose of this sign was to warn the people of Judah about the punishments that were approaching them so that they would change.

JEREMIAH AND THE BROKEN JAR 19:1FF.

The sign of the broken had the following meaning;

Jeremiah bought a clay or ceramic jar from a potter's house and took it to the valley of Ben-Hinnom till he reached Topheth the high place prepared as the altar where sacrifices were made to the small gods.

This is the point where Jeremiah shattered the clay jar by strongly dropping to the ground so as to smash it into pieces which nobody could collect for mending it back. He did this in witness of members of the ruling counsel represented by elders and senior priests.

In breaking the clay jar he was signifying how Yahweh was to intending to break the people of Judah as one would shatter a clay pot so that no one can get it mended back.

The sign represented Judah and all the people of Jerusalem while Jeremiah who was carrying it represented God.

Jeremiah went with the elders, priests and the ruling council to witness what would happen to the people of Judah in reference to the broken jar which he was now carrying.

Jeremiah bought this jar with his money which signified how God had bought the Jews from the wilderness in Egypt.

The elders who accompanied Jeremiah represented the arrogant leaders and the Jewish culture on which people were basing to defy God.

With the elders, priests and the ruling council, Jeremiah came to a place called Hinnon where the rubbish of the city was always dumped meaning that the people of Judah were like rubbish which needed to be burnt and destroyed.

This valley of Hinnon was later to be known as the valley of slaughter where all the plans of Judah and Jerusalem people would be frustrated by God.

When they reached this valley of Hinnon, Jeremiah smashed the jar and it indicated how the people of Judah would be smashed.

Jeremiah didn't have any mercy when dropping the clay jar which he had bought with his money signifying that God would have no mercy upon His people he had brought from Egyptian slavery.

The broken jar couldn't be put together again meaning that the nation of Judah would be destroyed beyond repair.

Jeremiah's witnesses who were the priests, elders and the ruling council were amazed with the total destruction of the jar meaning that whoever would hear about the destruction of Judah would be astonished.

The jar didn't resist Jeremiah's destruction. In the same way, the people of Judah would have no resistance against the Babylonian attack.

The pieces of the broken jar were left in the valley of slaughter meaning that the people of Judah were to be left everywhere without burial.

JEREMIAH'S CONFLICT WITH PASHHUR THE PRIEST (JEREMIAH 20:1-6)

Pashhur the son of Immer was the chief priest of the Jerusalem temple. He was so enraged when Jeremiah acted the sign of the broken jar upon which he pronounced dangerous oracles against the temple, Jerusalem and all inhabitants of Judah. He did this before witness of senior priests and elders who went with him to Tophet in the valley of Ben-Hinnon before coming to the temple courtyard to summarize his message to a listening crowd among was Pashhur's own son.

Jeremiah bought a ceramic jar from a potter's house and took it to the valley of Ben-Hinnom up to the high place called Topheth that had been prepared as altar for small gods.

He invited some elders and some senior priests to come along so as to witness what he was going to do from there.

They entered the valley from the Potsherd gate which was the dumping place of the city hence meaning that Judah and all her inhabitants were as good as rubbish waiting for dumping.

Jeremiah began by announcing oracles against the valley, the temple, the city of Jerusalem and Judah at large showing the impending dangers against them.

He announced that Yahweh would bring evil upon the valley of Hinnom because people had forsaken him and made Topheth a high place for foreign worship.

He continued that people had gone too far by sacrificing their children while burning them in fire as burnt offerings to Baal which was so loathsome.

He went on to say that this Valley would no longer be called the valley of Ben-Hinnom but the valley of slaughter because of the deaths to occur from there.

He said that an enemy would come and put to sword all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah at large without sparing anyone whether men or women.

He added that people's dead bodies would become food for birds and wild beasts because nobody would be able to escape the sword of the enemy.

He also said that those not yet dead would resort to cannibalism by eating the flesh of their own sons, daughters and neighbours when child sacrifice will become child eating.

To drive the point home Jeremiah shattered the ceramic jar by dropping it intentionally to the ground hence smashing it to pieces which no body collect to mend it back doing this in sight of everyone present.

In breaking the ceramic jar he was signifying that Yahweh was to break the people of Judah as one would shatter a clay pot so that no one can get it mended back.

He continued to prophesy judgment upon Judah that God would make empty the counsel that was guiding the nation for houses of the kings and city folks to be rendered unclean like the pagan worship places.

After this, Jeremiah made his way to the courtyard of the temple where he summarized all prophecies he had made from the valley of Ben-Hinnom so that a big crowd could listen to him.

Priest Pashhur's son was among the people that listened to Jeremiah prophesying from the temple courtyard, so it is from him that Pashhur got firsthand information which annoyed him about Jeremiah.

Pashhur began to strike Jeremiah because he didn't welcome whatever that he had said at Topheth and in temple courtyard and then he jails him at the upper Benjamin gate.

