

# JEREMIAH

ORDER IN OLD TESTAMENT

24

NUMBER OF CHAPTERS

52

TYPE

PROPHECY, MAJOR



## OVERVIEW

Jeremiah is one of the few prophets who warned the people of impending disaster and was able to experience the events as they unfolded. For over 40 years, Jeremiah found himself addressing a nation who refused to change its ways despite many warnings, and as a result found itself facing judgment from God.



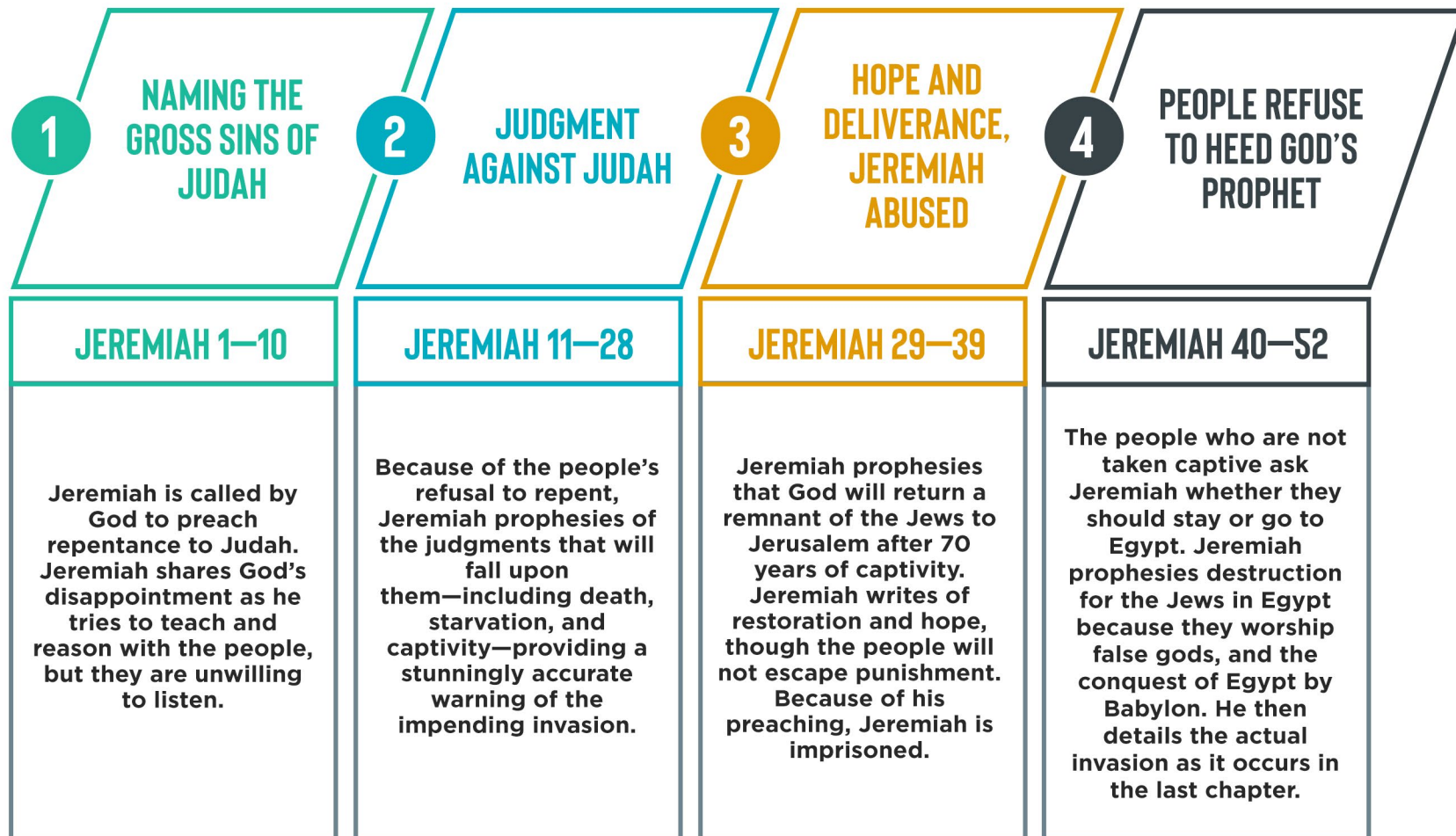
WRITTEN  
585–570 BC



TIME PERIOD COVERED  
575 BC–25 AD



AUTHOR  
The Prophet  
Jeremiah



# JEREMIAH

## AT-A-GLANCE

### BOOK(S) WRITTEN:

**Jeremiah & The Lamentations of Jeremiah**

### TYPE OF BOOK(S):

**Major Prophecy; Jeremiah is the second of four major prophets (including Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel).**

