

good
NEWS BIBLE

The books of

Jeremiah
and
Lamentations

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THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

The prophet at the time of exile

What's it about? Jeremiah was a prophet who lived in Judah in the seventh and sixth centuries BC. He told the people of God what God wanted them to hear at a time when invasion by the Babylonians was imminent. God told him to do several strange things – smash pots, buy a field, bury some shorts – to illustrate his prophecies.

Who wrote it? The obvious answer is Jeremiah, but some scholars doubt that. It could be that later editors reshaped earlier recordings of Jeremiah's words.

Why read it? The mixture of story and prophecy makes Jeremiah an easier book to access than some other prophets. What God asks Jeremiah to do can seem strange, but his deeds bring to life messages of salvation.

What's it to me? The rulers of Judah refused to listen to Jeremiah's warnings of imminent disaster. However, God never completely rejects his people. He allows them to be captured, but promises them a bright future if they return to him. The same God is calling us back to him, sticking by us and ready to welcome us back, whatever we've done.

Chapter 1

Jeremiah

¹This book is the account of what was said by Jeremiah son of Hilkiyah, one of the priests of the town of Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin.

²The LORD spoke to Jeremiah in the thirteenth year that Josiah son of Amon was king of Judah, ³and he spoke to him again when Josiah's son Jehoiakim was king. After that, the LORD spoke to him many times, until the eleventh year of the reign of Zedekiah son of Josiah. In the fifth month of that year the people of Jerusalem were taken into exile.

The Call of Jeremiah

⁴The LORD said to me, ⁵"I chose you before I gave you life, and before you were born I selected you to be a prophet to the nations."

⁶I answered, "Sovereign LORD, I don't know how to speak; I am too young."

⁷But the LORD said to me, "Do not say that you are too young, but go to the people I send you to, and tell them everything I command you to say.

⁸Do not be afraid of them, for I will be with you to protect you. I, the LORD, have spoken!"

⁹Then the LORD stretched out his hand, touched my lips, and said to me, "Listen, I am giving you the words you must speak.



“I am giving you the words you must speak” (1.9)

¹⁰Today I give you authority over nations and kingdoms to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

Two Visions

¹¹The LORD asked me, “Jeremiah, what do you see?”

I answered, “A branch of an almond tree.”

¹²“You are right,” the LORD said, “and I am watching^a to see that my words come true.”

^a *watching*: This word in Hebrew sounds like the Hebrew for “almond”.

¹³Then the LORD spoke to me again. “What else do you see?” he asked.

I answered, “I see a pot boiling in the north, and it is about to tip over this way.”

¹⁴He said to me, “Destruction will boil over from the north on all who live in this land, ¹⁵because I am calling all the nations in the north to come. Their kings will set up their thrones at the gates of Jerusalem and round its walls, and also round the other cities of Judah.

¹⁶I will punish my people because they have sinned; they have abandoned me, have offered sacrifices to other gods, and have made idols and worshipped them.

¹⁷Get ready, Jeremiah; go and tell them everything I command you to say. Do not be afraid of them now, or I will make you even more afraid when you are with them.

¹⁸⁻¹⁹Listen, Jeremiah! Everyone in this land — the kings of Judah, the officials, the priests, and the people — will be against you. But today I am giving you the strength to resist them; you will be like a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall. They will not defeat you, for I will be with you to protect you. I, the LORD, have spoken.”

Chapter 2

God's Care for Israel

¹The LORD told me ²to proclaim this message to everyone in Jerusalem.

LAMENTATIONS

The destruction of the holy city

What's it about? Lamentations is made up of five poems about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

Who wrote it? Possibly Jeremiah – but no one knows for sure.

Why read it? The poems are beautiful and sorrowful, and tell us about our friendship with God.

What's it to me? Lamentations shows us that it's OK to be sad for what we have lost. But with God, there is always hope.

Chapter 1

The Sorrows of Jerusalem

- 1 How lonely lies Jerusalem, once so full of people!
Once honoured by the world, she is now like
a widow;
The noblest of cities has fallen into slavery.

- 2 All night long she cries; tears run down her cheeks.
Of all her former friends, not one is left to comfort
her.
Her allies have betrayed her and all are now
against her.

