



BETHEL CHURCH
INTERNATIONAL WORSHIP CENTRE



A STUDY ON JEREMIAH



INTRODUCTION

Jeremiah is one of the longest books in the Bible. Even though the chapters are fewer when compared to Isaiah, Jeremiah tops the charts for word count. The book of Jeremiah provides more insight into the prophet himself than does any other prophetic book. We are provided with glimpses into his internal fears and struggles as a prophet as well as his hopeless attempts to convince the people of Judah to turn to God through a series of “*lamentations*” or “*confessions*.” Because of his “*lamenting*”, scholars have labelled Jeremiah ‘*The Weeping Prophet*’.

Jeremiah hailed from a priestly family in the town of Anathoth, near Jerusalem. His name means “*God lifts up*”.



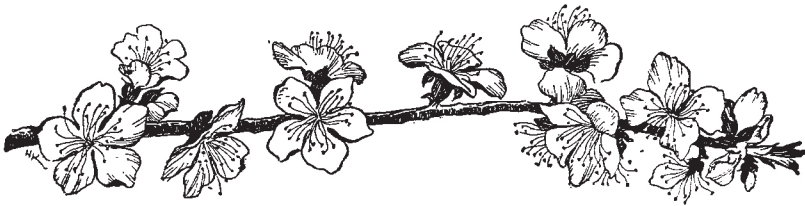
Similarities and Differences between Jeremiah and Isaiah

- Just like Isaiah, Jeremiah lived and preached in Jerusalem
- Jeremiah’s ministry spanned over 40 years and took place during the era of the Babylonian empire, while Isaiah’s ministry was during the Assyrian reign
- Jeremiah lived between the fall of the Assyrian empire and the rise of the Babylonian empire

WALKING WITH JEREMIAH

Jeremiah began his ministry in 627 BC during the reign of Josiah (the last good king of Judah). He carried the word of God to the people during the reigns of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Most of Jeremiah's confrontations and conflicts were with Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. Finally, Jeremiah experienced the terrible siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC by the Babylonians. Jeremiah 1:2-3 describes the duration of Jeremiah's ministry as one which extends into the time "*when the people of Jerusalem went into exile*".

The Book of Jeremiah must be read along with the Book of Lamentations, which consists of five chapters, to understand the pain and suffering of exile. Our fallen nature and sins bring pain and destruction both to the guilty and the innocent. But Lamentations tells us, "The Lord will not reject forever". We walk by faith in the living God whose faithfulness toward us will not fail.



THE BIG IDEA OF JEREMIAH

Jeremiah was sent to pursue a nation that was running away from God. The overarching message of the book is '**Obedience to God**', which was the only way for the people to prosper in the Promised Land and escape judgment.

The book of Jeremiah shows that God is just and He will punish sin. But it also shows that He is a God of compassion and mercy and He wants His people to return to Him. In Jeremiah, we see restoration after judgement. Therefore, it's also a book of hope!

Some key themes in this book are as follows:

- **God Calls His people for Service:** In the book of Jeremiah, we see that the Lord is a God who calls people for His service. God reminds Jeremiah that even before He formed him in the womb, He had set him apart for His purpose to be a prophet (1:5). This proves that no one is an accident! God has a plan and purpose for each life that He creates. Even though Jeremiah says he is too young and does not know how to speak, God commands and assures that His almighty presence will guide him.

- **Judgment and the Hope of Restoration:** In Jeremiah 1:9–10 Yahweh informs the young prophet that he has been appointed “*over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow*”. This imagery occurs frequently in Jeremiah, especially in the first 29 chapters, as they focus on judgment. However, Yahweh also promises Jeremiah that by the power of His word, He will “*build and plant*”, which paints images that are in stark contrast to those drawn up in earlier chapters, where “*uproot and tear down*” seemed to set the theme. The figurative imagery of building and planting is also used frequently throughout the Book of Jeremiah, especially in restoration passages such as Jeremiah 30–33.
- **The Stubbornness of the Human Heart:** Jeremiah has much to tell us about the human heart. His prophecy describes how the people of Israel failed to obey the Lord, in spite of repeated warnings, after He miraculously delivered them from the Egyptians. Instead, they “*followed the stubbornness of their evil hearts*” (11:8). The people professed to follow the Lord, but their actions were contrary to His character.