The next day when he was let out of Pashhur's prison, Jeremiah pronounced harsh words to the senior priest without fear or favour.

He said that his name would no longer be Pashhur but, "Terror everywhere" this was to confirm what Judah was about to experience from God's wrath.

To the overzealous temple policeman that Pashhur used to terrorize him throughout the night, Jeremiah said that he would become terror to himself plus all those in league with him.

Jeremiah continued that Pashhur would be forced to look on while his friends are put to sword by an enemy when terror surrounds the land.

Jeremiah said still that Judah would be given into the hand of the king of Babylon who would take some people as exiles after killing the rest and stripping the wealth of Jerusalem by carrying it to Babylon.

Then he said that Pashhur and his household carted off to Babylon where they would die and be buried, a sign of dishonour for a priest to die on a foreign land and be buried there which means being so unclean.

Jeremiah prophesied the destruction of Judah in a horrible way that would surprise everybody. This was because the people of Judah had sinned against God.

He added that the people of Judah had abandoned Yahweh and above all defiled the whole land by importing pagan gods whom they sacrificed to. This was a disgrace to the holy temple of God and God himself.

Many leaders of Israel were guilty of bloodshed more over of innocent people especially those who showed concern for sins of those leaders.

Pashhur was greatly irritated by Jeremiah because being the chief priest; Pashhur thought that Jeremiah had no right to speak evil against God. To Pashhur the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem was blasphemy which is punishable by death.

Besides, what annoyed Pashhur most was Jeremiah to attack the evils of the Israelites from the very holy place (i.e.) the courtyard of the temple where he presided as the chief priest. The attack of Judah without Pashhur's knowledge made Pashhur to look at Jeremiah as a liar.

More still, all along the Jews thought that they were pure and good before their God basing on the way they were worshipping him. Therefore to Pashhur, Jeremiah's prophecy was aimed at ridiculing their way of life.

LESSONS MODERN RELIGIOUS LEADERS LEARN FROM THE CONFLICT OF JEREMIAH AND PRIEST PASHHUR

The conflict between Jeremiah and Pashhur has a lot to teach our present religious leaders. This can be seen in the following ways;

Religious leaders should always stand for the truth and the genuine gospel of Christ even when it means persecuting just as Jeremiah risked his life in order to put right what was wrong.

They ought to be firm and brave while transmitting God's message. They should be determined enough such that they make their mind known to the potential sinners just as Jeremiah remained firm for all that would follow his prophecies.

They should have absolute confidence and trust in their God because with God all is assured to those who believe in him just as God had promised to be with Jeremiah in all situations.

Religious leaders should condemn all sorts of evils committed in the country without any reservation unlike priest Pashhur who was always silent about what Jeremiah condemned

Present religious leaders should be ready to suffer and even die for the good of God's ministry just Jeremiah was always ready for any consequences of his message.

Religious should condemn all irreligious practices such a murder, prostitution, sectarianism and other forms of injustices just as Jeremiah did during the temple sermon and surprised everyone.

All religious leaders and other strong believers should accept to be corrected unlike priest Pashhur who took corrections as insults to his office and instead of welcoming criticism ended up torturing the prophet.

Christians should try to purify themselves and their family members if at all they are to live a joyous life unlike Jeremiah who never took time to purify his family which was now doomed to destruction in exile.

Christians should be humble, polite and reserved while someone delivers to them a word from God no matter whether it is amusing or not unlike Pashhur and other people who grabbed Jeremiah for torture.

Christians should always examine themselves first before resorting to coercive measures unlike Pashhur and his supporters who chose to torture Jeremiah and later faced God's punishment because they didn't examine themselves.

Christians should just repent for their sins and seek for God's forgiveness instead of engaging themselves in arguments unlike Pashhur who began giving Jeremiah spiteful names like calling Jeremiah 'The Confuser.'

Christians should look at themselves as sinners who will never stop being talked to or condemned by any other person from God just like the few sons of the priests who agreed with Jeremiah.

JEREMIAH IS ORDERED BY GOD NOT TO MARRY JER.16

Jeremiah was commanded by God not to marry, not to have children and to stay away from any social gatherings whether joyful or sorrowful. This had the following implications;

Disaster was about to befall the children born in Judah and God did not want Jeremiah's children to face that trouble.

Children born in Judah were going to die of a terrible disease and calamity. The disease would leave nobody alive.

There would be no one to mourn for the dying children of Judah, so it wasn't necessary for Jeremiah to marry and have children who were to die so terribly.

Jeremiah's children and those of Judah were to die and there would be nobody to bury them because everybody would be dying.

Parents and children would die and their dead bodies would pile on the streets later to become manure for plants on the ground.

Children and parents would be killed by an advancing enemy from Babylon in a very brutal way to make parents regret why they ever got such helpless children.

The children of Judah would be slaughtered by the enemy and those who would escape death would be dragged into exile to mark the end of families in Jerusalem.

