

BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Approximate date: 600s-500s B.C.E. (Right, some conservative-moderate); 500s B.C.E. (some conservative-moderate); 500s-300s B.C.E. (Left)

Time period: the Southern Kingdom before and immediately after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem

Author: Jeremiah and/or Baruch (Right; some conservative-moderate); Baruch (some conservative-moderate); anonymous writers and editors (Left)

Location of author: Land of Israel or Jerusalem (Right, conservative-moderate); Land of Israel, Jerusalem, and/or Babylon (Left)

Target audience and their location: Southern Kingdom Israelites before the Babylonian exile (Right, some conservative-moderate, some Left); Southern Kingdom Israelites during the Babylonian exile (some conservative-moderate, some Left); Southern Kingdom Israelites after the Babylonian exile (some Left)

People:

Jeremiah (son of Hilkiah), Josiah (son of Amon), Jehoiakim (son of Josiah), Zedekiah (son of Josiah), Baal (deity), Manasseh (son of Hezekiah), Pashhur (son of Immer) or Magor-Missabib, Zephaniah (priest), Nebuchadnezzar, Shallum (son of Josiah), Jehoiachin (son of Jehoiakim), Philistines, Micah, Uriah (son of Shemaiah), Elnathan (son of Acbor), Ahikam (son of Shaphan), Hananiah (son of Azzur), Elashah (son of Shaphan), Gemariah (son of Hilkiah), Ahab (son of Kolaiah), Zedekiah (son of Maaseiah), Shemaiah the Nehelamite, Jehoiada, Hanamel (son of Shallum), Baruch (son of Neriah, son of Mahseiah), Molech (deity), Jaazaniah (son of Jeremiah, son of Habazziniah), sons of Hanan, Igdaliah, Jonadab (son of Recab), Micaiah (son of Gemariah), palace officials (36:12), Jehudi, Elishama, Seraiah (son of Azriel), Shelemaiah (son of Abdiel), Jehucal (son of Shelemaiah), Irijah (son of Shelemaiah, son of Hananiah), Jonathan (secretary), Shephatiah (son of Mattan), Gedaliah (son of Pashhur), Jehucal (son of Shelemaiah), Pashhur (son of Malkijah), Ebed-Melech, Nergal-Sharezer of Samgar, Nebo-Sarsekim, Nebuzaradan, Nebushazban, Gedaliah (son of Ahikam), survivors left behind in Judah (40:8), Johanan (son of Kareah), Baalis (king), Ishmael (son of Nethaniah), Jezaniah (son of Hoshai), Queen of Heaven (deity), Hophra, Neco, Amon (deity), Chemosh (deity), Ammonites, Molech (deity), Heshbon (deity), Ben-Hadad (deity), Marduk (deity), Medes, Bel (deity), Hamutal (daughter of Jeremiah), Evil-Merodach

People mentioned:

David, Moses, Samuel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Asa, Baasha, Esau, Solomon

Places:

Anathoth, Jerusalem, Egypt, Kittim, Kedar, Memphis, Tahpanhes, Shihor, Assyria, Tekoa, Beth Hakkerem, Sheba, Shiloh, Topheth (meaning, fireplace), Valley of Ben Hinnom, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Tarshish, Uphaz, Jordan, Perath, Negev, Lebanon, Potsherd Gate, Upper Gate, Babylon, Gilead, Bashan, Abarim, Samaria, Sodom, Gomorrah, Uz, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, Ashdod, Tyre, Sidon, Dedan, Tema, Buz, Arabia, Zimri, Elam, Media, Sheshach, New Gate, Moresheth, Kiriath Jearim, Gibeon, Tower of Hananel, Corner Gate, Gareb, Goah, Kidron Valley, Horse Gate, Lachish, Azekah, Benjamin Gate, Middle Gate, Arabah, Riblah, land of Hamath, Ramah, Mizpah, Shechem, Geruth Kimham, Bethlehem, Migdol, Upper Egypt, Lower Egypt, Carchemish, Euphrates, Nile, Cush, Lydia, Tabor, Carmel, Thebes, Gaza, Caphtor, Ashkelon, Kiriathaim, Heshbon, Madmen, Horonaim, Bethel, Dibon, Holon, Jahzah, Mephaath, Beth Diblathaim, Beth Gamul, Beth Meon, Kerioth, Bozrah, Kir Hareseth, Jazer, Sibmah, Elealah, Jahaz, Zoar, Eglath Shelishiyah, Nimrim, Ai, Edom, Teman, Hamath, Arpad, Damascus, Hazor, Merathaim, Pekod, Leb Kamai, Ararat, Minni, Ashkenaz