### PROBABLE DATES OF WRITING:

**Jeremiah was written sometime between 586 and 570 BC. Lamentations was written in 586-85 BC.**



### AUTHOR BACKGROUND:

Jeremiah was the son of a priest from the small town of Anathoth in Judah. He was nearing 20 when he began to prophesy, and he continued for the rest of his adult life, perhaps more than 40 years. Like Isaiah, his message and loud cries from God were not heeded by the people. In fact, extra-biblical material tells that he was stoned to death by them after the great exile to Babylon.

Jeremiah was not part of the Babylonian exile. Early church leaders believe he was taken to Egypt to avoid being sent to Babylon. It was in Egypt that exasperated countrymen who also fled from Judah eventually stoned him.

Jeremiah was known as the lamenting prophet, because God was very angry during the time he prophesied, and true prophetic news from God was rarely good.

However, the prophet also offers some of the most beautiful words of hope in the Bible.



### UNUSUAL PLACES THIS AUTHOR WROTE:

To write Lamentations, Jeremiah had walked through the streets and alleys of the holy city of Jerusalem and saw nothing but destruction. It was during the throes of the Babylonian invasion of 586 BC. While still considered a book of prophecy, Lamentations is rife with the heartache which had just occurred; the great city of God fell and was destroyed, and its people had fled.

The Book of Jeremiah may have been completed in Egypt.



### UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH THIS AUTHOR WROTE:

Jeremiah had the unusual situation of prophesying for many years about the same impending disasters and then living long enough to see them come to pass. One might think some people would come up to him and say, "Oops! You were right!" That appears not to be the case.

# LAMENTATIONS

ORDER IN OLD TESTAMENT

25

NUMBER OF CHAPTERS

5

TYPE

PROPHECY, MAJOR



## OVERVIEW

Written by Jeremiah, the Book of Lamentations shares his sorrow at the destruction of Jerusalem and the wickedness of the people. Having warned and prophesied of the event for over 40 years, Jeremiah grieves Judah's ruin and captivity. He writes a series of poems expressing both God's view and his own feelings, which are closely aligned.



WRITTEN  
585 BC



TIME PERIOD COVERED  
586–585 BC



AUTHOR  
The Prophet  
Jeremiah

1

JEREMIAH  
MOURNS THE  
FORMERLY  
BEAUTIFUL CITY

### LAMENTATIONS 1

Jeremiah recounts the destruction of Jerusalem. He touches on several topics including weeping, loneliness, affliction, labor, grief due to sin, captured children, and hunger.

2

GOD'S ANGER  
EXPRESSED

### LAMENTATIONS 2

Jeremiah writes from the Lord's perspective expressing anger, then the people's perspective as they cry out in misery and sorrow.

