

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH & LAMENTATIONS

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The Plan of the Major Old Testament book studies

These notes are not intended to be textual commentaries of the Old Testament books. They serve as a proposed *outline guide* for the student or teacher in *preparing personal studies, or for teaching and study notes*. The notes are from the Bible Dictionaries and Bible Encyclopedia referenced below in the Bibliography as research references for further study. Much of the information in this lesson is edited from the *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* and my own lecture notes.

Bibliography

Tyndale Bible Dictionary.

Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible.

Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary.

The Prophet and the Books Jeremiah & Lamentations

This study is not intended to be a critical commentary on the Book of Jeremiah and Lamentations. It is a *guided study* of the *prophetic book of Isaiah*, its *form* and *literary role* in the life of Israel, its *theology* and importance to the Christology of the New Testament, and an introduction to the suffering service of all believers in God.

The purpose of these notes is to give you an overview of Isaiah, to provide you with a *historical* and *theological context* of each book. You can then follow the chapter breakout sections as the framework of your study or class.

A few commentaries are listed for further research and study.

Bibliography

Brueggemann, Walter, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998.

Craigie, Peter C., Page H. Kelley, Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah 1-25*, Word Bible Commentary, 1991.

Garrett, Duane, *Song of Songs*, Paul R. House, *Lamentations*, Word Bible Commentary, 2004.

Keown, G. L., *Jeremiah 26-52*, Word Bible Commentary, 1995.

Longman, Tremper III, David E. Garland, *et al.*, *Jeremiah-Ezekiel*, Zondervan, 2010.

The Historical Context of Jeremiah

Babylonian Captivity ca 627 BCE

Jeremiah, the Person

The *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* observes, “Jeremiah was God’s prophet to Judah before its fall in 586 BCE; his name is also spelled “Jeremias” (Mt 16:14) and “Jeremy” (Mt 2:17; 27:9).

Jeremiah was born in the village of Anathoth, about three miles (4.8 kilometers) northeast of Jerusalem. His father’s name was Hilkiah, and he belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. His call came in the 13th year of King Josiah (640–609 BCE). He refers to himself as “a child” when called (Jer 1:6), but the Hebrew word is not the same as used in Jeremiah 30:6 and 31:8 and cannot be limited to preadolescence. He was probably referring to his inexperience rather than to his age. Jeremiah was born about 657 BCE during the reign of the wicked king Manasseh, while the great Ashurbanipal, who had shaken the world by sacking the ancient Egyptian city of Thebes in 663 BCE, ruled a world empire from Assyria.

God informed Jeremiah that he had consecrated and appointed him before birth (Jer 1:4–5). Jeremiah first shrank with a sense of inadequacy and fear: “O Sovereign Lord, ... I can’t speak for you! I’m too young!” God would not allow Jeremiah to excuse himself. He was assured that words would be given him to speak, and guidance given for the way (v 7). He was promised protection (v 18) and deliverance (v 8) despite opposition (v 19). God touched his mouth, signifying divine inspiration of his words, and gave the sign of a branch from an almond tree, explaining that the Lord is watching ... The third sign was the boiling pot (v 13) facing from the north, picturing the source and fury of impending disaster.

Thus the tone of Jeremiah’s life ministry was set; judgment, disaster, danger, defeat, and impending death for the nation.”¹

Jeremiah’s Introduction and Commission

Jer 1;1-10. *“The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, ² to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. ³ It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.*

⁴ Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,

⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

⁶ Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” ⁷ But the Lord said to me,

“Do not say, ‘I am only a youth;’ for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak.

⁸ Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.”

⁹ Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.

¹⁰ See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down,

¹ *Tyndale Bible dictionary*, p. 680.