Key Themes:

the Lord calls Jeremiah to serve Him as a prophet / the Lord accuses Israel of forsaking Him, in spite of the goodness He has demonstrated / God considers the faithless Northern Kingdom to be more righteous than the faithless Southern Kingdom / Jeremiah foretells a coming disaster upon Jerusalem from the north / because no one righteous can be found in Jerusalem, God will have no choice but to judge / the Lord will thoroughly judge Jerusalem via an army from the north, because its evil is so great and the people have rejected His Torah / Jeremiah prophesies the Lord's judgment at the Temple gates, as He will not hesitate to judge Jerusalem and its sin as He previously punished Shiloh, the first place in Israel to experience His presence / great death and desolation will engulf the people of Judah, including mass exhumations / the gross idolatry of Judah, and its being led astray by false teachers, require God to enact serious judgment / God considers all of Israel to be uncircumcised of heart / the Lord speaks against adorning a tree for idolatrous worship, as such deities did not make Heaven and Earth as He did / the Lord decrees how some will be taken prisoner in the coming judgment, which is to leave Judah desolate / Jeremiah prays that God's proper justice will prevail / the Lord condemns the people of Judah and Jerusalem for their disobedience to His covenant, and their forsaking of Him for Baal / the men of Anathoth plot to kill Jeremiah because of his prophecies, with the Lord telling him not to worry / Jeremiah asks the Lord why He does not allow His righteousness to prevail, judging the wicked / the Lord tells Jeremiah that He will uproot Judah and judge them, but later have compassion upon them and bring them home / the Lord explains to Jeremiah that Judah and Jerusalem have become like a worthless belt / the Lord will turn those in Jerusalem over to gross drunkenness / the Lord will cause His people to be taken into captivity because of their adulterating against Him / the Lord will send a drought against Judah and Jerusalem, not heeding their fasts or cries / the Lord chastises false prophets who tell His people there will be no sword or famine / the Lord says He would not show mercy even if Moses and Samuel were among the people / a promise of restoration is offered for repentance / while the Lord will severely judge His people for their sin, a restoration likened unto the Exodus is promised, one affecting not only Israel but also the nations who have known nothing but false gods / true strength and healing are to be found in the Lord, and not in human devices / Jeremiah speaks against the people of Jerusalem for working on the Sabbath / the Lord compares what He will do to Judah and Jerusalem as what a potter does with clay / Jeremiah pleads to the Lord as accusers plot to attack him / the Lord instructs Jeremiah to show Jerusalem that He will make them like broken pottery / Pashhur has Jeremiah taken away and beaten because of his prophecies at the Temple / the Prophet Jeremiah stands distraught before the Lord, having endured some terrible pain / Jeremiah tells King Zedekiah's envoys that God has rejected his plea for deliverance, and that Jerusalem will be utterly assaulted by the Babylonians / the Lord proclaims judgment against the evil kings of Judah / God promises to raise up a Righteous Branch who will be responsible for the ultimate restoration of His scattered people / Jeremiah laments over the damage false prophets have done / the Lord warns those who hear false prophets who lie in His name / the Lord condemns false oracles spoken in His name without His expressed consent / those taken away into Babylonian captivity are compared to being a basket of good figs / the Prophet Jeremiah tells the Southern Kingdom of Judah that after twenty-three years of prophesying, and being rejected, God will send them into Babylonian exile for seventy years / the nations that had affairs with Judah will drink from the cup of God's wrath / God's ultimate judgment will affect all humanity / Jeremiah is not killed for prophesying against Jerusalem and the Temple, because Micah was not killed for making the same prophecy previously / King Jehoiakim has Uriah tracked to Egypt for making similar prophecies, and has him executed / the Lord tells the nations of the region that they, along with Judah, will fall under the yoke of Babylon / the Lord says not to listen to those who promise a soon restoration from Babylon / Hananiah prophesied falsely of a soon restoration of the Temple articles from Babylon / the Prophet Jeremiah sends a letter to exiles in Babylon, urging them to settle down and prosper, as the exile will only end in the Lord's timing / Jeremiah warns the exiles in Babylon against false prophets raised up among them / Shemaiah the Nehelemite's family will not survive the exile / a day is promised when Israel and Judah will be restored from their captivity / in spite of their incurable sin, God will have mercy upon Israel, accomplishing restitution / the Lord promises to return and to restore the people of Ephraim and Judah to the Promised Land, prospering them / the Lord promises a New Covenant with Israel and Judah, where His Torah is written on the hearts of His people / Jeremiah buys the field of his cousin Hanamel / in spite of the imminent collapse of Judah and Jerusalem, the Lord tells Jeremiah that Israel and Judah will be restored in the day that the Righteous Branch from David's line arises / the Prophet Jeremiah tells King Zedekiah that he will be taken captive to Babylon /

