

INTRODUCTION TO 24TH BIBLEBOOK

JEREMIAH (627-550 B.C.)

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A. AN OUTLINE OF JEREMIAH'S PROPHECIES IN HISTORY

(in chronological order)

The book of Jeremiah is a combination of history, biography and prophecy. The book of Jeremiah has not been written in chronological order, because it was compiled over a long period of time and had at least four editions. The book covers mainly that period in history when the kings of Judah faced the threat of the growing Babylonian Empire. The prophet Jeremiah began to prophesy during the reign of king Josiah in 627 B.C. and prophesied till well after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

We may divide Jeremiah's prophesying into five periods as follows:

1. The first period of Jeremiah's prophesying was from 627-622 B.C.

Roughly **Jeremiah chapters 1-3, 7, 10-11** belong to the first period of Jeremiah's prophesying.

- In 568 B.C. chapter 1:1-3, the introduction
- In 627 B.C. chapter 1:4-19.
- In 627-622 B.C. chapter 2:1 to 3:5, 3:6 to 4:2, 7:16-20, 7:30 to 8:3, 10:1-16.
- In 622 B.C. chapter 11:1-5.

Read these parts against the history of king Josiah and his reformation:

The history of king Josiah before his reformation.

He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and followed the example of his ancestor, king David, and did not turn aside to the right or to the left¹. He was a godly king and a great reformer.

His religious and moral reformation may be divided into three stages:

- The first stage of his reformation was from 632-628 B.C.

While king Josiah was still a youth of 16 years old (632 B.C.), he began to seek the God of his ancestor David². This means that he personally renounced the corrupt, polytheistic religion of his two predecessors. The death of king Ashurbanipal of Assyria in about 632 B.C. helps to explain how a young man of 16 years old could successfully defy his Assyrian overlord by ceasing to honour the Assyrian gods.

- The second stage of his reformation was from 628-622 B.C.

When Josiah was 20 years old (628 B.C.), he began to extend his reformation to Jerusalem and eventually to all of Judah and even to the former territory of the northern kingdom of Israel. The call of Jeremiah the prophet in the 13th year of king Josiah, that is, in 627 B.C., and his vigorous prophesying against the gross idolatry in Jerusalem and Judah (1:4 to 4:2) may have been the strongest force that stimulated Josiah to act more and more strictly against rooting it out. 2 Kings 23:4-20 and 2 Chronicles 34:3-7 relate how Josiah gradually tackled the problem of rooting out idolatry: He removed from the temple the cult vessels used in the worship of foreign gods and thus terminated the *official* worship of idols in the temple. He did the same in Judah. First he only removed the foreign idolatrous priests and only later he brought the Levitical priests to defile the idolatrous high places where the idolatrous priests had burned incense to the Lord. Only after he had removed the idolatrous priesthood, he began to destroy the idols. He destroyed the important idols of the neighbouring nations, including the idols of their overlord, Assyria. In Jerusalem, he defiled the 'Tophet', which was a burning place where children were sacrificed for Moloch. This gruesome idol was a sign of loyalty to Assyria. Josiah removed the horses and burned the chariots used in worship of Shemesh, the sun-god, just in- or outside the temple area. He destroyed other roof- and temple altars in Jerusalem. He destroyed the high places on the Mount of Olives, where Ashtoreth, a naked female image and other fertility gods of Canaan were worshipped. After he had destroyed all the idols in the southern kingdom of Judah, he also destroyed all the idols in the territory of the former northern kingdom of Israel. He began by completely destroying and defiling Israel's great altar at Bethel, just as another prophet had prophesied would happen three hundred years before in the time of king Jeroboam³. He destroyed the temples on the high places in the cities of Samaria and slaughtered the idolatrous priests of the high places on their own altars and defiled them.

- The third stage of his reformation was in 622 B.C.

When Josiah was 24 years old (622 B.C.), the book of the Law was found while restoring the temple in Jerusalem.