Jeremiah's not marrying was symbolizing to the people of Judah that they would be defeated by the Babylonians.

By not marrying and not having children, Jeremiah was to symbolize that Judah was as unproductive before God as a barren or childless marriage.

Not marrying meant that the people of Judah were not to enjoy life but to wait for disaster which was about to befall Judah.

He was to remain a celibate and not to grieve for marriage, in the same way he wasn't supposed to mourn the dead because the future of Judah was all to be like that.

Jeremiah was also to stay away from burial ceremonies because deaths were to become so common and no one would get time to bury the other, not even the beloved ones.

The people of Judah and Jerusalem would be killed and their dead bodies would become food for wild birds and wild animals to enjoy.

Those children of Judah who would escape immediate death and exile would die of starvation when parents would turn to their own children for food.

Jeremiah was not supposed to enter a house where there was feasting, eating and drinking because all people were sinners waiting for their punishment.

Not marrying and not participating in ceremonies symbolized the mourning of Judah, Jerusalem and God's temple.

Jeremiah's unmarried life was to confirm his message of showing people that there was no hope of comfortably raising families apart from disaster ahead of every person.

It was also to emphasize that there would be no more moments of joy like going for parties, feasts and celebrations of any nature apart from troubles every time and everywhere.

The end of Judah was drawing closer when everyone would be killed in wars and famine because of people's sinfulness without sparing anyone whether great or lowly.

God had withdrawn his love from the people who had abandoned him and dedicated themselves to the small gods like Asherah, Molek, Baal and other idols.

There would be nobody to offer food to the mourners or a consoling drink to the starving children since everyone would be starving and dying of war, famine and diseases.

There were going to be no more songs of brides and grooms because troubles and discomforts would become the order of the day all over Judah.

Without any pity, God was going to throw the Jews out of the land of Judah so horribly because its inhabitants had abandoned him by serving small gods.

God was going to make the people of Judah pay for their wickedness through the enemy to hunt them out of every hiding from mountains, hills and cracks of the rocks because of filling Judah with lifeless statues.

JEREMIAH AS A SUFFERING / WEEPING PROPHET

Jeremiah is referred to as a weeping prophet because since his call from childhood to be a prophet to his death on the cross he was undergoing pain in a physical, mental and spiritual sense such that with suffering weeping was inevitable for a normal human being that's why even the book of Lamentations is attributed to Jeremiah for properly bringing out his anguish lifetime situation.

He was grieving over the wickedness of his people and the impending judgment the nation's sins had provoked.

People were not heeding to his warnings hence responding to their rebellion with tears and mourning for what would happen to them.

He always had grief because most of the situations the message he had for the people was a message of doom yet as a person it was not his wish to see them dying in pain.

Due to the impending judgment upon Judah, God forbade Jeremiah from marrying and having children which made his life very horrible hence turning him into a weeping man.

God made Jeremiah a very lonely man because on top of not having a family, he was told not to attend any social gatherings like burials, mourning of the dead as well as joyful feastings.

Jeremiah was hated by most people right from political leaders to religious leaders and the common people as well as his village mates of Anathoth who even at one conspired against him for dead.

Prisons became Part of Jeremiah's common home where he was always under torture on hands of police officers, fellow prisoners, the Princes to the extent of throwing him in empty wells

.Jeremiah had a very heavy spiritual cross to bear throughout his life as God's prophet together with the physical yokes both wooden and metallic yet always attacked by the false prophets like Hananiah who would pounce on him to shutter the wooden yoke.

Jeremiah lived as a prophet a tumultuous life since he lived through six reigns that were grossly sinful with the exemption of Josiah's reign the rest Manasseh, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah were all were all causing tears.

It was a common practice that most of the canonical prophets in Israel faced stiff opposition from the public and this often culminated into beating, imprisonment, abuses and sometimes death of these prophets.

The unappealing oracles like impending doom, foreign attacks, plagues, famine and other disaster pronounced by prophets, consequently exposed most prophets like Jeremiah to all sorts of human torture by either the politicians or other influential religious leaders in Israel.

When he foresaw the capture of Jerusalem, Jeremiah tried to preserve his message by writing it using Baruch. However King Jehoiakim burnt his scrolls in presence of the court officials (Jeremiah 36:23); thus showing Jeremiah as a suffering servant.

Jeremiah was forced to put on a wooden yoke as a sign to imply the impending danger from Babylonia to all nations. However, when it was destroyed by prophet Hananiah, God gave him a metallic one (Jeremiah 27:1-7, Jeremiah 28:12).

In the misunderstanding between Jeremiah and Pashhur, Jeremiah was arrested, chained, beaten and tried (Jeremiah 20, 26), thus showing him as a weeping prophet.

After prophesying badly about the temple and the city of Jerusalem, Jeremiah was denied chance to preach from the temple yet it was the only place from where he caused impact to his listeners.