the Lord proclaims that judgment will be issued against Judah for not allowing slaves to go free after their designated period of service / the Recabites faithfully followed a command from their forefather not to drink wine / King Jehoiakim burns the scroll sent to him by the Prophet Jeremiah / Baruch and Jeremiah are hidden when their lives are in danger / the Prophet Jeremiah is cast into prison under the false charge of deserting to the Babylonians / Jeremiah is thrown into the cistern of Malkijah, only to be helped out by Ebed-Melech / Jeremiah tells King Zedekiah that his life will be spared if he hands himself over to the Babylonians / King Zedekiah attempts to escape to Jerusalem, but is captured by the Babylonians and has his sons killed before him / Zedekiah is blinded and taken as a prisoner back to Babylon / Nebuchadnezzar orders generous treatment of the Prophet Jeremiah / the Prophet Jeremiah does not have to go to Babylon along with the others / Gedaliah, the Babylonian governor of Judah, is assassinated / Jeremiah instructs people from the remnant left behind in Judah not to leave for Egypt / the Lord tells Jeremiah that those fleeing to Egypt will meet calamity when the Babylonians decide to attack / the Lord promises judgment on the Jews who fled to Egypt, who have fallen into idolatry by worshipping the Queen of Heaven / the Lord promises Jeremiah an escape, even if the people face disaster / Jeremiah issues a prophecy concerning Egypt / Jeremiah issues a prophecy concerning the Philistines / Jeremiah issues a prophecy concerning Moab / Jeremiah issues a prophecy concerning Ammon / Jeremiah issues a prophecy concerning Edom / Jeremiah issues a prophecy concerning Damascus / Jeremiah issues a prophecy concerning Kedar and Hazor / Jeremiah issues a prophecy concerning Elam / Jeremiah issues a prophecy concerning Babylon / the city of Jerusalem falls to the Babylonians / King Jehoiachin, in Babylonian exile, is treated kindly by Evil-Merodach

Key Scriptures: Jeremiah 1:5; 2:19; 4:3-4, 18-22; 6:16-19; 7:2-7; 8:8-9; 9:13-14, 25-26; 10:1-5, 23-25; 12:1-3; 14:13-16; 16:10-21; 17:5, 7-10; 23:5-8, 16-18; 30:1-3; 31:10-11, 18-20, 31-34; 33:6-9, 11, 14-16; 50:4-10 / **God's Judgment on Judah** (1:1-45:5); **God's Judgment on the Nations** (46:1-52:34)

