

Jeremiah — The Prophet at Judah’s Collapse

Series: 30 Prophets of the Bible - Dr. Randy White

I. Identity of Jeremiah

Name and Calling

- “Jeremiah” (Hebrew: יֵרֵמְיָהוּ, *Yirmeyahu*) likely means “The LORD appoints” or “The LORD throws/casts down.”
- Son of Hilkiah, of the priests in Anathoth of Benjamin (Jer. 1:1; Josh. 21:18).
- Called before birth as “a prophet unto the nations”; appointed to root out, pull down, destroy, throw down, build, and plant (Jer. 1:4–10).
- Jeremiah knew the temple and covenant forms from the inside, yet exposed religious confidence that had become empty ritual (Jer. 7:1–15; 8:8–12).

Personality

- Tender, reluctant, and deeply affected by his message (Jer. 1:6; 8:18–9:1).
- Frequently lonely and opposed, yet enduring rejection, imprisonment, threats, and national collapse (Jer. 11:18–23; 15:10; 20:7–18; 37–38).

II. Historical Setting

Timeframe

- Jeremiah prophesied from the thirteenth year of Josiah through the fall of Jerusalem and beyond (Jer. 1:2–3).
- Approximate span: c. 627–586 BC, from Josiah through Zedekiah, with aftermath into the remnant period (2 Kings 22–25; Jer. 40–44).

International Setting

- Assyria was collapsing; Babylon was rising. Nineveh fell in 612 BC; Carchemish in 605 BC established Babylon’s dominance (Jer. 46:2).
- Judah tried to survive between Egypt and Babylon, but Jeremiah called submission to Babylon God’s discipline (Jer. 27:1–22; 38:17–23).

Judah’s Condition

- Josiah’s reforms were real, but the nation’s heart remained divided (2 Kings 22–23; Jer. 3:6–10).
- Idolatry, injustice, false prophecy, and temple-confidence marked Judah’s final decades (Jer. 5; 6:13–15; 7).
- Exile was not an accident of politics; it was covenant judgment (Jer. 11:1–17; 25:1–14).

III. Nature of Jeremiah’s Ministry

Primary Message

- Judah had broken the covenant and would face Babylonian judgment (Jer. 2:1–13; 25:8–11).
- The people were to repent, but national judgment would not be easily reversed (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11–12).
- Exile would last seventy years, after which God would visit and restore His people (Jer. 25:11–12; 29:10–14).

Distinctive Burdens

- False religion: temple-confidence apart from obedience (Jer. 7:1–15).
- False prophets: peace promised where no peace existed (Jer. 6:14; 23:9–40; 28:1–17).
- Surrender to Babylon sounded treasonous, but obeyed God’s word (Jer. 21:8–10; 38:1–6).

Tone and Style

- Sermons, laments, legal accusations, symbolic actions, and historical narrative.
- Vivid images: broken cisterns, potter and clay, marred girdle, broken bottle, and yoke (Jer. 2:13; 13:1–11; 18:1–11; 19:1–13; 27–28).

IV. Major Themes

The Broken Covenant

- Jeremiah stands in the Deuteronomic covenant tradition (Deut. 28–30; Jer. 11:1–17).
- Sin is presented as spiritual adultery, stubbornness, and refusal to hear (Jer. 3:1–14; 7:24–28; 13:23).

The Word of the LORD

- The repeated issue is whether Judah will hear God’s word (Jer. 1:2; 7:13; 13:15; 25:3–7).
- Jeremiah’s written scroll was burned, but the word was rewritten and enlarged (Jer. 36:1–32).

Judgment and Hope

- Judgment: siege, sword, famine, pestilence, exile (Jer. 14:12; 21:7; 24:8–10).
- Hope: return, restoration, righteous Branch, everlasting covenant, and new covenant (Jer. 23:5–8; 30–33; Heb. 8:8–13).

V. Structure of the Book

Chapters 1–25 – Warnings Before the Fall

- Call of Jeremiah (1)
- Judah’s covenant unfaithfulness and coming judgment (2–20)
- Kings, prophets, shepherds, and the seventy years (21–25)

Chapters 26–45 – Conflict, Crisis, and Collapse

- Jeremiah opposed by priests, prophets, officials, and kings (26–29)
- Book of Consolation: future restoration and new covenant (30–33)
- Final days of Jerusalem and aftermath after the fall (34–45)

Chapters 46–52 – Nations and Historical Appendix

- Oracles against the nations: Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Elam, and Babylon (46–51).
- Final record of Jerusalem’s fall confirms Jeremiah’s message (52; cf. 2 Kings 24–25).

VI. Why Jeremiah Matters

Interpretive Value

- Jeremiah explains why Jerusalem fell: not Babylonian strength alone, but covenant rebellion under divine judgment.
- He bridges the last days of the monarchy, the destruction of the temple, and the beginning of exile.
- A true prophet may be unpopular, politically inconvenient, and personally broken, yet faithful.
- Jeremiah’s message moves from uprooting to planting: judgment is real, but God has not abandoned His covenant purpose (Jer. 1:10; 31:35–37).