It probably got lost during the terrible time of religious decay under king Manasseh. The reading of this book of the Law caused Josiah to humble himself before the Lord. On the one hand, he stamped out completely public idolatry.

¹ 2 Chronicles 34:1-2

² 2 Chronicles 34:3

³ 1 Kings 13:1-5

He killed all the mediums and spiritists and destroyed all the remaining idols and abominations that could be seen in the land, in accordance with the Old Testament Law. He formally restored the worship of the Lord in the temple. Before him, there was no king like him who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him.⁴

2. The second period of Jeremiah's prophesying was from 622-608 B.C.

Roughly **Jeremiah chapters 4-10** belong to the second period of Jeremiah's prophesying:

- In 622-609 B.C. chapters 4:3 to 6:30, 7:21-29, 8:4 to 9:26, 10:17-25.
- In 608 B.C. chapters 22:10-12.

Read these parts against the history of king Josiah.

The history of king Josiah after his reformation.

Josiah's reformation changed the outward religion of the people of Judah, but it did not change the inner wicked nature of the people! Therefore, Jeremiah's prophesying directed itself against all other manifestations of their wickedness. Although public idolatry was stamped out, *the hearts* of the people were still unconverted! Jeremiah preached against adultery and prostitution (5:7-8; 9:2), deceit and injustice (5:26-28), oppression and violence (6:6-7), greed (6:13; 8:10), unwillingness to repent (8:4-6), ignorance of God's requirements (8:7), and going from one sin to another (9:3).

During the end of Josiah's reign, the Assyrian Empire crumbled and the Babylonian Empire was established. As the Assyrian Empire crumbled, king Necho II of Egypt desired to renew Egypt's claims on the Syrian coast and Palestine. However, Babylon inherited the western part of the Assyrian Empire after the destruction of Assur and Nineveh. A clash between Egypt and Babylon was therefore unavoidable. The Egyptian army marched north to Carchemish in 608 B.C. to assist the Assyrian army against Nabopolassar of Babylon, but Josiah opposed and delayed him at Megiddo. Josiah probably intended to unite the former northern territory of Israel with the southern territory of Judah and regarded king Necho's activities as a threat to his extended kingdom. In this battle at Megiddo in 608 B.C., Judah's godliest king, Josiah, died.

The history of king Jehoahaz.

King Jehoahaz reigned only in 608 B.C. He ruled only for 3 months. On his return south from Carchemish, king Necho II of Egypt deposed him, brought him to Riblah and later exiled him to Egypt, where he died.

3. The third period of Jeremiah's prophesying was from 608-597 B.C.

Roughly **Jeremiah chapters 7, 11-23, 25-26, 35-36, 45-46** belong to the third period of Jeremiah's prophesying.

- In 608-605 B.C. chapter 7:1-15, 26:1-24, 11:6-17, 12:1-6, 46:1-28.
- In 605 B.C. chapter 25:1-38, 36:1-8, 45:1-5, 36:9-32.
- In 605-601 B.C. chapter 35:1-19.
- In 601 B.C. chapter 12:7-17.
- In 598 B.C. chapter 13:1-14, 21:11 to 22:9, 22:13-19.
- In 597 B.C. chapter 13:15-27, 14:1 to 15:21, 16:1-21, 17:1-27, 18:1 to 20:18, 22:20-27, 22:28-30, 23:1-8.

Read these parts against the history of king Jehoiakim and king Jehoiachin:

The history of king Jehoiakim as a vassal of king Necho II of Egypt.

Jehoiakim reigned from 608-598 B.C. He was the son of Josiah and an older brother of Jehoahaz. On his return from Carchemish, king Necho II of Egypt appointed him to the throne and changed his name from Eliakim to Jehoiakim, as a sign of his vassalage to Egypt. In order to pay the Egyptian dues, Jehoiakim imposed heavy land taxes. He did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers (Amon and Manasseh) had done. The reformation of Josiah was forgotten and the people again reverted to idolatry. The prophets Jeremiah and Habakkuk prophesied against this rebellious decay. King Jehoiakim also shed much innocent blood, including of the prophet Uriah⁵. During his reign, king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon twice invaded the kingdom of Judah.