In the Bible, the heart is not just a bodily organ but the intellectual, psychological, and emotional powerhouse of our being. Jeremiah says, the human heart “*is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*” (17:9). But God gives us a cure for the human heart in the form of the indwelling Holy Spirit, who is promised in the New Covenant.

- **The Introduction of the New Covenant:** Yahweh reveals to Jeremiah that His people have broken the covenant. However, He promises a new covenant in the future (31:31-34) – one that will not be written on tablets of stone like the previous covenant, but one that Yahweh will put in the minds of His people and “write on their hearts” (31:33).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

JEREMIAH 1-29

Judgment upon Judah

Jeremiah 2:13:

“For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.”

JEREMIAH 30-33

Hope and Restoration

Jeremiah 31:3

“... The Lord says, I have loved you with an everlasting love.”

JEREMIAH 45-52

Judgment of Nations

Jeremiah 46:10

“But that day belongs to the Sovereign Lord of Heaven’s Armies. It is a day of reckoning, when He will pay back His adversaries...”

JEREMIAH 34-44

History of Exile

Jeremiah 31:3

“The Babylonians set fire to the royal palace and the houses of the people and broke down the walls of Jerusalem”

Chapters 1-29 Judgment against Judah

1. THE CALL OF JEREMIAH

Jeremiah 1:4-5, *“Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”*

In God’s supreme sovereignty, He calls and commissions Jeremiah to be prophet of global importance. He says four things to the prophet that completely change our view of what it means to be human.

1. *“I formed you”*: Our limited minds imagine conception as only a biological event. But, here, we are encouraged to rethink the origins of human life. As it says in Psalm 139:14, *“I’m fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are your works.”* When God is present in the process of conception, the value of human life takes on the implications of eternity. The weight of our glory as humans comes through these words of Jeremiah.

2. *“I knew you”*: This is the second mind-boggling revelation of God that states He knew Jeremiah even before the day of his conception. The word indicates not just cognitive awareness, but an act of personal commitment to a relationship. For this reason, some translations use the phrase *‘I chose you’*.

3. “*I sanctified you*”: The usage of the verb reminds the Israelites that they are set apart as a “*holy people*”. Jeremiah was about to experience a culture that had lost all reverence and sacredness for human life. Our sanctity of life is based on God’s purposes, for which He sets us apart.

2. “*I ordained you as a prophet to the nations*”: Here God specifically defines His call on Jeremiah to be a prophet in his young age. All people are called by God, maybe not to be prophets, but to be saints, as Paul says to so many churches in his epistles. This is a true saying, “***I cannot “find” myself until I first find Him. And I cannot ultimately know who I am until I know whose I am***”.

Jeremiah felt inadequate to be a prophet as he thought he was too young. But despite his age, God urges him to act and promises to be with him. In God’s economy, it is not one’s inherent strength, abilities, or credentials that count, but His presence. For this reason, Jeremiah is urged to boldly deliver God’s message to the people (1:7-10).



2. SHATTERED COVENANT AND SHATTERED RELATIONSHIP

Jeremiah 2:13, *“For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.”*

Jeremiah goes on to point out two glaring inconsistencies, whereby Judah stands accused:

1 . Judah acted against common practice. It was historically unprecedented for people to forsake the Gods of their inheritance. Even the people whose gods were impotent, who were no gods at all, remained loyal to them. Yet, here was Jerusalem, forsaking the one, true God, and pursuing emptiness.

2 . They acted against common sense. Why would anyone take something of great value and deliberately exchange it for something worthless? It defied every law of common sense, so much so that the astonishment could only be felt in heaven because the earth had lost its mind (v. 12). Jerusalem did not retain the capacity to comprehend the loss.

In essence, they had:

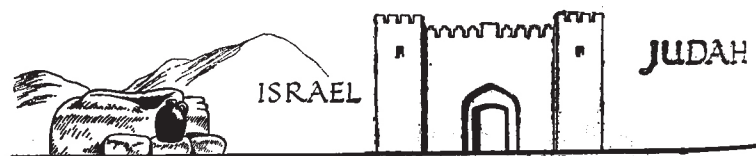
- Forsaken God, the fountain of living waters
- Cut cisterns of their own making

By abandoning the Lord and putting their trust in other gods, the Israelites had dug cracked cisterns, which were unable to contain the water of life. Thus, they were cut off from the fountain of life and were unable to contain a blessed life by their own means.