3

THE DEPTHS OF  
DESPAIR; THE  
HEIGHT OF HOPE  
AND FAITH

### LAMENTATIONS 3–4

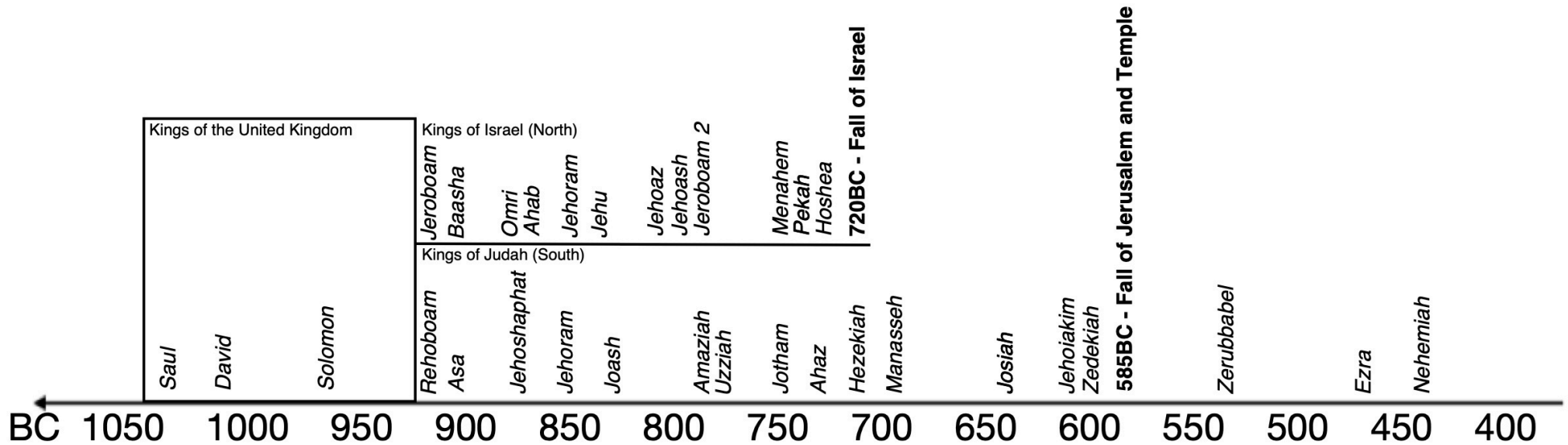
Jeremiah describes the wickedness of the people and their suffering in great detail because of their departure from God. He describes a foreshadowing of the suffering and crucifixion of Christ. He also describes with hope God's promise of restoration as the people repent.

4

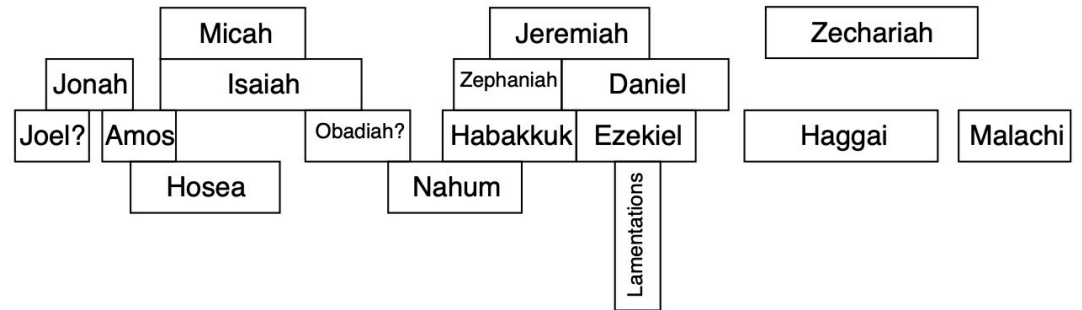
FURTHER  
IMAGERY AND A  
HOPE IN GOD

### LAMENTATIONS 5

Jeremiah prays regarding the miserable state of the people. He praises God and invokes His mercy for the Jews and long suffering toward them.



# Timeline of The O.T. Prophets



## THROUGH THE BIBLE: Major Prophets // Jeremiah & Lamentations

### OBJECT LESSONS IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

**Chapter 13** - God instructs Jeremiah to buy a new linen undergarment & wear it, symbolizing the Jews' close relationship with God, clinging to Him. Jeremiah is then told to hide it in a rock crevice by the river where it becomes ruined, dirty, & useless. This act illustrates the people's spiritual corruption & being unfit for God's use.

**Chapter 18** - God instructs Jeremiah to visit a potter's house, where he observes the potter shaping clay on a wheel. The clay represents the people; the potter is God with authority & power to mold His people according to His will. When the clay is marred, the potter reshapes it into a new thing. Like the old hymn: "Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way! Thou art the potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after thy will...." God can judge, reshape & restore people & nations based on their response to His call.

**Chapter 19** - God instructs Jeremiah to smash a clay jar in front of the people to show impending judgment the irreversible damage when Judah is smashed.