The history of king Nebuchadnezzar's first invasion into Judah in 605 B.C.

Nebuchadnezzar was the crown prince of Babylon and was in charge of the Babylonian army. He fought the Egyptians in the upper Euphrates region in 606 B.C. During the 4th year of the reign of Jehoiakim (46:2), that is, in May to June 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar made a surprise attack on Carchemish, sacked the city and annihilated the Egyptian army of king Necho II at Hamath.

Subsequently, during July-August 605 B.C., he conquered Syria and Palestine as far as the border of Egypt⁶. Jerusalem was besieged and Jehoiakim, until now a vassal of king Necho II of Egypt, was captured. He was bound in chains and was probably taken to Babylon in order to secure Judah's loyalty to Babylon.

⁴ 2 Kings 23:25

⁵ 2 Kings 24:4, Jeremiah 26:20-23

⁶ Josephus. Antiquity x.6

Some temple vessels and hostages, *including the prophet Daniel and his friends, were also taken to Babylon*⁷. Jehoiakim, however, must soon have returned to Jerusalem to resume his reign⁸. King Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar's father, died in August 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar heard of his death while he was still in Palestine and he rode across the desert to Babylon in order to be officially crowned as king of Babylon in September 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar ruled till about September 562 B.C.

The history of king Jehoiakim as a vassal of king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

According to chapter 36 (verse 1-7), during the 4th year of Jehoiakim (605 B.C.), *the Lord commanded Jeremiah to write his first scroll*. However, when Jeremiah's scroll was read to king Jehoiakim a few months later, Jehoiakim cut it up and threw it into the fire. He did not believe that king Nebuchadnezzar would come and destroy the land of one of his loyal vassals, the land of Judah, as Jeremiah predicted would happen in his scroll (36:8-32). King Jehoiakim was an oppressive and covetous ruler. He built costly royal buildings by making use of forced labour (22:13-17).

From external sources we know that in 601 B.C., the Babylonians fought against the Egyptians and both sides sustained heavy losses. After their virtual defeat, the Babylonians remained at home to re-equip their army. Probably because of this, king Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and transferred his allegiance to king Necho II of Egypt⁹. At first, king Nebuchadnezzar did not intervene, but only stimulated the local Babylonian garrison-troops as well as Judah's neighbouring nations to make raids into Judah, and thus confine Jehoiakim to Jerusalem¹⁰. However, after 18 months, the Babylonian army was re-equipped and they raided the Arab tribes of Kedar and East Jordan in 599 B.C. (49:28-33).

Nebuchadnezzar's second invasion into Judah began in 598 B.C. During this siege of Jerusalem, in December 598 B.C., king Jehoiakim died. He died 3 months and 10 days before the fall of Jerusalem¹¹. Jeremiah had prophesied that he would receive "a donkey's burial" (22:18-19) and according to the historian Josephus, his body was thrown outside the city wall!

The history of king Jehoiachin.

He reigned only in 597 B.C. Jeremiah prophesied the end of both his rule and dynasty in Jeremiah 22:24-30.

He ruled for only 3 months and 10 days¹². He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done.

The history of king Nebuchadnezzar's second invasion into Judah in 598-597 B.C. This invasion which had begun under king Jehoiakim in 598 B.C. ended under king Jehoiachin in 597 B.C. King Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem in March 597 B.C. King Jehoiachin, his mother, his servants, his captains and his officials went out to meet the king of Babylon. His capitulation probably saved the city from being destroyed. But king Nebuchadnezzar removed the temple vessels to the temple of Bel-Marduk in Babylon¹³ and led the following people away into exile: King Jehoiachin, the king's mother, the king's wives; the king's officials, the leading men of the land (all the nobles or princes); the captains and about 7000 mighty men of valour (soldiers); about 1000 craftsmen and smiths, all strong and fit for war; and 10 000 captives. None remained except the poorest in the land.