Jeremiah 18:18, shows that the people of Judah connived not to attend his sermons, thus therefore making him to waste his time and energy preaching to unbothered people.

Jeremiah was almost killed by his village mates of Anathoth. He was charged with preaching a message different from what they expected (Jeremiah 18:18-23).

Jeremiah was forced to pass on the message of judgment to Judah despite the kind of Love and attachment he had for them, against his will Jeremiah was forced to prophecy whatever God gave him.

Old as he was, Jeremiah was instructed by God to put on linen shorts and was told not to put them in water. He suffered during this period (Jeremiah 13).

Jeremiah suffered most of his time, cursed and tormented. He was a subject of harassment from the general public. This situation made him regret why he was born.

He was dropped in the well after prophesying about the destruction of the people who would remain in the city of Jerusalem. Jer. 38:6).

He was arrested, beaten and locked up in the house of Jonathan on allegations that he was collaborating with the Babylonians (Jeremiah 37:15-16).

He was forced by God to preach the kind of information which was so hard for a normal human being that even when he tried to refuse, God would insist and instead promise him assistance.

Like other Israelites, Jeremiah suffered from the experience of the desert which was so appalling where he had to spend forty days waiting on God.

Jeremiah suffered the problem of not preaching from the temple. During his utterances against the temple, Jeremiah was stopped from using the temple for his sermon.

JEREMIAH'S MESSAGE CONCERNING THE PROPHETS OF JUDAH

Here, Jeremiah was concerned with the issue of true and false prophet hood of the then prophets of God in Judah. Jeremiah criticized the nature of prophetism in Judah which was full of satanic influence.

To Jeremiah, the prophets were wicked and failed to utilize their power. Many of them were godless. They had no personal knowledge of God. Therefore whatever they did didn't reflect any requirements of God.

They were fond of doing evil in God's temple. This comprised of bribery, theft, denial of justice to the poor etc.

Their actions and behaviours were not co-relating with any demands of Yahweh. They were living their own life style which made no any impact to the people they preached to. Therefore God was ready to punish them. (Jeremiah 23:12).

The prophets worshipped Baal and they let the people go away from God.

The prophets of Jerusalem were fond of committing adultery and telling lies. They connived with people to sin against God.

The prophets were ill-informing God's people about what God wants. They only imagined things on their own but not what God passed over to them for delivery to his people. They thus filled people with false hopes.

Most of these prophets were not sent by God to speak for him. They were self proclaimed in this institution, but wherever they went, they talked in God's Name.

They were fond of telling lies and they claimed falsely that God had given them revelations in dreams.

They were accused of accepting payments for their oracles so that they can be bought and used of soothing language to the people who went to them by speaking words of peace and comfort instead of challenging them.

However, according to Jeremiah's message it appeared that a true prophet is the one with the following qualities;

He was one who had a personal relationship with God (i.e.) in whatever he proclaims, there is a direct relationship with what God expects his people to do.

A true prophet spoke with the truth of God's will. However different this was from what his listeners expected to hear e.g. Jeremiah's temple sermon.

True prophets were mediating between God and the people.

True prophets prophesied without fear, favour, bias or discrimination by telling people what God wanted them to hear but not what the people wanted to hear.

A true prophet must be aware that he was sent by God speak for him. He was just a medium through which God's message was made known to the people.

His message was a challenge to the listeners to give up their evil and live according to God's will.

His own life and actions must be a witness to the moral claims of God. In most cases what a true prophet prophesizes comes to fulfillment. A true prophet would speak on God's behalf since the message was coming from God.

A true prophet would use his message to drive people to repentance and go back to God but not to encourage sin.

JEREMIAH AND THE FALSE PROPHET HANANIAH IN JER 28

The exchange between Jeremiah and Hananiah the leader of false prophets makes the sharpest confrontation between true prophets and false prophets in the Old Testament in presenting the

worship wars because it took place in the presence of the Priests and all people during Zedekiah's reign, the last king of Judah.

Jeremiah caught Hananiah red hand deceiving people that God was going to break the yoke of the king of Babylon within two years and bring back all the treasures as well as king Jehoiachin of Judah and other exiles after removing Nebuchadnezzar from his throne.

Jeremiah interdicted by telling Hananiah since all the previous true prophets had prophesied war, disaster, plagues and other warnings; a prophet who tells people peace can only be recognized as sent by God after fulfillment of his words.

Prior to this, Jeremiah had been commanded by God to perform a sign of walking around the public with a wooden ox-yoke across his shoulders. This was signifying that Judah would continue to be under the Babylonian control.

This is when Hananiah jumped over Jeremiah's wooden yoke off his neck and crushed it to show how God was going to crush Nebuchadnezzar and all Babylon just within two years time.

He hastened to add that, if Judah agreed to submit to the Babylonian influence, the people would be treated with mercy and would not be killed.