- 3 Judah's people are helpless slaves, forced away from
home.ⁿ
They live in other lands, with no place to call their
own —
Surrounded by enemies, with no way to escape.



“Like a widow ... all night long she cries” (1.1, 2)

ⁿ are helpless... home; or fled from home, from the misery of slavery.

- 4 No one comes to the Temple now to worship on the holy days.
The young women who sang there suffer, and the priests can only groan.
The city gates stand empty, and Zion is in agony.
- 5 Her enemies succeeded; they hold her in their power.
The LORD has made her suffer for all her many sins;
Her children have been captured and taken away.
- 6 The splendour of Jerusalem is a thing of the past.
Her leaders are like deer that are weak from hunger,
Whose strength is almost gone as they flee from the hunters.
- 7 A lonely ruin now, Jerusalem recalls her ancient splendour.
When she fell to the enemy, there was no one to help her;
Her conquerors laughed at her downfall.
- 8 Her honour is gone; she is naked and held in contempt.
She groans and hides her face in shame.
Jerusalem made herself filthy with terrible sin.
- 9 Her uncleanness was easily seen, but she showed no concern for her fate.
Her downfall was terrible; no one can comfort her.
Her enemies have won, and she cries to the LORD for mercy.

- 10 Her enemies robbed her of all her treasures.
She saw them enter the Temple itself,
Where the LORD had forbidden Gentiles to go.
- 11 Her people groan as they look for something to eat;
They exchange their treasures for food to keep
themselves alive.
“Look at me, LORD,” the city cries; “see me in my
misery.”
- 12 “Look at me!” she cries to everyone who passes by. ◦
“No one has ever had pain like mine,
Pain that the LORD brought on me in the time of his
anger.
- 13 “He sent fire from above, a fire that burnt inside me.
He set a trap for me and brought me to the ground.
Then he abandoned me and left me in constant
pain.
- 14 “He took note of all my sins and tied them all together;
He hung them round my neck, and I grew weak
beneath the weight.
The Lord gave me to my foes, and I was helpless
against them.
- 15 “The Lord jeered at all my strongest soldiers;
He sent an army to destroy my young men.
He crushed my people like grapes in a winepress.

◦ *Look... by; or May this not happen to you that pass by; or Does this mean nothing to you that pass by?*

- 16 “That is why my eyes are overflowing with tears.
No one can comfort me; no one can give me
courage.
The enemy has conquered me; my people have
nothing left.
- 17 “I stretch out my hands, but no one will help me.
The LORD has called enemies against me from
every side;
They treat me like some filthy thing.
- 18 “But the LORD is just, for I have disobeyed him.
Listen to me, people everywhere; look at me in my
pain.
My young men and women have been taken away
captive.
- 19 “I called to my allies, but they refused to help me.
The priests and the leaders died in the city streets,
Looking for food to keep themselves alive.
- 20 “Look, O LORD, at my agony, at the anguish of my
soul!
My heart is broken in sorrow for my sins.
There is murder in the streets; even indoors there is
death.
- 21 “Listen^P to my groans; there is no one to comfort me.
My enemies are glad that you brought disaster on
me.

^P One ancient translation *Listen*; Hebrew *They listened*.

Bring^q the day you promised; make my enemies
suffer as I do.

- 22 “Condemn them for all their wickedness;
Punish them as you punished me for my sins.
I groan in misery, and I am sick at heart.”

Chapter 2

The LORD's Punishment of Jerusalem

- 1 The Lord in his anger has covered Zion with darkness.
Its heavenly splendour he has turned into ruins.
On the day of his anger he abandoned even his
Temple.
- 2 The Lord destroyed without mercy every village in Judah
And tore down the forts that defended the land.
He brought disgrace on the kingdom and its rulers.
- 3 In his fury he shattered the strength of Israel;
He refused to help us when the enemy came.
He raged against us like fire, destroying everything.
- 4 He aimed his arrows at us like an enemy;
He killed all those who were our joy and delight.
Here in Jerusalem we felt his burning anger.
- 5 Like an enemy, the Lord has destroyed Israel;

^q One ancient translation *Bring*; Hebrew *You brought*.