**Chapter 24** - God shows Jeremiah a vision of two baskets of figs placed before the Temple. One contains good figs, representing those He'll redeem. The other holds bad figs, symbolizing those He'll judge. No one wants rotten figs; they want ripe figs. Which kind of fig are you?

**Chapters 27 & 28** - God instructs Jeremiah to wear a wooden yoke & proclaim that He's given the nations into Babylon's hands, urging them submit to avoid destruction. The false prophet, Hananiah, breaks the yoke, falsely predicting Babylon's defeat, but Jeremiah counters that God will replace the wooden yoke with an iron one, signifying an even harsher, inescapable Babylonian rule.

**Chapter 43** - God instructs Jeremiah to hide large stones in the pavement in front of Pharaoh's palace in Egypt. This act prophesies that Egypt will also be invaded by Nebuchadnezzar (which happens in 568 BC) who will set up his throne over those stones. In other words, the Jews who escaped to Egypt still won't be getting away from Babylon's reach. They should have stayed home in Judah like God said & stayed safe.

**Chapter 51** - Jeremiah instructs Seraiah (an official) that when he goes off to Babylon to take a scroll containing the prophecies against Babylon, tie it to a stone, & throw it into the Euphrates River. This act symbolizes the inevitable & permanent destruction of Babylon which will sink, never to rise again.



## OVERVIEW OF LAMENTATIONS

Since I don't have the space to include this material in my message on Jeremiah, I'm including it here. Lamentations is the other book Jeremiah wrote as the "weeping prophet." The Hebrew title comes from the first word of the book, "How" or "Alas," but the 2nd century B.C. Greek translators titled it "Lamentations" because it's a book of grief & sorrows.

Jeremiah previously composed a lament for the last good Judean king, Josiah, killed in battle (2 Chron 35:25). Here he laments over the loss & death experienced during the destruction of Jerusalem & the Temple when the Babylonians (Chaldeans) destroyed them in 586 B.C. This was their 3rd & final incursion into Judah. In the book of Jeremiah, he looks ahead to the coming destruction; in Lamentations, he looks back.

It's not only a grief over what had been lost, but over the possibility of what could have been. In the case of the nation, Jeremiah was mournful over what it could have become had Josiah been able to continue his reign of revival. As Jeremiah pleads with his countrymen to repent & turn to the Lord, he mourns over the inevitable disaster that awaits them as they stubbornly refuse to listen to him & the other prophets God sent (such as Isaiah, Amos & Hosea) over the last 200 years.

It's a dark, disturbing picture, full of gloom. During the 2-year siege, many were starving, with mothers even reduced to cannibalism of their own children (2:20; 4:10). Afterward, many Jews were killed or exiled. The last king from David's line is dragged away. Some Jews were left behind to live amongst the ruins. Children used to laugh & play in the streets, but now they beg for food.

It's not just emotional grief, but theological grief. It's a solemn reflection on the ruinous & miserable consequences of sin. It was unthinkable that God would actually bring such disgrace, desolation & complete destruction on Jerusalem—the city of David, capital of the nation, & center of worship which had seemingly stood invincible for hundreds of years. So this book is a funeral dirge for a city, a nation, & an era.

Solomon's Temple where God's presence dwelt on the Ark of the Covenant for about 400 years had been plundered, burnt, & lay in ruins. The last time the Ark was mentioned in Scripture was during the time of King Josiah in 622 B.C. (2 Chron. 35:3). But it's been missing ever since—whether destroyed, taken away, or hidden beforehand (perhaps by Jeremiah as claimed by 2nd Maccabees 2:4-8 in the Apocrypha). The altar where the priests made sacrifices, & courtyards where the people celebrated festivals were gone. The Jews were stunned. It seemed that God had abandoned them.

How could this happen? Why did God take away the land He promised to the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob), to Moses & to David?! God must remain true to His righteous, holy, & just nature. He cannot continue to bless, protect, & provide for people deliberately & continually defying Him. They'd repeatedly broken the Covenant He'd made with them by their disobedience, idolatry, & immorality. Their destruction was just & deserved since God had warned them centuries ago, & often since, not to depart

from the covenant. Yet, they ignored & rejected the warnings, so all the curses from the book of the Law came true.