Theological Summary: The Book of Jeremiah (Heb. *Yirmayah*, יִרְמְיָהוּ) covers the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah, with most of his prophecies being delivered immediately before the conquering of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Jeremiah is unique in that it covers more biographical and personal data than any of the other Tanach Prophets, and truly gives us an insight into who Jeremiah was as a man who served God.¹ Jeremiah's immediate prophetic predecessor was Zephaniah, with Habakkuk and Obadiah probably being prophetic contemporaries. The sources we have to reconstruct the period of Jeremiah's ministry are largely found in the narratives of 2 Kings 21-25 and 2 Chronicles 33-36, and some of the Prophets who succeeded him such as Nahum and Ezekiel.²

The Book of Jeremiah has come under some substantial criticism over the past several hundred years, particularly in liberal theological circles. It is imperative for anyone who examines the text to disregard "modern notions regarding coherent structure, logical development, and chronological sequence...Jeremiah is not a modern book and must not be judged by those standards" (*ISBE*),³ as Jeremiah simply does not operate from a modern or postmodern framework of "accuracy." Notably, Jeremiah is the longest book of the Hebrew Bible by a word count, with significant sections composed in poetry and prose, as well as personal pleadings. The Talmud indicates that Jeremiah was once placed as the first of the Prophets (b.*Bava Batra* 14b-15a),⁴ a place now held by Isaiah.

Jeremiah was a member of the priestly house of Hilkiyah, from Anathoth (1:1), and may have been a descendant of Abiathar (1 Kings 2:26). Jeremiah was a prophet who forecasted doom for Judah, and as a direct result he had few friends. However, one of those closest to him was his scribe Baruch, who often wrote down his prophecies as they were dictated (26:4-32). Jeremiah's life was continually in danger (11:18-23; 26:8; 38:6),

¹ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 808-809; Jack R. Lundbom, "Jeremiah, Book of," in *ABD*, 3:707; Dillard and Longman, pp 287-289.

² S.K. Soderlund, "Jeremiah, Book of," in *ISBE*, 2:985.

³ Soderlund, "Jeremiah, Book of," in *ISBE*, 2:987; cf. Dillard and Longman, pp 289-291.

⁴ "Our rabbis have taught on Tannaite authority: This is the correct order of the prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, the twelve prophets" (b.*Bava Batra* 14b; *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*). Cf. Marvin A. Sweeney, "Jeremiah, Book of," in *EDB*, 686.

and he has often been described as the “weeping prophet” (Feinberg, *EXP*).⁵ Jewish tradition largely holds that he was stoned to death while in Egypt (cf. Hebrews 11:37).⁶

Rabbinic tradition indicates that Jeremiah actually wrote his own book (b.*Bava Batra* 15a),⁷ but upon careful scrutiny of the text this seems doubtful. The prophetic oracles are arranged in a narrative and historical framework that was surely not written by Jeremiah. The most logical choice for the final composition of Jeremiah then falls to Baruch (36:32). Conservative theologians generally feel that all of the prophetic oracles in Jeremiah are genuinely Jeremianic, with Baruch being responsible for the narrative and biographical material.⁸ “[T]he book of Jeremiah is composed of a minimum of two sources” (*ISBE*),⁹ those sources being Jeremiah’s prophecies and Baruch’s narration.

Ch. 52 is widely acknowledged to be an appendix to Jeremiah, probably an addendum composed by Baruch.¹⁰ We also cannot disclude the possibility of further redaction of Jeremiah after Baruch, or more likely that some of Jeremiah’s prophecies were composed by people other than Baruch.

Liberals largely feel that Jeremiah did not reach its final form until after the Babylonian exile. They generally argue for three main source strands for Jeremiah: genuine Jeremianic prophecies, Baruch’s redactions, and anonymous source material.¹¹ It is sometimes called “a compilation of compilations” (*IDB*).¹² Liberals concede that there is some genuine material in the text originating from Jeremiah, but that it would be difficult to filter out with all of the presumed other additions. Whereas conservatives primarily argue that any additions to the prophecies are the narrative plots given by Baruch, liberals argue for substantially more change.¹³

It is not uncommon to see liberals also argue for the final editors of Jeremiah to be associated with the so-called Deuteronomist school,¹⁴ with extreme liberals actually arguing that the Book of Jeremiah influenced the composition of Deuteronomy¹⁵ (see **Deuteronomy** entry for a summarization of the Deuteronomist view). Liberals often assert, “the chaotic nature of the book was the result of this long process of editing pre-existing sources” (*New Interpreter’s Study Bible*).¹⁶ It is frequently argued that the Book of Jeremiah is reflective upon how the Jewish exiles must now deal with God considering that Jerusalem and the Temple have been destroyed, and their independence has been taken from them. Thus, liberals commonly assert that Jeremiah did not reach its final form until after the Babylonian exile, and is the result of Jewish communities trying to rebuild their nation.