*to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant.”*

The Theological Context of Jeremiah

“Part of God’s commission to Jeremiah clarified the purpose of Jeremiah’s ministry: *“Today I appoint you to stand up against nations and kingdoms. You are to uproot some and tear them down, to destroy and overthrow them. You are to build others up and plant them”* (1:10). The first four parts of the commission required that *Jeremiah*, appointed as a “chief governor” over nations, *should wreck the existing religious and social structures by his preaching against moral and spiritual sin.*

Doubtless, the physical destruction caused by the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians was the accessory to the truth uttered by the prophet. *Jeremiah is consistent in his blasts at moral and religious wickedness, his call to submit to the punishment that God gives through Babylon is pervasive, and his assurance that such submission will lead to blessing is important to his message.* When Zedekiah asks advice (38:14), we know what Jeremiah will say. When the captains of the refugees ask if they should go to Egypt, we already know the answer (42:3). We may also anticipate the obdurate rejection of God’s message on the part of *the inquiring people, who apparently want to know God’s will but have no desire to obey it.*

Nevertheless, *part of Jeremiah’s purpose focuses on the most distant future when the new covenant will supplant the old (31:31–37), and a transformed people bent on obedience rather than sin will receive God’s promised kingdom.*

National sin brings national punishment. No truth blazes so clearly in Jeremiah as this. Gentiles as well as Jews stand under the same judgment, for God is not the God of Israel only.

Individuals are not overlooked in divine judgments on nations. God sets before each the way of life and the way of death (21:8) and appeals to each to choose life (27:13).

Jeremiah illustrates human depravity by questioning if people can change their skin color or leopards their spots (13:23). The depths of depravity reach beyond man’s ability to measure (17:9–10). People even love falsehood (5:30–31).

Yet God promises to transform willing subjects who call on him (33:3) by giving them a “new heart” (24:7; 32:38–41) as the climatic provision of the new covenant (31:33–35).

The *Messiah*, who accomplishes God’s redemptive reconciliation, *is called by several iconic, symbolic names - the Lord our Righteousness, the King, the righteous Branch, the Branch of David (23:5–6; 33:15–16).*

A future nation will arise of individuals who accept God’s salvation. But Judea will first have to *pass through “the night of tribulation and travail” (30:6–7), Babylonian captivity.* Faithful Jews will understand the true identity of their Messiah, they will believe and receive him with penitent sorrow, will be cleansed (33:8), and will be regathered from all countries (32:37) by the omnipotent God (v 27).²

The Message of Jeremiah

Jeremiah predicted the fall of Judah and a seventy year captivity in Babylon. He regarded himself as the true prophet and God’s spokesperson against the false prophets like Hananiah who, although sincere, proclaim false statements. The false prophets hate Jeremiah and bring pressure with the king against Jeremiah. Jeremiah loses political influence but wins spiritually, feeling alone in his cry against false religion and apostasy. He shrinks emotionally but never gives up on his task and mission. Jeremiah is deeply patriarchal in favor of Judah but cannot accept Judea’s security divorced from faith in God rather than political-religious alliances with others.

² *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, p. 684, edited and clarified where necessary.

Jeremiah pronounced God's judgments on Israel, Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt. However, throughout the book and prophecies there never was an occasion where God's gracious forgiveness was not offered, with a promise of restoration inherent in the message..

Although the *message* of prophecy is Jeremiah's, he did not write the book, Baruch, his scribe brought Jeremiah's proclamations together in the book. In addition, the book was written theologically, not chronologically, carrying God's and Jeremiah's message clearly to the Judeans.

The Book of Lamentations is closely related to the book of Jeremiah and, like Jeremiah, was most likely brought together by Jeremiah's scribe, Baruch.

Topical Analysis of the Book of Jeremiah

These comments serve as a guide to your study of Jeremiah. You need to familiarize yourself with each section then read the text, focusing your comments on the major theme in each section.

Prophecies Under Josiah and Jehoiakim

Jer 1:1-20:18. Jeremiah's call. His prophecy that Jerusalem will fall because the people are immoral and wicked. Judgment lies before them. Their sinful impenitence in their religious worship threatens them with judgment. They are idolatrous and stubborn, and this likewise calls for judgment. God must judge them because they refuse to repent. God will not hear Jeremiah's prayer for forgiveness. God strengthens Jeremiah, his prophet for the task he has given him. The parable of the potter and the clay illustrate the breaking of Jerusalem by the breaking of the clay. Jeremiah is placed in stocks and complains to God.