The history of king Jehoiachin's release from prison in 561 B.C. The chapters 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 52 are virtually the same and this was written by an unknown writer in Babylon. In March 561 B.C, king Evil Merodach of Babylon, who succeeded king Nebuchadnezzar, released Jehoiachin from prison and elevated him to a position higher than all the other kings at Evil-Merodach's court.

4. The fourth period of Jeremiah's prophesying was from 597-586 B.C.

Roughly **Jeremiah chapters 21, 23-24, 27-34, 37-40, 49-52** belong to the fourth period of Jeremiah's prophesying.

- In 597 B.C. chapter 23:9-40, 24:1-10, 29:1-32, 49:34-39.
- In 594 B.C. chapter 27:1 to 28:17, 51:59-64.
- In 588-587 B.C. chapter 21:1-10, 34:1-22, 37:1-21 when the siege was temporary raised, 38:1-28, 39:1-14, 32:1-44, 33:1-26, 30:1-24, 31:1-40, 39:15-18, 52:4-30, 40:1-6.

Read these parts against the history of king Zedekiah:

The history of king Zedekiah as a vassal of king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

He reigned from 597-587 B.C. After Nebuchadnezzar had deposed and exiled Jehoiachin to Babylon, he appointed Zedekiah as king and changed his name from Mattaniah to Zedekiah as a sign of his vassalage to Babylon. It seems that both the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel regarded Jehoiachin as the last legitimate king of Judah¹⁴. Zedekiah ruled over the poorest of the land, and from among them, new officials, captains and false prophets emerged. The Lord regarded them as "split open figs that cannot be eaten due to rotteness" (29:16-19; 24).

⁷ Daniel 1:1-3

⁸ 2 Kings 24:1; 2 Chronicles 36:6

⁹ 2 Kings 24:1

¹⁰ 2 Kings 24:1-2

¹¹ 2 Chronicles 36:9

¹² 2 Chronicles 36:9

¹³ 2 Kings 24:13; Ezra 6:5

¹⁴ Jeremiah 22:30; Ezekiel 17:11-14

In 596 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar fought a battle against Elam (49:34) and in 595 B.C. he mastered a rebellion in Babylon. Thus king Nebuchadnezzar was again kept busy at home. Therefore, in the 4th year of Zedekiah's reign, in 594 B.C., ambassadors from the surrounding nations, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon came to Zedekiah in Jerusalem, probably to negotiate a rebellion against king Nebuchadnezzar. According to chapter 27 and 28, Jeremiah prophesied vigorously against the false prophets who incited the nationalist party to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah went to Babylon, probably to quell the rumours of a planned rebellion and to allay Nebuchadnezzar's suspicion (51:59). Nevertheless, Zedekiah finally broke his covenant with Nebuchadnezzar and sent his envoys to king Hophra of Egypt for help¹⁵.

The history of king Nebuchadnezzar's third invasion into Judah in 588-586 B.C. From his 17th to 19th year, Nebuchadnezzar campaigned against the West. From his headquarters at Riblah he directed the siege of Jerusalem. The siege began in January 588 B.C. King Hophra of Egypt marched to support Zedekiah in his revolt against Nebuchadnezzar. But when the siege was temporarily raised to meet the Egyptian army, king Hophra returned in haste to Egypt, and left Jerusalem to be devastated by king Nebuchadnezzar. Jerusalem fell in July 587 B.C. Zedekiah and the men of war fled by night, but Zedekiah was captured in the plain of Jericho and his army was scattered. He was taken to Riblah in the land of Hamath, where Nebuchadnezzar slaughtered his sons and the princes of Judah before his eyes, then blinded him and exiled him in chains to Babylon. He was imprisoned in Babylon until he died.