Jeremiah suffered in many ways for his prophecies, but when they finally come to pass, he mourns instead of rejoicing in being justified. Likewise, God takes no joy in having to punish His children (Ez. 33:11). His wrath isn't impetuous or volatile. He is slow to anger & longsuffering (Ps. 103:8). But His patient mercy will not continue indefinitely. His righteous justice will not be delayed forever. Rebellious sin must be dealt with justly.

This Exile or Captivity is the most crushing catastrophe in Israel's history, only to be surpassed later after the time of Jesus when Jerusalem will once again be destroyed & the Second Temple permanently torn down because of the Jews' rejection of their Messiah (just as they had rejected Jeremiah). God will use the Roman Empire in A.D. 70 to end the Jewish nation as the Church becomes the true Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). Christians are now the "chosen race, holy nation, & royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9).

Though Israel was re-established as a political state in 1948, it is not biblical Israel. Modern Israelis are not Israelites. Though some Jews read Lamentations at the Western (Wailing) Wall where a portion of the 2nd Temple still remains, & they still hope for a 3rd temple to be built, this is no longer needed because the Church is now the Lord's temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17). Jesus is our final sacrifice--altars or priests are no longer needed.

Lamentations is a series of 5 poems with each containing 22 verses (except the middle one which has 66 verses = 3 x 22), reflecting the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The first 4 are alphabetic acrostics, similar to Psalm 119, which aids in memorizing it. The first verse begins with "A" (aleph), the 2nd begins with "B" (beth), & so on. Since the middle chapter has 3 times as many verses, the first 3 verses begin with "A" (aleph), then 3 with "B" (beth), & so on. Even the final chapter simulates an acrostic. Hebrew poetry isn't about rhyming words, but has a kind of meter or rhythmic beat.

Filled with prayers & cries of anguish, each chapter blends sorrow, confession, & a glimmer of hope in God's mercy. Each ends with a prayer, except the 4th, but that's made up by the last which is all prayer. In chapter 1, Jerusalem is represented as an abandoned widow, bereft of children. "Lady Zion" is weeping in the night with no one to comfort her. Her enemies are God's instruments of judgment, but she pleads for Him to see her affliction & judge her enemies. Likewise, chapter 2 describes God's wrath as the cause of the city's collapse. But cries are made for Him to see their suffering, especially of the innocent.

In chapter 3, a shift happens as Jeremiah describes their anguish but affirms God's steadfast love. The Lord himself sorrows over those He's chastening because He loves them. So it becomes an affirmation of faith in the justice & goodness of God as Jeremiah remembers His promises. No one should complain when being rightly disciplined for sinning, but still he pleads for restoration & vengeance. It's full of language drawn from other laments in the Old Testament (such as Psalms, Job, & Isaiah).

Jeremiah 3:22-25 is center of the book practically & spiritually: "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. The LORD is my portion," says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.' The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him" (ESV). This often-quoted verse is the basis for the classic hymn: "Great is Thy Faithfulness," with the words, "Morning by morning, new mercies I see."

**Main Point: In the middle of judgment, God always offers hope!**

As long as we're still breathing, we can return to Him & find compassionate forgiveness! God's punishment might seem severe, but we can maintain faith in the face of it because it's designed to purify us (Heb. 12:11). Godly sorrow leads to repentance which results in salvation (2 Cor. 7:10). "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Chapter 4 tells of horrific conditions during the siege, contrasting the city's former glory with its present degradations. It makes clear that sinful rebellion was the cause of God's wrath being poured out. They had brought it upon themselves, & were now reaping what they & their ancestors had sown.

Chapter 5 concludes with a list of ongoing hardships, & a communal prayer for God's mercy & restoration. "Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old— unless you have utterly rejected us, and you remain exceedingly angry with us" (5:21-22).

Their judgment was deserved, but they should let this time be restorative. Any hope for the future would only be found in repentance. Cast yourself on God's mercy! God will give you back the land, though it will only be a shadow of its former glory. God will work through a small remnant to fulfill His promise to bring the Messiah into the world. Sin brings misery, but God compassionately sent us Jesus to rescue us! One day, He will wipe away all tears (Rev. 7:17).

Brett Kays

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