Throughout this chapter, as well as the book, Jeremiah uses a common prophetic motif, wherein he compares Judah/Israel to an unfaithful, adulterous wife and Yahweh to a faithful husband. Chasing after foreign gods is paralleled to a wife having adulterous affairs with other men. Also, Jeremiah refers to Israel and Judah as two sisters (3:6–11). The older sister (Israel) committed adultery and was sent away (i.e., conquered by the Assyrians). It only seems natural that the younger sister, Judah, would take heed and learn from the mistakes of her sister.

There are glimpses of a call to repentance and restoration in Jeremiah 3:22, which reads, “*Return, you faithless people, I will cure your backsliding.*”

In the 4th chapter of John’s gospel, Jesus talks to the Samaritan woman about drinking from the “*fountain of living water*”, which is extracted from Jeremiah 2:13.



JEREMIAH'S LIST OF SINS OF JUDAH / ISRAEL

- Adultery (5:7; 7:9)
- Oppressing foreigners, orphans, widows (7:5)
- Worshipping false gods (7:9; 11:13)
- Lying and slander (9:4)
- Boasting in wisdom and riches (9:23-24)
- Unfaithfulness to God (11:10)
- Pride (13:15-22)
- Sabbath breaking (17:19)
- Ingratitude to God (18:20)
- Building altars to Baal (19:4)

“What is an idol?”

“It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to receive what only God can give.”

The essential dynamic of change in the heart of a Christian runs on a cycle of repentance and faith.

- **Repentance** is unmasking the idols of the heart, the motivation for actions and bases for identity other than Christ, and placing them at the Cross

- **Faith** is trusting in the forgiveness of Christ, while understanding both the depth of our sin and the value of Christ's sacrifice

3. PRIDE GOES BEFORE A FALL

In 7:1–15, Jeremiah delivers a message in the temple (called the “*Temple Sermon*”). The actual results of this sermon are chronicled in Jeremiah 26. He tells the people that if they really change their ways, and truly care for the orphans, widows, and foreigners, and abandon their idolatry, then Yahweh would avert the coming judgment and let them stay in Jerusalem (7:2–11). The people, however, continued to break the Ten Commandments habitually. To make things worse, they had the audacity to come to the temple and expect safety from Yahweh.

Yahweh responds with astonishment and Jeremiah prophesies, “*Look at what happened to Shiloh, Yahweh points out, where the tabernacle once was housed. Just as Shiloh was destroyed, so will be Jerusalem*” (7:12–15).

Shiloh is a representation of what happens when we choose to put our sense of security in a building. In Jeremiah’s time, people thought having the holy temple in their midst was enough for God’s protection. But, time and again, people deteriorated from total devotion in God to lukewarm hearts to total corruption. Instead of heeding God’s Word, they would fall prey to their enemies and suffer as slaves.

But God’s promise to the tribe of Judah still echoes through the centuries - a temple that could never be destroyed - the true Shiloh - not of stone, brick, or mortar, but through Christ alone!

4. THE SOVEREIGN POTTER

In Jeremiah 18:1 – 12 Yahweh takes Jeremiah to a potter's house to observe the potter at his wheel. When one of the pots becomes marred, the potter simply reforms it into another pot. Yahweh declares that He is like the potter, with the power to reshape Israel / nations based on their response to Him and the repentance of their sin.

One of the ironies of the book of Jeremiah is that Yahweh continually intertwines the message of inevitable judgment with calls to repentance to avert judgment.

In **Jeremiah 19**, Yahweh uses a potter's analogy again. This time, however, the pot has hardened and cannot be reshaped. While Jeremiah's first message involving the potter's vessel was a message of hope to reconstruct (18:4-6), this second message conveys destruction with no hope of recovery. Jeremiah is told to smash the pot and say, *"This is what Yahweh Almighty says: 'I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired.'"*



5. WICKED HEART VS BLESSED HEART

In the Bible, the heart is not just a blood-pumping organ. It is, in fact, the seat of belief, emotions, and desires, which controls our choices and decisions.

Jeremiah 17:9 says, “*This heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.*” This line rings through Scripture as an expression of the incurable sickness of the heart of an unregenerate human. The apostle Paul says, “*To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace*” (Rom. 8:6). The heart that departs from the Lord lives in the desert, the parched places in the wilderness (17:6). These people who make flesh their strength have denied the ultimate call of God upon their lives.