Jerusalem was destroyed and the people were exiled in August 586 B.C. Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, came to Jerusalem and burned the temple, the palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. His army broke down the walls of Jerusalem. He took the following people into exile: the deserters from Judah, who had fled to the Babylonians during the siege, the rest of the artisans and the rest who survived the siege. But he left some of the poorest in the land to be vine-dressers and plough-men (52:12-16). He also took everything of value from the temple to Babylon (52:17-23).

5. The fifth period of Jeremiah's prophesying was from 586-568 B.C.

Roughly **Jeremiah chapters 40-44** belong to the fifth period of Jeremiah's prophesying.

- In 587-568 B.C. 52:1-3, 40:7-16, 41:1-18, 42:1 to 43:13, 44:1-30.
- In 586 B.C. 52:31-34, the death of the last king of the theocracy.

Read these parts against the history of the Jews after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.:

The history of the Jews after the fall of Jerusalem.

King Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah as governor of Judah, but he was soon assassinated. The rest of the Judeans or Jews were afraid that king Nebuchadnezzar would come to punish them, and so they fled to Egypt. They even forced the prophet Jeremiah to go with them.

In 568 B.C., king Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt and destroyed much of Egypt. He also took some of the Jews in Egypt captive to Babylon.

B. THE HISTORY OF THE TEXT OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

There is good evidence to believe that the book of Jeremiah had several editions that preceded the final form of the text as we have it in the Hebrew tradition today.

1. The First Edition of the book of Jeremiah consisted of chapters 1:4 to 7:15 and chapter 45.

In the 4th year of the reign of king Jehoiakim, before September 605 B.C., the Lord commanded Jeremiah to record on a scroll all the words that the Lord had spoken to him from the days of king Josiah to the 4th year of king Jehoiakim (36:1-4). This edition must have contained a chronological summary of Jeremiah's prophecies from his calling to the beginning years of king Jehoiakim. This scroll was cut in pieces and burned by king Jehoiakim in 605 B.C. (36:23).

2. The Second Edition of the book of Jeremiah added chapters 7:16 to 39, 46-51 and 1:1-3.

This edition had three stages:

- The first stage consisted of chapter 7:16 to 10:25. According to chapter 36 (verse 28,32), in the 4th year of the reign of king Jehoiakim, that is, in December 605 B.C., the Lord commanded Jeremiah to produce a second scroll. Jeremiah dictated to Baruch all the words of the first scroll and "added many similar words" to them. These additions were of similar content and must also have been in chronological order. However, they were made over a period of time. At several occasions prophecies from different periods were added in chronological order to the scroll.
- The second stage consisted of chapter 11-17. In the light of chapter 36:32, it is reasonable to assume that Jeremiah kept adding to these earlier prophecies new messages, which the Lord gave him after the 4th year of Jehoiakim's reign. Jeremiah 10 to 17 is meant to be a continuation of the scroll written in the 4th year of Jehoiakim. In chapters 11 to 17 it is always Jeremiah himself who speaks, prophesying the Lord's word, relating what happened to himself because of his preaching, and sharing the struggles of his soul. Except for 7:1 and 11:1, which were added when Baruch finally edited the book of Jeremiah.

¹⁵ 2 Kings 24:20; Jeremiah 52:3; Ezekiel 17:15-21

- The third stage consisted of chapter 18 to 39, 46 to 51 and 1:1-3. The governing principle of this part of the book is the co-operation between the prophet Jeremiah and his friend and helper, Baruch. The Holy Spirit inspired and guided both men in directing, writing and editing this section. Parts were written by Jeremiah himself, for example, chapter 23, 30 and 31. Parts were dictated by Jeremiah and Baruch added some biographical details to it, for example, chapter 18 to 20. And parts were written in the historical relating form, for example chapter 36 to 45. An introduction was written (1:1-3) that covers the period from Josiah's reign to only the fall of Jerusalem. This indicates that the Second Edition of the book of Jeremiah was published soon after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.