The text of Jeremiah is problematic, with two distinct versions of Jeremiah in existence.¹⁷ The Hebrew Masoretic Text edition is the base for most English translations. However, the Greek Septuagint version is one-eighth shorter, with some chapters laid out differently. Chs. 46-51 from the MT appear between 25:13 and 15 in the LXX.¹⁸ Some believe that the LXX is a witness to an alternative Hebrew edition that once existed. It is also fair to say that the turmoil surrounding Jeremiah’s life accounts for the two versions, with more than one collection of his messages circulating when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians.¹⁹ We do know that a part of

⁵ Charles L. Feinberg, “Jeremiah,” in *EXP*, 6:358-360.

⁶ Cf. F. Cawley and A.R. Millard, “Jeremiah,” in *NBCR*, 627.

⁷ “Jeremiah wrote the book that is called by his name, the book of Kings, and Lamentations” (b.*Bava Batra* 15a; *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*).

⁸ John B. Graybill, “Jeremiah, Book of,” in *NIDB*, 508.

⁹ Soderlund, “Jeremiah, Book of,” in *ISBE*, 2:989.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:988.

¹¹ Lundbom, “Jeremiah, Book of,” in *ABD*, 3:712-716.

¹² J. Muilenburg, “Jeremiah the Prophet,” in *IDB*, 2:831.

¹³ Lundbom, “Jeremiah, Book of,” in *ABD*, 3:711-712; Sweeney, “Jeremiah, Book of,” in *EDB*, pp 687-688.

¹⁴ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 805.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 810-811.

¹⁶ Kathleen M. O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” in *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, 1052.

¹⁷ Muilenburg, “Jeremiah the Prophet,” in *IDB*, 2:831; Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 817-818; Cawley and Millard, in *NBCR*, 627; Graybill, “Jeremiah, Book of,” in *NIDB*, 508; Soderlund, “Jeremiah, Book of,” in *ISBE*, 2:990; Lundbom, “Jeremiah, Book of,” in *ABD*, 3:707-708; Dillard and Longman, pp 291-294.

¹⁸ Cf. *Archaeological Study Bible*, 1240.

¹⁹ Graybill, “Jeremiah, Book of,” in *NIDB*, 508.

Jeremiah's prophecies were burned by King Jehoiakim (26:32), which meant that it would have to be re-written.²⁰

One of the textual traditions clearly stands behind the LXX, whereas the longer textual tradition is what was traditionally used by Judaism. Witnesses to both textual traditions were discovered at Qumran among the Dead Sea Scrolls,²¹ causing some to speculate that the Hebrew vorlage behind the LXX was expanded into the current MT version.²² Some feel "that the MT of Jeremiah, originating in Palestine, is full of secondary expansions...while the LXX, originating in Egypt, gives in most cases a 'purer,' less expanded text tradition" (Holladay, *IDBSup*).²³ "The debate since Qumran has shifted, focusing now on the relationship between these two different text types" (Dillard and Longman).²⁴

The fact that there are two versions of Jeremiah's prophecies should neither affect nor subtract from Jeremiah's message. However, knowing (or not knowing) about this can affect our exegesis where Jeremiah (perhaps from the LXX) is quoted in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures.