The heart that hopes in the Lord lives “*like a tree planted by the waters.*” Instead of parched, hard, unproductive conditions, this heart is borne from the fruitful condition of the mind set on the spirit. It has distinctive characteristics, such as:

- This heart is blessed (v.7)
- It spreads out its roots with the promise of becoming productive and refreshed
- It does not fear (v. 8)
- Heat and drought are ever-present realities, but need not be the undoing of the trusting heart
- This is reminiscent of David’s Psalm 23: “He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul.”

Shūv! Shūv! Shūv!

The Hebrew word *shūv* is one of Jeremiah's favourite words, occurring more than one hundred times in the book. Theologically, it lies at the heart of his message. The basic meaning of *shūv* is "*to turn*." However, it can mean "*to turn to*," "*to turn back*," or "*to turn away*." Thus Jeremiah uses *shūv* as his central word for "*repent*" (i.e., a turning away from sin and a turning to Yahweh). On the other hand, Jeremiah also uses *shūv* for turning away from Yahweh. So *shūv* can refer either to true repentance or to abandonment.

PREPARE FOR A LIFE IN EXILE

Jeremiah 25 – 29 states that the time for repentance is over, and the people of Judah are heading for exile. Jeremiah describes the consequences of forsaking God and discloses facts about the exile, which was set to take place in two parts.

- The first exile will be the deportation of those who are in the Palace and the noblemen of the city
- The second exile includes many others who will go into exile after the complete destruction of the temple by the Babylonians

Highlights of this section:

1. Judgments will happen rapidly just as it was prophesied by Jeremiah
2. God Himself is casting them out
3. With the judgments are the promises of return, for Yahweh will not reject His people forever. Jeremiah 29:10-11, *“For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”*
4. In exile, Jeremiah instructs them to build houses, marry and settle for the next 70 years
5. Jeremiah understands the intention of God. He foresees bringing Gentiles into the kingdom by making the return of His people a great spectacle! In these verses, Jerusalem is a representative of all wayward people who come to the Lord from the ends of the Earth in confession and repentance. *“You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”* (Acts 1:8).

Chapters 30 – 33 Hope and Restoration

1. THE EVERLASTING LOVE

Jeremiah 31:3, “*The Lord says, I have loved you with an everlasting love.*”

While Jeremiah 1 –29 focuses primarily on judgment (with glimpses of restoration), Jeremiah 30–33 stresses restoration (with a few brief reminders about judgment). Jeremiah 30 – 33 represents the book of comfort or the book of restoration because it focuses on hope for the future. The judgments in Jeremiah 1-29 is reversed in chapters 30-33.

The key verse is found in Jeremiah 31:3, “... *The Lord says, I have loved you with an everlasting love.*” Yahweh’s covenant of love is an important theme in the Old Testament. Jeremiah reminds the people of what Yahweh had done and said in the past. He continually takes the initiative to draw His people to Himself because He values His covenant with us. The fallen nature of human beings is so wilful. It exalts itself against God. Yet, Jeremiah was sure that the fallen nature did not have the last word. “*You shall be My people, and I will be your God*” (Jeremiah 30:22)

Because of His faithful love, Yahweh promises to restore His people and rebuild their nation (31:4). The theme of building up and planting runs throughout the latter half of the book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31:10-12, “... ‘He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over His flock like a shepherd.’ For the Lord will deliver Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they...They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more.”

Like the first exodus, Israel’s second exodus will be a testimony to the nations that Yahweh is God who loves those who follow Him. As He delivered His people from Egypt, Yahweh will miraculously deliver His people from Babylon (31:11). Similarly, we see the final exodus from the bondage of sin through the redemption in Christ Jesus, which is freely available for all (John 3:16, 1 Timothy 2:6). Only God can script an ultimate love story, as such, to deliver us.

Throughout Jeremiah 1 –29, Israel is admonished for her ways. E.g. Israel/Judah is described as an unfaithful wife and a hardened, shameless prostitute. However, in Jeremiah 31:4 and 31:21, God refers to the nation as “O *Virgin Israel*.” The transformation from a hardened prostitute to a young, pure virgin is a powerful image of the change that only Yahweh’s salvation can bring.