3. The Third Edition of the book of Jeremiah added chapters 40 to 44.

Chapter 40 to 44 was obviously recorded after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. (40:1), but before Nebuchadnezzar's invasion into Egypt in 568 B.C. (44:29-30). Chapter 43:8-44 was most likely written by Baruch in Egypt. Chapter 45 was originally written in the 4th year of Jehoiakim's reign, that is, in 605 B.C., and formed the appendix to Jeremiah's First Edition. Baruch later moved it to the end of the historical section of the book. The book of Jeremiah is about one eighth shorter in the Greek translation than the Hebrew text. It would seem that this Third Edition of the book of Jeremiah has been preserved in the Greek translation. It was published in Jeremiah's lifetime and first disseminated in Egypt.

4. The Fourth Edition of the book of Jeremiah was the final edition and added chapter 52.

It had two stages:

The first stage consisted of chapter 1-51. Probably after Jeremiah's death, it appears that Baruch made a more comprehensive collection of his master's sermons and re-arranged the material in a somewhat logical order. Jeremiah 51:64 says, "The words of Jeremiah ends here."

The final stage consisted of chapter 1-52. Chapter 52 was copied from 2 Kings 24:18 to 25:30 with some modifications. It records the fall of Jerusalem from a Babylonian perspective and it relates the clemency granted to king Jehoiachin in 561 B.C. It must have been added to the book of Jeremiah by someone living in Babylon during the exile. Because it does not mention the return from exile in 537 B.C., we conclude that the final edition of the book Jeremiah was completed around 550 B.C. in Babylon. The whole book of Jeremiah was therefore written between **627-550 B.C.** It constitutes the present Hebrew text of the book of Jeremiah, which we possess today. Note that this Final Edition of the book of Jeremiah retained the introduction of the Second Edition unaltered (1:1-3).

C. THE PERSON AND CHARACTER OF JEREMIAH

1. Jeremiah's life.

Jeremiah was the son of a certain priest called Hilkiah. He came from the town of Anathot, which was in the tribe of Benjamin. His family was not poor, because even during the siege of Jerusalem, Jeremiah could buy a piece of land from one of his relatives (chapter 32). During the 13th year of the reign of king Josiah of the southern kingdom of Judah, that is, in 627 B.C., the Lord called Jeremiah to be a prophet. He was still young, maybe about 20 years old (1:6). The Lord revealed to him not to marry (16:2). During his whole life, he dedicated himself to his calling as a prophet. He was the most important prophet during the last period of the southern kingdom of Judah, from 627 B.C. to well after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.

2. Second. Jeremiah's character.

The book of Jeremiah reveals the soul and struggles of the prophet Jeremiah.

- Jeremiah had a sensitive nature. He had affection for the people of Judah. However, their hardness of heart and his consequent prophesying God's judgement over them caused him unending pain. For example, in Jeremiah 13:17 he says, "If you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the Lord's flock will be taken captive."
- Jeremiah was lonely. Jeremiah 16:2 says that he was not married. In Jeremiah 9:4-5 he probably experienced how his former friends deceived him. In Jeremiah 15:17 he says, "I never sat in the company of revellers, never made merry with them; I sat alone, because your hand was on me and filled me with indignation."
- Jeremiah was a man of prayer. Praying was a very discouraging task for Jeremiah, because God sometimes said to him, "Do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you" (7:16).
- Jeremiah was rejected by his own people. They often misjudged him. They could not understand that he was called to prophesy judgement on them. The Jews failed to acknowledge their corruption and sin. They regarded Jeremiah's preaching of the word of the Lord as offensive and they could find no pleasure in it. As a consequence, they closed their ears to his preaching (6:10).
- Jeremiah was persecuted. His enemies plotted to attack him with their tongues and paid no attention to anything he said (18:18). The priests and prophets and people seized him to sentence him to death (26:8). The book he wrote was cut up and burned (chapter 36). He was arrested, beaten and imprisoned in a dungeon (chapter 37).