Prophecies under Jehoiakim and Zedekiah

Jer 21:1-39:18. Zedekiah asks about Nebuchadnezzar coming to which Jeremiah suggests surrender. Jeremiah calls to the people to amend their ways, and urges them not to lament over Shallum (Jerusalem). Jeremiah rebukes Jehoiakim (Eliakim) and pronounces judgment over Coniah (Jehoiakim). He warns against the false prophets. He uses the vision of two baskets of figs as a symbol, the good figs represent the people in captivity. The bad figs are Zedekiah and the judgment to come. Jeremiah prophesies the seventy-year captivity, the fall of Babylon, and the destruction of the Temple. Jeremiah is tried in which he warns against false prophets. He promises a return from captivity and speaks of a new covenant. As a token he buys land in Anathoth. Jerusalem shall be restored and they shall have a new king – the Branch. He describes the siege of Jerusalem. Zedekiah destroys Jeremiah's scroll. Jeremiah is imprisoned. He and Zedekiah consult secretly. Jerusalem is captured.

Prophecies after the Fall of Jerusalem

Jer 40:1-45:5. Jeremiah returns to Gedaliah at Mizpah. Ishmael conspired against Gedaliah who is murdered. Jeremiah warns against flight to Egypt. He is abducted and prophesies in Egypt against Egypt and Judah. Jeremiah encourages Baruch.

Prophecies Against Heathen Nations

Jer 46:1-51:64. Jeremiah pronounces doom on Egypt by the Chaldeans. He also prophesies the doom of Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus (Syria), Kedar (Arabia) Hazor, Elam, and Babylon.

Historical Appendix

Isa 52:1-34. The Fall of Jerusalem is described again; the rebellion, the capture, the destruction, the booty, the slain, the captives, and the deposition of Jehoiachin.

The Book of Lamentations

The short *Book of Lamentations* following Jeremiah in the Old Testament canon is precisely what it calls itself, *Lamentations* over the sinfulness of Israel and Judah, the harshness of Israel's exile under Assyria, the destruction of Jerusalem, the beloved Holy City, Jerusalem and the Temple, and Judah's captivity in Babylon.

In the midst of the lamentations over the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple we find one of the most loving and graceful statements of the Old Testament which became a guiding light to Dr. Thomas Olbricht's theology of the Old Testament, *He Loves Forever*.

Lam 3:18-27

*“so I say, “Gone is my glory,
and my expectation from the Lord.”*

*¹⁹ Remember my affliction and my bitterness,
the wormwood and the gall!*

*²⁰ My soul continually thinks of it
and is bowed down within me.*

*²¹ But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:*

*²² The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;*

*²³ they are new every morning;
great is thy faithfulness.*

*²⁴ “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”*

*²⁵ The Lord is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.*

*²⁶ It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the Lord.*

*²⁷ It is good for a man that he bear
the yoke in his youth.”*

The Sections of Lamentations

These comments serve as a guide to your study of Lamentations. You need to familiarize yourself with each section then read the text focusing on the major theme in each section.

Jerusalem desolate and forsaken

Lam 1:1-22. The desolation of Jerusalem caused by her sin. A Cry for compassion.

God's judgment explained, and recompence urged

Lam 2:1-22. God has judged his people for their sinful opposition to His will. God is their enemy. The horrors of famine. Jerusalem's false prophets. A call for supplication.

The prophets lament and hopes

Lam 3:1-66. The cry of affliction; the prophet has shared the suffering. Jeremiah hopes for the mercies of God, and calls for conversion. Sin has sorrows. A prayer for Jerusalem.

The condition of Zion, past and present, contrasted

Lam 4:1-22. What Jerusalem was and now is. Consequences for her sins. Edom to be punished.

The prayer for mercy amid affliction

Lam 5:1-22. An appeal for mercy and confession of sin. A final plea to God.

The Books of Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Lamentations

All four of these Sacred Old Testament Books are set in the same *historical, religious, political, and theological contexts; the political and religious apostasy of Israel and Judea/Judah, and their religio/political adultery* with their politically powerful neighbors, Assyria, Syria, Babylon, and Egypt.