It's important to note that some prophets, Hananiah inclusive had started alleging that Judah would soon be freed from the Babylonian control and the exiles together with their treasures would be returned by 597BC.

In opposition to this popular view, Jeremiah reacted by saying that the Babylonians were God's instrument of judgment on the people of Judah that all their power to dominate other nations was directly coming from God.

God's word came upon Jeremiah to tell Hananiah that in the place of the wooden yoke he had broken was to be a yoke of iron which signified that Nebuchadnezzar's God given strength was to get stronger and invincible.

Such a message was however not appealing in the ears of those who expected the imminent return of the exiles and the restoration of their treasures.

Hananiah at the temple had said that within two years the exiles and the treasures taken from Jerusalem will be returned and this would mark the end of Nebuchadnezzar's reign.

From what Hananiah said, Jeremiah was able to conclude that, Hananiah may not be a true prophet. To Jeremiah a true prophet is one who prophesies disaster where it's expected. Hananiah was a false prophet because he was trying to prophecy peace where there was no peace to declare.

Jeremiah told Hananiah that the Lord has not sent you but you persuade people to believe in lies therefore the Lord will remove you from the face of the earth.

Jeremiah disapproved Hananiah As he was not a true prophet sent by God. He was telling oracles from his own mind but in the name of God. He thus misled people.

All that Jeremiah prophesied against Hananiah found fulfillment that very year when hananiah was among the people who were killed in the Babylonian attack.

LESSONS TO PRESENT RELIGIOUS LEADERS

They should have confidence in what they preach especially if they believe that it comes from God, Just as Jeremiah maintained his stand.

Religious leaders should always seek for God's guidance and allow him to work in their mind unlike Hananiah who was not using God and ended up telling lies.

They ought to be faithful and preach oracles that would make the congregation have confidence in them unlike Hananiah who was just making lies and personal imaginations.

They should promote unity of the congregation by preaching a similar gospel to their people unlike the false prophets who readily gave good prophecies to people who paid and bad prophecies to people who could not pay them.

Religious leaders should pray to God until when he chooses them to serve him as his messengers instead of imposing themselves in such offices just Hananiah was a self-imposed prophet.

They should live to what they preach and so they need to live an exemplary kind of life just as Jeremiah lived according to God's word.

They should be open minded and frank when it comes to delivering God's message just as Jeremiah would not withhold any message from God however destructive it had to be to the public.

They should criticize fake or false priests who are just antagonizing the preaching of God's message just as Jeremiah confronted Hananiah when he was misleading he Jews about the Babylonian captives.

They should always answer back whenever they are attacked publicly in order to clear the name of God like Jeremiah's response to Hananiah when he broke the wooden yoke that Jeremiah replaced with metallic one.

They should encourage their followers to ignore personalized churches because they are not different from what Jeremiah was fighting against in Judah just as Jeremiah tried so much to detach the Jews from Hananiah.

JEREMIAH AS A PROPHET OF DOOM

The following reflects Jeremiah as a prophet of doom;

Jeremiah as a name means “Exaltation of God” but due to his message being consistently characterized with disasters, wars, plagues, suffering, destruction, exile and other fears upon the people of Judah, some of his people nicknamed him Jeremiad which means mournful complaints and lamentations because he was misperceived as a man who took pleasure in predicting pain and destruction.

The call of Jeremiah to be a prophet shows God giving him the words he had to speak. He was given the power to pronounce God’s judgment upon Judah because of their wickedness, hence, “I give you authority over nations and kingdoms to uproot and pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and plant” (Jeremiah 1:10).

The two visions witnessed during his call also point towards the destruction of Judah. There was a boiling pot and an almond tree. It indicated that God was going to have Judah punished by an enemy from the north.

Jeremiah said that the people of Israel would be disgraced for the evils they committed against God. They would be punished for their deliberate denial of Yahweh.

He says Judah would be surrounded by her enemies. Their temple, city and beautiful gardens would be surrounded by enemies because of their rebellious acts against God.

Jeremiah experienced increased heart beating for fear of the impending disasters in Judah. He was worried because his people seemed not to be bothered yet they were all evil.

He saw destruction coming to Judah at all costs. He had seen that the earth was left a barren waste, sky was dark, mountains shaking, and no people; and once fertile land had become a desert. All these were coming because of people’s wickedness (Jeremiah 4:23-26).

At the temple in his sermon, Jeremiah had seen that the temple had been misused and so it would be destroyed just as Shiloh was destroyed.

Jeremiah prophesied the destruction of the beautiful city by the enemies who would come from the north. This would happen because of the oppression which was everywhere in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 6:5, 22).

He brought the sad news to his village mates who wanted to kill him. He said that the young men of Anathoth will starve to death, others would be killed in war and none would survive.

Jeremiah assured King Zedekiah as Jerusalem would surely be attacked by the Babylonians. However he warned them that if they don’t resist them, no one would be killed.