He was thrown into a cistern full of mud and nearly drowned in the mud (chapter 38). And he was even forced to go along with the refugees to Egypt (43:6).

- Sometimes, Jeremiah despaired about God's presence. Jeremiah 15:18 relates how he was tired of struggling and began to despair about God's presence and help. He said that his pain was unending and that God had become like a deceptive brook or like a spring that failed to give water to him. He even cursed the day he was born (20:14).
- Seven, Jeremiah even contemplated to give up. Jeremiah 20:9 shows that he even contemplated to stop prophesying God's words of judgement. But then he experienced that *God's words became like fire in his heart* and he could not keep it for himself. He experienced that prophesying is not merely a human task, because then he would not have been able to fulfil his task. He experienced that prophesying is God himself who accomplishes part of his glorious and powerful work through a weak and sinful instrument.

D. THE MAIN MESSAGES WHICH JEREMIAH PROPHESED

1. Jeremiah prophesied God's judgement against the rebellious people of God.

God's task for Jeremiah was a very difficult task, because he was called mainly to proclaim God's judgements against the people of Judah. The Jews did not like to hear these messages of judgement. Jeremiah proclaimed God's holy anger against Judah's sins of gross idolatry and immense injustice (7:9-11). He proclaimed that God's wrath would be poured out over the land, the city of Jerusalem, the temple, on man and on beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground, and God's wrath would burn and not be quenched. God said, "Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name and say, 'We are safe to do all these detestable things? Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you?'" God commanded Jeremiah to proclaim to them that peoples from the north would conquer them, destroy their cities and land and take them into exile.

2. Jeremiah prophesied against the evil kings and their officials, false prophets and corrupt priests.

The task of Jeremiah was made extremely difficult by the evil kings and their officials, the false prophets and the corrupt priests, who should have been servants of the Lord, but in fact were servants of their idols.

- Jeremiah 23:1-2 calls the evil kings and their officials 'shepherds' who destroy and scatter the sheep of God's pasture. Especially during the time of king Zedekiah, the government officials regarded Jeremiah as one who opposed the nationalist party of Judah, as a deserter to the enemy (37:11-16) and as one who discouraged the Judean soldiers from fighting against the enemy (38:1-6).
- Jeremiah 23:9-40 says that the prophets were not sent by God and did not speak the words of God (23:21), but prophesied in the name of their idols (23:13) and prophesied the delusions of their own minds (23:26). They led God's people astray (23:13), strengthened the hands of the evildoers (23:14) and spread ungodliness and wickedness in the land (23:15,11). While Jeremiah proclaimed God's judgements, these false prophets proclaimed peace and prosperity for the land.
- Jeremiah 6:13-14 says that also the priests were corrupt, practised deceit and were greedy for financial gain. They ruled by their own authority and not by God's authority. The sad thing was that the people of Israel loved it that way. The Jews were as corrupt as their officials, prophets and priests.

3. Jeremiah prophesied against religious formalism.

All these political and religious leaders stressed religious formalism or outward religious ceremonies. They said that no harm would come to the Jews, because they possessed the temple (7:4). But Jeremiah proclaimed *the uselessness of religious formalism or outward religious ceremonies*. God did not care about the incense they burned and did not accept the sacrifices they brought (6:20). The temple would be destroyed just like the first place where the tabernacle had stood in Shiloh (7:12). God would not listen to their prayers and fasting (14:11-12).

4. Jeremiah prophesied against the heathen nations.

At his calling, God appointed Jeremiah not only as a prophet to the Jews, but as "a prophet to the nations" (1:5). His prophecies concerning God's judgement of Judah would also affect these nations. God would uproot, tear down, destroy and overthrow them (1:10). In Jeremiah chapter 27 God commanded Jeremiah to proclaim God's word to the envoys from the different nations who came to Judah during the time of king Zedekiah to induce Judah to join their rebellion against king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Jeremiah said that God made the earth and everything on it and that God gives it to whomever he wishes. He prophesied that God would give their countries to king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and they would serve under his yoke for at least three generations of kings in Babylon. Moreover, God warned these nations saying, "If any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadnezzar or bow its neck under his yoke, I will punish that nation with the sword, famine and plague, until I destroy it by his hand."