2. A NEW COVENANT

Jeremiah 31:31-34, *"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."*

- Yahweh's new covenant will be written on hearts rather than on stones This "new covenant," Yahweh declares, will not be like the old one He forged with their fathers (the Mosaic covenant), because they broke (annulled) that covenant (31:32). The new covenant will be characterized by an internal change, for this covenant will be written on their hearts rather than stone, and the law will be placed within each person (31:33-34). Recall that in the Hebrew of the Old Testament the term "heart" usually refers to one's "seat of decision." That is, one's heart is where one makes decisions, especially to follow Yahweh in obedience or not.
- *The other great characteristic of the new covenant is that because of this new covenant, Yahweh will forgive sins*

There is no mention of sacrifice here. Forgiveness is cited as one of the important blessings that accompanies the new covenant.

Jesus states clearly that his death inaugurates the promised new covenant of Jeremiah (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:23–26). Likewise, the book of Hebrews cites Jeremiah 31:31–34 directly, which is followed by three chapters that discuss the implications of the new covenant (the end of the old obsolete covenant, the end of the Jewish sacrificial system because of Christ's ultimate sacrifice, etc.). Thus, Jeremiah's new covenant is foundational to our understanding of how Christ fulfils the Old Testament's promises. Through the inauguration of the new covenant, Jesus ushers a glorious time of restoration as predicted by the prophets.

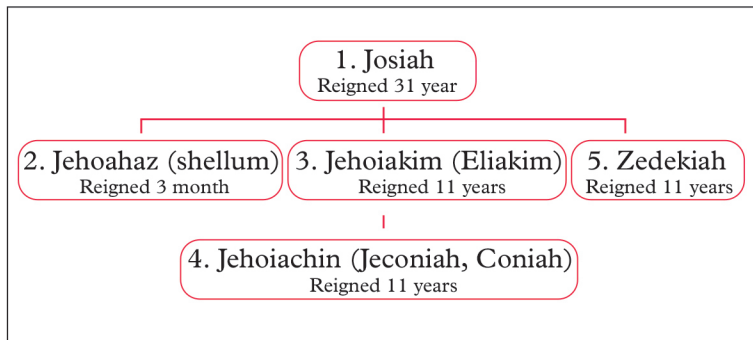


Chapters 34 – 44 History of Exile

THE HISTORY OF JERUSALEM'S FALL & EXILE

Jeremiah 39:8, “*The Babylonians set fire to the royal palace and the houses of the people and broke down the walls of Jerusalem.*”

The Last Five Kings of Jude

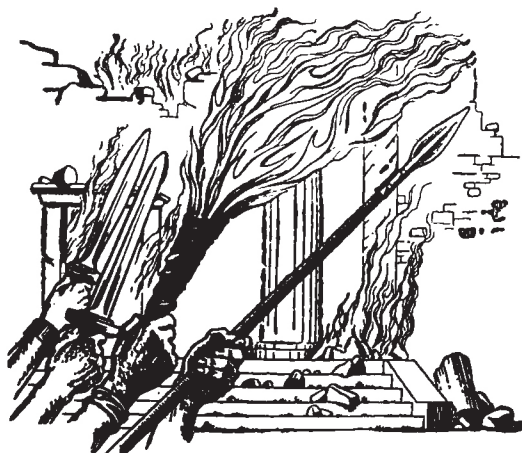


Throughout the book of Jeremiah, Yahweh reminds the people that their sinful and disobedient behaviour has been ongoing for a long time. In 15:4 Yahweh declares that He “*will make them detestable to all the kingdoms of the earth*” (cf. Deut. 28:37) because of what Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, did in Jerusalem.

Manasseh was the grandfather of Josiah. **King Manasseh** was one of the worst kings in Judah’s history, with respect to idolatry and shedding innocent blood (see 2 Kings 21 for a description of his terrible acts). **King Josiah** the good king tried to reverse the evil acts of Manasseh (2 Kings 23:26) but wasn’t able to reverse the negative momentum of the people toward idolatry and other sinful behaviour.

In Jeremiah 25, Yahweh repeats the charge, stating that the people are not listening to Him or to His prophets (25:1–7). Thus, Yahweh raised up Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the land.

King Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, but was probably murdered just as the Babylonian army arrived (598 BC). The city surrendered and the new, young **King Jehoiachin**, and most of the nobility were carried off to Babylonia (the first deportation). Later Nebuchadnezzar appointed **King Zedekiah** as the ruler over Judah which was a vassal nation under Babylon. But King Zedekiah, instead of listening to Jeremiah and surrendering to Babylon, forged an alliance with Egypt to fight against the Babylonian Empire. However, Nebuchadnezzar attacked and destroyed the temple of Jerusalem and executed King Zedekiah's children and nobles in the Palace. Many were captured and taken into exile (the second deportation).



In the years that followed, many false prophets proclaimed that these exiles would return home soon. Jeremiah, however, wrote a letter to those exiles, which is preserved for us in 29:4–23. In the letter, Jeremiah tells them to settle down, marry, build houses, and plant crops because they are going to be there for seventy years (29:5–6, 10).

At this stage in the history of Yahweh's people their prayers and calls to Him went unanswered because of their sin. But the exile caused them to realise their sin and repent.

Following this, Jeremiah conveys one of the most comforting promises: *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declare the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* (29:11). Despite the circumstances in which they found themselves, the exiles could rest in the hope that Yahweh would present them with a blessed future after the days of their exile were over. The exile meant the end of the road for the state, institutions, temple and traditions of the Judahites and a beginning of a new covenant with God.

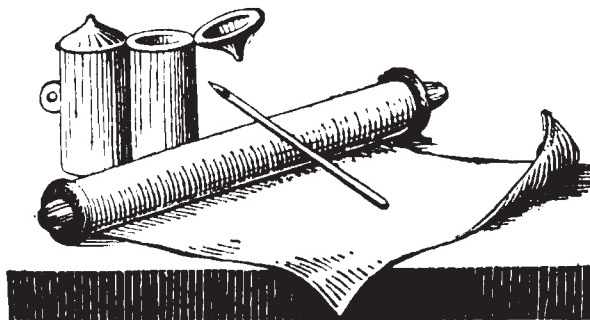


Chapters 45 – 52 Judgment of Nations

JEREMIAH'S PROPHECIES AGAINST THE NATIONS

Jeremiah 46:10, *“But that day belongs to the Sovereign Lord of Heaven’s Armies. It is a day of reckoning, when he will pay back his adversaries....”*

Many of the prophets, before Jeremiah, delivered messages of judgment not only against Israel and Judah but also against the surrounding nations. Jeremiah also delivered an extensive series of oracles of judgment against several nations. These judgments are primarily based on a nation’s violent actions against Judah, especially their complicity during the Babylonian invasion. However, judgment is rendered for other sins as well—idolatry, violence, and arrogance, among others. The nations that Jeremiah pronounces judgment upon are Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar and Hazor (Arab tribes), Elam, and especially, Babylon. One interesting aspect of these oracles was that some of the nations would be judged, but they would survive and continue as nations, while some others



Yahweh allowed the Babylonians to judge the disobedient Hebrews in Judah. Yet, Jeremiah declared that Yahweh would not abandon the Israelites to the winds of history. In the future, He would restore them. Likewise, the Babylonians would be judged for their sin and violence. Indeed, Cyrus, the Persian, captured Babylon without much of a struggle in 539 BC, and the city (and empire) quickly faded from prominence and disappeared from history.

In the last chapter of Jeremiah, we see the release and elevation of Jehoiachin, who eats at the king's table for the rest of his life in exile (52:32-34). This raises the hope of the people in exile that someday in the future Yahweh would again show favour to His people and make a new covenant just as He promised.

One can take tremendous encouragement from the truth that our God is a God of mercy and compassion. Even though He punishes sin and disobedience, His unending love and mercy endures forever and ever.

CONCLUSION

Seeing God's patience with His people in the Old Testament reminds us that God has always been and continues to be merciful. The truth that His chosen people routinely ignored the covenant they made with Him for the better part of a millennium without immediate death and destruction, should give us hope in our own struggles with living well for God. Though we fail Him, He is patient with us and works on us to bring about the best for our lives.

But the book of Jeremiah also reminds us that an end will certainly come, a truth that should spur us to follow God wholeheartedly. Will you follow Him? Will you turn to Him for an intimate, covenant fellowship? Will you be consistent in your love toward Him? Will you make more space exponentially for Him to work in your life?



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