Jeremiah's prophecies were delivered during the final period of the Southern Kingdom from the reigns of Josiah to Zedekiah in the Seventh-Sixth Centuries B.C.E.,²⁵ with Jeremiah likely beginning his ministry in 627-626 B.C.E. Jeremiah was commissioned for the Lord's work against the backdrop of the expanding Babylonian Empire and the fall of Assyria.²⁶ The Egyptians attempt to defeat the Babylonians, but are defeated instead. Tensions are rife in the Judahite court between those who favor an alliance with Egypt, and Jeremiah who favors Babylon. The Prophet Jeremiah is politically engaged, believing that opposing Babylon was contrary to God's will.

While prophetic, Jeremiah is interspersed with historical data. It is easy for some interpreters to be confused as to which is which, as Jeremiah's oracles are likely not composed in any distinct chronological order. But "In spite of the fact that the book is not at all in chronological order, it is possible to date many of its sections because they contain chronological notations" (*NIDB*).²⁷ Furthermore, the discovery of the Lachish letters in 1932-1938 has shed some interesting light on the possible circumstances surrounding Jeremiah,²⁸ possibly being a major extra-Biblical witness to his existence. We find that many of Jeremiah's prophecies were fulfilled in the short term following his ministry, yet many remain to be fulfilled in the future.

Divine judgment is a major theme seen in the Book of Jeremiah, but so are repentance and restitution also major themes. God is portrayed as the Creator of all, and One who is in control of the affairs of humanity. The Prophet Jeremiah in his service to Him is concerned with the responsibility of the individual, and indicates many times that sin will have its consequences. "The idea of a close, personal walk with God lies at the heart of Jeremiah's conception of being a prophet" (*NBCR*).²⁹ While God will judge His people, He nevertheless promises a New Covenant where they will be restored to His favor (31:31-34). We see that Judah as a state would be judged, but individuals would not be lost to God's grace. Jeremiah frequently speaks words of rebuke to false prophets who would deter God's plan.

The message of Jeremiah was not popular. The most significant factor that led to Jeremiah's widescale rejection was his support of Babylon as God's instrument of judgment upon corporate Judah. Jeremiah warns the people of their sin, and urges individuals to repent and seek restitution with God. Jeremiah does offer hope, but recognizes that chastisement is necessary. Some theologians have compared Jeremiah to being like Moses, but unlike Moses seeing his people out of bondage, Jeremiah oversees them entering the exile.³⁰

²⁰ Feinberg, in *EXP*, 6:362; Dillard and Longman, 290.

²¹ Sweeney, "Jeremiah, Book of," in *EDB*, pp 686-687.

²² Marvin A. Sweeney, "Jeremiah," in *Jewish Study Bible*, 919.

²³ W.L. Holladay, "Jeremiah the Prophet," in *IDBSup*, 472.

²⁴ Dillard and Longman, 292.

²⁵ Feinberg, in *EXP*, 6:363-367.

²⁶ Cawley and Millard, in *NBCR*, 626; Soderlund, "Jeremiah, Book of," in *ISBE*, 2:985; Dillard and Longman, pp 286-287.

²⁷ Graybill, "Jeremiah, Book of," in *NIDB*, 508; cf. Soderlund, "Jeremiah, Book of," in *ISBE*, 2:988; Dillard and Longman, 302.

²⁸ Graybill, "Jeremiah, Book of," in *NIDB*, pp 508, 509.

²⁹ Cawley and Millard, in *NBCR*, 628.

³⁰ Dillard and Longman, pp 299-300; Sweeney, in *Jewish Study Bible*, 917.

The time period of Jeremiah is very important for anyone to understand the ultimate restoration of Israel. "Included in Jeremiah's vision of a new future for Judah and Israel was...a restored line of David, embodied in the person of the Messiah (33:14-26)" (*ISBE*).³¹ These are undoubtedly themes that we see in the ministry of Yeshua and His Apostles.

There is presently not a great deal of Messianic examination of Jeremiah as a whole. We may occasionally see bits and pieces of teaching dealing with certain end-time themes, or the promise of a New Covenant. Yet, the historical and textual issues of Jeremiah are seldom, if ever, addressed. Today's emerging Messianic movement would do well to improve its understanding of Jeremiah, and his sincere call for the people to return to God and His ways of obedience.

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³¹ Soderlund, "Jeremiah, Book of," in *ISBE*, 2:986.