God also warned these nations not to listen to their own false prophets, diviners, interpreters of dreams, mediums and sorcerers, who tell lies and say that they would not serve Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah chapters 46 to 51 contain all Jeremiah's prophecies against these nations.

However, if these nations listened to God's word and bowed their necks under the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, then they would not be destroyed as a nation. Then God would let them live, built them and plant them again.

5. Jeremiah prophesied repentance.

Jeremiah not only preached God's judgement, but also called people to repentance and reformation of their lives. In Jeremiah chapter 26 God commanded Jeremiah to proclaim to all the people in Judah to listen to God's words and to turn from their evil ways. Then God would relent and not bring on them the disaster he was planning to bring to them because of all the evil they did. In Jeremiah chapter 18:6-11, God said that all people and *all nations were in his hand like clay in the hand of a potter*. If God announced that a nation or kingdom be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and that nation or kingdom repented of its evil, then God would relent and not inflict this disaster on it. Therefore, *all nations and kingdoms are called to turn from their evil ways and to reform their ways and actions!*

6. Jeremiah prophesied God's grace.

- God's judgements would be a limited judgement. Even when Judah would not heed God's exhortations to repentance, God still gave them a ray of hope with regard to the future. Three times God set a limit to his judgements right in the midst of the most terrible proclamations of judgement and said that he would not judge the people and the land according to its sin. For example, in Jeremiah 4:27 he says, "The whole land will be ruined, though I will *not destroy it completely*" (5:10,18).
- God remains in complete control of his judgements. God's grace is even more clearly seen in Jeremiah 25:9-12. There God called king Nebuchadnezzar 'his servant', that is, his instrument of punishing Judah. He promised that the period of punishment would be no longer than seventy years and that after the period of punishment God would also punish Babylon for its sins. This meant that *God remained in full control of all events on earth even when he judged people*.
- God has plans to prosper his people and to give them hope and a future. According to Jeremiah 29:10-14 God also promised that after Judah's exile to Babylon, he would bring them back to Judah and restore the land to them (16:15; 23:8; 32:36-44). God said, "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know *the plans I have for you, ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*" Thus, just as Jeremiah 1:10 said, Jeremiah was not only a prophet proclaiming the judgement of God, but also a prophet proclaiming the salvation of God! He proclaimed *the uprooting of nations*, but also *the rebuilding of nations* (12:15).
- God's salvation reaches its peak in the coming Messiah and the new covenant. *The heart of Jeremiah's prophesying was not the nation of Judah or the Jews, but the coming Messiah who would come out of Judah.* According to Jeremiah 23:5-6, the coming Messiah would be a King coming from the family of king David and he would do what is just and right (30:9; 33:15-16). In Jeremiah 31:31-34 he says that *the coming Messiah would make a new covenant with his people that would not be based on outward ceremonies, but on an inward relationship with God*. In this new covenant, the former shadowy objects and ceremonies in the worship service of Israel would make place for the realities themselves, as Hebrews 10:1 teaches. For example, Jeremiah 3:16 also says that the ark, which was the most holy symbol of the presence of God in the midst of his people, would become completely obsolete.
- God's salvation would not be limited to the nation of Israel, but would include all the nations. According to Jeremiah 3:17, not only the nation of Israel, but also the Gentile nations would have a part in this glorious future salvation (4:2; 12:15-16; 16:19-21). All this shows that ultimately, *the prophecies in the Old Testament are not limited to Israel, but are related to all the nations in the world!* That is why all the prophetic books in the Bible have been written for all the nations in the world! That is why all people in the world should read and believe the prophetic books in the Bible.