Without any fear, Jeremiah prophesied that Hananiah the false prophet would be killed for misleading the people of God and it was fulfilled with immediate effect.

He foretold the exiling of the Israelites into Babylonia where they would spend so many years. He however added that time would come when they will be liberated by God.

He performed the **SYMBOLIC SIGNS** which portrayed the forth coming doom to Judah and they were as follows:

- a) He never married as instructed by God not to build a family of his own in light of the impending destruction of the children and all inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah at large.
- b) He was refused to attend burial ceremonies since burial would be the order of the day (Jeremiah 16:4).
- c) He was stopped from attending parties and all kinds of feasts because God would silence them. (Jer:16:8-9)
- d) At the porters place, he saw that poorly made pots would be destroyed and changed into other items.
- e) This meant that the rebellious people of Judah would be destroyed and God would bring up other people later (Jeremiah 18:4).
- f) Jeremiah broke the jar he was holding which meant that God would destroy the people of Judah and their city just as the clay jar was broken (Jeremiah 19:10).
- g) He changed Passhur's name to "terror" to mean that a catastrophe would befall on Judah in which many people would be killed by their enemies. (Jer:20:3)
- h) Jeremiah put on the linen shorts and was not allowed to wash them which signified the impending destruction to befall on Judah because of their poor behaviour (Jeremiah 13).
- i) He carried a wooden yoke to mean the long period Judah and other countries would be under the Babylonians.

JEREMIAH AS A PROPHET OF HOPE

Jeremiah was a prophet of hope and this is shown in the following ways;

His call to be a prophet is an indication of a ray of hope. Through Jeremiah God wanted to make the Israelites recall his providence so that they could return to him before destruction sets in.

As a man of hope, he was compelled to write down his prophecies through Baruch, such that those who would get the chance of reading them may repent and get saved from the impending calamity-destruction.

More still, in his sermon at the temple, Jeremiah urged the people to cleanse themselves and seek for forgiveness from God. This would save them from the forth coming dangers.

At his darkest hour while Babylon surrounded his starving city, he bought a piece of land from his brother in Anathoth as soon as he got out of a sign that time will come when the exiles would return and regain their land after 70 years of exile.

In the letter to the exiles in Babylonia, Jeremiah assured them as God would show them concern and take them back to their mother land (Jeremiah 29:10)

God promised to liberate his people from exile and destroy all the nations in which they would be scattered.

Even though God would punish the Israelites, he promised to be fair and lenient to them (Jeremiah 30:11).

They were urged not to complain anymore because of their injuries, wounds and sores. God promised to take care of them and nurse them again.

He promised to revenge against their oppressors and enemies that they too, would be oppressed and taken as prisoners (Jeremiah 30:16).

He showed chances of rebuilding Jerusalem and the restoration of their glory. The palace would also be restored and their power which had been shattered would come back (Jeremiah 30:18).

He said that God would bring back a remnant to Judah to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple which shows hope according to Jer.29:10 -14 and 30:2-3.

He also said that a descendant of David would rise up to serve God in Jer.23:5-6 and 33:14-17, which was later understood as a Messianic prophecy in reference to the coming of Jesus Christ.

He prophesied that God would heal the spiritual wounds of his people, restore his covenant with them and build up and plant his people again according to Jer.30:12-17 and 32:38-41.

God through Jeremiah promised that he would once again become the God of all the tribes of Israel. He would pour his mercy on them.

That God would fill the land of Israel and Judah with people and animals. That he would take care of plants and build up what was destroyed.

He prophesied that when restoration comes, each person would be responsible for his / her own sins. The sons would no longer have the sour taste because of the sour grapes eaten by their parents.

He says that God would make a new covenant with his people, whose laws would be written on the hearts of the people. Under this covenant God would be compelled to forgive all his people of their sins and they will all know him.

JEREMIAH'S PROPHECY ABOUT THE NEW COVENANT (JEREMIAH 31:31-34).

This is one of the three most prominent prophecies of Jeremiah which include the temple sermon, the fall of Jerusalem mostly emphasized in the book of lamentations, then the prophecy of the new covenant. This prophecy has a message of consolation as compared to the rest of Jeremiah's 40 years prophetic ministry characterized by curses, judgment, warnings and disasters.

This prophecy reveals hope in the future of coming back from exile, revival of God's love and friendship, surrounded by the God's warm tender love and care in a new united world of all creation.

God assures his people that he will restore them to their homeland, restore the fortunes of the united Israel and Judah as they resettle in the land that he gave to their ancestors.

Since most of the pre-exilic prophets had emphasized Israel's failure to uphold God's covenant and all judgment was upon them because of that disobedience, So Jeremiah offers the solution by unveiling the new covenant to solve all the problems.

He declares that days are coming when god will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and Judah, a covenant different from the one God had made with their fathers on the he brought them out of Egypt.

Jeremiah continues that the Sinai covenant which they broke was like a marital covenant where God was the husband with an unfaithful wife who is the Israelites' fore fathers that never kept the covenant.

