

## Who was Jeremiah in the Bible?

Jeremiah the prophet lived in the final days of the crumbling nation of Judah. He was, appropriately, the last prophet that God sent to preach to the southern kingdom, which comprised the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. God had repeatedly warned Israel to stop their idolatrous behavior, but they would not listen, so He tore the 12 tribes asunder, sending the 10 northern tribes into captivity at the hands of the Assyrians. Then God sent Jeremiah to give Judah the last warning before He cast them out of the land, decimating the nation and sending them into captivity in the pagan kingdom of Babylon. Jeremiah, a faithful, God-fearing man, was called to tell Judah that, because of their unrepentant sin, their God had turned against them and was now prepared to remove them from the land at the hands of a pagan king.

No doubt Jeremiah, who was only about 17 when God called him, had great inner turmoil over the fate of his people, and he begged them to listen. He is known as “the weeping prophet,” because he cried tears of sadness, not only because he knew what was about to happen but because, no matter how hard he tried, the people would not listen. Furthermore, he found no human comfort. God had forbidden him to marry or have children (Jeremiah 16:2), and his friends had turned their backs on him. So, along with the burden of the knowledge of impending judgment, he also must have felt very lonely. God knew that this was the best course for Jeremiah, because He went on to tell him how horrible conditions would be in a short time, with babies, children, and adults dying “grievous” deaths, their bodies unable to even be buried, and their flesh devoured by the birds (Jeremiah 16:3-4).

Obviously, the people of Israel had become so hardened by the numbing effects of sin that they no longer believed God, nor did they fear Him. Jeremiah preached for 40 years,

and not once did he see any real success in changing or softening the hearts and minds of his stubborn, idolatrous people. The other prophets of Israel had witnessed some successes, at least for a little while, but not Jeremiah. He was speaking to a brick wall; however, his words were not wasted. They were pearls being cast before swine, in a sense, and they were convicting every person who heard them and refused to heed the warning.

Jeremiah tried to make the people understand their problem was a lack of belief, trust, and faith in God, along with an absence of fear that caused them to take Him for granted. It is easy to be lulled into a false sense of security, especially when the focus is not on God. The nation of Israel, just like many nations today, had stopped putting God first and had replaced Him with false gods, those that would not make them feel guilty or convict them of sin. God had delivered His people from bondage in Egypt, had performed miracles before them, and had even parted the waters of the sea for them. In spite of all these displays of God's power, they returned to the false practices they had learned in Egypt, even making vows to the false "queen of heaven," along with performing the other rites and rituals that were part of the Egyptian culture and religion. God finally turned them over to their idolatry, saying, "Go ahead, then; do what you promised! Keep your vows!" (Jeremiah 44:25).

Jeremiah became discouraged. He sank into a quagmire where many believers seem to get stuck when they think their efforts are not making a difference and time is diminishing. Jeremiah was emotionally spent, even to the point of doubting God (Jeremiah 15:18), but God was not done with him. Jeremiah 15:19 records a lesson for each believer to remember in those times when he feels alone, useless, and discouraged and whose faith is wavering: "Therefore this is what the LORD says: 'If you repent, I will restore you that

you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman. Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them.”” God was saying to Jeremiah, come back to Me, and I will restore to you the joy of your salvation. These are similar to the words penned by David when he repented of his sin with Bathsheba (Psalm 51:12).

What we learn from the life of Jeremiah is the comfort of knowing that, just like every believer, even great prophets of God can experience rejection, depression, and discouragement in their walk with the Lord. This is a normal part of growing spiritually, because our sinful nature fights against our new nature, that which is born of the Spirit of God, according to Galatians 5:17: “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.” But, just as Jeremiah found, we can know that the faithfulness of our God is infinite; even when we are unfaithful to Him, He remains steadfast (2 Timothy 2:13).

Jeremiah was given the task of delivering an unpopular, convicting message to Judah, one that caused him great mental anguish, as well as making him despised in the eyes of his people. God says that His truth sounds like “foolishness” to those who are lost, but to believers it is the very words of life (1 Corinthians 1:18). He also says that the time will come when people will not tolerate the truth (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Those in Judah in Jeremiah’s day did not want to hear what he had to say, and his constant warning of judgment annoyed them. This is true of the world today, as believers who are following God’s instructions are warning the lost and dying world of impending judgment (Revelation 3:10). Even though most are not listening, we must persevere in proclaiming truth in order to rescue some from the terrible judgment that will inevitably come.