In the new covenant God will write his laws inside people's minds and hearts unlike the old covenant whose laws were written on breakable stone tablets. (Jer. 31:33).

The new covenant is full of hope of warm love and comfort because God promises to be their God and them, his people which means that they will completely hate and forget the small gods.

The new Covenant is to be self motivating without a need for anybody to be reminded of God's love and expectations but only by the guidance of one's heart, mind and soul from the least of them to the greatest. Jer. 24:6-7.

The new covenant was to prompt God to forgive all people's iniquities by forgiving and forgetting them once and for all hence bringing back a special new relationship of tender love and care between God and his people.

The new covenant marks the end of terror and horrors but to live in enjoyment of the good things that God makes for his people.

The new covenant was to be accompanied by increased population in people and animals as well as helping the people to rebuild their demolished cities, fortresses and temples. Jer.24:6-7

This prophecy is contained in Jeremiah's message of consolation to the Israelites who were sure that the Babylonians would capture of their city and country of Judah.

Jeremiah prophesied that God would make with them a new covenant that would supersede the Old Mosaic Covenant which had been broken by the people of Judah and Israel. He says the new covenant will last longer and he will maintain its purity form.

In the new covenant, God and his people would be bonded together in a new and better relationship than before.

In the new covenant, people will be given the true knowledge of God which will act as a basis of God's blessings and joy. Therefore absence of his knowledge would result into unhappiness and disaster.

According to the new covenant, there will be no need for a prophet to teach others about the true character and will of God. This is because such a person will know what God wants and hates.

The new covenant will be a universal one which will involve all the people in the world unlike the old covenant which limited itself to only the Israelites. In the new covenant therefore each and every person will have a chance of knowing God.

The new covenant will be an everlasting covenant. It will not be like the old covenant which was broken over and over again.

The new covenant was to be fulfilled with the coming of Jesus Christ to become a human being and seal the covenant God initiated to bring man closer to him. All the assurance of forgiveness of sin is also more pronounced in the new covenant.

The summary of evils condemned in the temple sermon

Jeremiah is sent into the temple to accuse God's people of false religion and idolatrous practices which include:-

- They were worshiping God in the temple while letting immigrants, widows and orphans to suffer in their midst.

- There was no justice or righteousness in the nation.
- Covenant faith was morally bankrupt in Judah hence deserving God's judgment.
- They were looking at the temple as their greatest haven or lucky charm yet their tensest vulnerability due to sinfulness.
- They never believed that what had happened to their brothers of Israel was soon coming to them.
- They had a popular belief in the temple in the temple itself to guarantee their security even if they were grossly disobedient and corrupt.
- Falsely they were stressing God's covenant of the everlasting temple and dynasty even if they were continuously annoying God.
- They were comforting themselves with the destruction of Israel taking Judah to be spared for being special.
- They were trusting in the temple rather than in God.
- They were considering themselves to be untouchables because of the temple.
- They were only into temple rituals than the true demands of God.
- Instead of using the temple for prayer they had turned it into a den of robbers.
- They were committing murder.
- They were committing adultery.
- They were walking after other gods.
- They were practicing customs and rituals of the temple just for the sake.
- They were misusing Jehovah's house which is called by his name.
- They kept going about their external worship as if God was not seeing them.
- They were remaining unrepentant while expecting God's protection through the temple.
- They were persistently violating the covenant faith because of the temple as their insurance.
- They were living in idolatry while hiding in the temple,
- They were falsely praying in the temple yet God was not ready to listen to their hypocrisy.
- They were offering meaningless sacrifices by having no trust and obedience in God.
- After burning their children as sacrifices at the high place of Topheth in the valley of Ben-Hinnom they would come to the temple of God, hence that valley would become their slaughter ground.

NB. The temple sermon however sparked off the persecution of Jeremiah and made his life extremely hard because he was always in pain both physically, mentally and spiritually as the prison became his permanent home, torture, warning people who never bothered to change yet he was seeing the forthcoming troubles on the nation. So he suffered throughout the reign of Jeoiakim, Jehioachin and Zedekiah up to his death in Egypt

The summary of King Manasseh repentance when exiled to Assyria by army commanders

- He magnificently humbled himself when in trouble exiled in Babylon.
- He began seeking God's face.
- He consistently prayed to God for forgiveness.
- God was really moved and came to Manasseh's rescue back to Jerusalem.
- He leant and accepted that the Lord is God.

- He carried out reforms on himself.
- He reinforced the outer wall on west side of David's city
- He encircled the Ophel and raised it to a great height.
- He eliminated the foreign gods and idols from God's temple.
- He removed all the altars he had built in Jerusalem and on the mountains.
- He discarded all places of idol worship outside the city.
- He set up an altar to the Lord made a peace offering on it.
- He ordered all the people of Judah to serve the lord god of Israel.

NB. Manasseh was succeeded by his son Amon who ruled for two years. He was assassinated by his officials and they made his son Josiah King of Judah.

The summary of the sins of King Josiah's reforms

- He began seeking the God of his ancestors while sixteen years old.
- In his twelfth year as King he began removing the high places.
- He removed the goddess of Asherah from Judah
- He abolished all carved images made for the worship of small gods.
- He tore down all the altars of Baal from his presence.
- He chopped down the incense altars that accompanied the Baal altars.
- He broke into pieces the Asherim.
- He ground all the carved images to dust and scattered the residues in the graves.
- He burned the bones of Baal Priests at their altars so as to purge Judah and Jerusalem.
- He tore down all the images of Asherah in cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon and Naphtali which were outside Judah.
- He ordered for the repair of God's temple by which the Law book as written by Moses was found in his 18th year as King Josiah.
- He carefully listened to the Law book as Shaphan read it to him.
- He asked Hilkiah to consult God which proves his humility and obedience to God and the Prophets.
- When Prophetess Huldah responded that God was angry and bound to punish Judah in accordance with the curses of the Law book, Josiah tore his clothes in repentance.
- Even though God promised not to punish Judah during Josiah's time, Josiah still joined the rest of the people in repentance and fasting.
- He gathered all the people with him to make a covenant to God to follow the Lord and keep his commands; this was after reading the book of the Law to them.
- He continued to remove all the detestable things from all the territories of Israel.
- He reorganized the Passover on the 14th day of the 1st month for the first time as Moses had instructed.
- He reappointed the true consecrated priests of the Levites in clan and tribe.
- He told the true Priests to put the Holy Ark in the temple that Solomon the son of Israel's King David had built.
- He asked the true Priests to serve god's people in the best way possible but not as a burden on their shoulders.

The summary of the sins of King Manasseh

- He re-established the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed.
- He built altars of Baal.
- He erected the goddess of Asherah. (Venus)
- He worshiped and served the armies of heaven.
- He built altars in God's temple to honour small gods.
- He put altars in the two courtyards of God's temple to honour small gods.
- He burned his sons as offerings in Ben-hinnon valley to Molech a Canaanite god.
- He practiced fortune telling, witchcraft and sorcery.
- He communicated with mediums.
- He was fond of provoking God by doing things that God considered evil.
- He placed carved images of Asherah in God's temple.
- He deceived the people of Judah to practice more evil.
- He had no ear for God's voice though the prophets.
- He did so much to destroy the worship of the true God.
- He persecuted his people and shed innocent blood till he flooded Jerusalem with blood.
- He is said to have murdered prophet Isaiah slaying him in half.
- He proved to be more wickedly than wicked kings of other nations.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. a) *Examine the call of Jeremiah to be a prophet.*
b) *What lessons can Christians learn from the call of Jeremiah?*
2. a) *Discuss the sermon which Jeremiah delivered at the temple in Judah.*
b) *Examine the importance of this incidence to the Christians today.*
3. a) *Examine the reasons for denying Jeremiah a chance to marry and have children.*
b) *Discuss what the church can do to encourage monogamous marriage.*
4. a) *Examine the teaching of prophet Jeremiah on the sign of the broken Jar.*
b) *What are the consequences of this sign of the broken jar to Jeremiah?*
5. a) *Examine Jeremiah's teaching about the prophets and priests of Judah*
b) *What would Jeremiah condemn against the religious leaders in Uganda if he resurrected today?*
6. a) *Examine the teaching of Jeremiah about the new covenant.*
b) *How did the new covenant differ from the Sinai covenant?*
7. a) *Examine the sins of Judah at the time of prophet Jeremiah.*

- b) Discuss the importance of Jeremiah's condemnations against Judah to the Christians today.*
8. *"Jeremiah was a prophet of doom" Discuss.*
 9. *"King Manasseh of Judah and Ahab of Israel were of the same mother" comment*
 10. (a) *Examine the idea of the New Covenant in Jeremiah's prophecy.*
(b) *How was Jeremiah's prophecy fulfilled in the New Testament?*
 11. (a) *Examine the sins in Israel at the time of Jeremiah.*
(b) *Discuss the consequences of these sins according to Jeremiah*
 12. *Examine Jeremiah's use of symbolism in his prophecy.*
 13. (a) *Why did Jeremiah tell the people of Israel not to trust in temple?*
(b) *Discuss the consequences of his prophecy about the temple.*
 14. (a) *Account for the conflict between Jeremiah and Pusshur the priest.*
(b) *Comment on Pusshur's reaction to Jeremiah's messages.*
 15. (a) *Examine the nature of Jeremiah's prophetic call and mission. (Jer 1:1-9)*
(b) *Why is Jeremiah always called the suffering prophet?*
 16. (a) *Account for the suffering experienced by Jeremiah.*
(b) *How can the vocation of a Christian (as God's messenger) bring suffering today?*