

3 Jeremiah

Last week we surveyed Isaiah. We saw how the exile divided the book into two main parts: before the exile (Isaiah 1–39), and after (Isaiah 40–66). Any questions on Isaiah?

Jeremiah also lived at the time of the exile. In this session we'll look at the most familiar passages from Jeremiah, and set them in context for you. You can then read Jeremiah in the framework. How does that sound?

Jeremiah warned that **Babylon** was coming to invade the city, destroy the temple, and take over the land. As you can imagine he was not popular with Jerusalem's leaders. He spends most of this time banging heads with the authorities in Jerusalem.



Source: *Standard Bible Atlas* (Standard Publishing, 2006), 20.

3.1 The temple (Jeremiah 7)

In Old Testament times God lived among his people (in the temple), not within his people (through the Spirit). Three times a year, they visited God at his house.

So, how could Jerusalem possibly fall? No one was going to defeat God. If God was there, the city was impregnable. If God could not be captured, Jerusalem could not be captured either. In the words of **Psalm 46:4-5**, Jerusalem was *the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall.*

Yet Jeremiah said Jerusalem would fall. It was no longer God's city. God had moved out. The temple was no longer a house inviting God's kingship. It was occupied by bandits robbing God of his authority so they could dominate the people with their own:

Jeremiah 7 (NIV)

⁴ Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is **the temple of the LORD**, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!" ...

⁹ Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, ¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"—safe to do all these detestable things? ¹¹ Has this house, which bears my Name, become a **den of robbers** to you?

... ¹⁵ I will thrust you from my presence, just as I did all your fellow Israelites, the people of Ephraim.'



Solomon's temple (artist's impression)

Not God's house! A muggers' hangout! The temple was no longer God's house where his servants implemented God's justice for his people. It was occupied by thieves, deceiving the people into serving them. God would not stand for it. Neither would the temple!

They thought God's presence was *in the temple*. Jeremiah inverts that. **The temple was *in God's presence***. If God found it offensive, he could remove it—and the offenders—from this presence (verse 15).

God had already removed Israel (the northern nation) from his presence. He would do the same for Judah. Just as the Assyrian Empire had taken the land of Israel 135 years earlier, the Babylonian Empire would now take what was left. God would *thrust his people from his presence*, sending them into exile in Babylon.

They hated Jeremiah. Instead of heeding the message, they plotted to kill the messenger (11:21).

3.2 The potter (Jeremiah 18)

Jeremiah enacted his prophecy so the people would get the message. He watched a potter shaping a pot that didn't turn out. The potter crushed the clay to make something else:

Jeremiah 18:3-6 (NIV)

³ So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel.

⁴ But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.

⁵ Then the word of the LORD came to me. ⁶ He said, "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel."



That's not how the leaders were thinking. They thought that since God had made a covenant with Israel, God was stuck with them, regardless of how they turned out. Jeremiah has been talking about the **covenant** relationship (e.g. 11:2, 3, 6, 8, 10; 13:21). But Jeremiah says that God can crush what he formed from the clay and make it into something that pleases him. They can't presume on the covenant relationship for their survival, just as they could not presume on the temple. The covenant contained sanctions for disobedience, including being exiled (e.g. Deuteronomy 28:36, 49, 64). The sanctions also spoke about the possibility return from exile (Deuteronomy 30). The covenant blessings and curses were **conditional** on how they responded:

Jeremiah 18:7-10 (NIV)

⁷ "If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, ⁸ and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.

⁹ And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, ¹⁰ and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it."

Did you see that? Prophecy is not set in stone. It's **conditional**, because it's **relational**.

Christians sometimes get hung up on things like Judas betraying Jesus. They think Judas had no choice because it was prophesied. But prophecy is not like that. Prophecy is not doom regardless; it's God calling us to respond **relationally**.

Remember that first generation that Moses led out of Egypt? They had the capacity to choose not to follow God into the Promised Land. God didn't force them. God reworked his schedule, like a potter reworking the clay.

So, Jeremiah's generation was vulnerable too. **God could smash the kingdom:**

Jeremiah 19 (NIV)

¹ This is what the LORD says: "Go and buy a clay jar from a potter. ...

¹⁰ "Then break the jar while those who go with you are watching, ¹¹ and say to them, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired.'"

Did you want to discuss the conditional nature of prophecy?

3.3 Seventy years (Jeremiah 25)

The Potter broke and reshaped the vessel he was making, but he did not give up on his project. For Jeremiah's generation, the exile was a major detour on the way to the kingdom of God, but God was not abdicating.

The LORD reigns over all nations. He even uses his enemies for his purposes:

Jeremiah 25:8-14 (NIV)

⁸ Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: "Because you have not listened to my words, ⁹ I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," declares the LORD, "and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. ... ¹¹ This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

¹² “But when the **seventy years** are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation ... ¹⁴ They themselves will be enslaved by many nations and great kings; I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.”

In 539 BC, Babylon fell to Persia. King **Cyrus** thought it would be easier to keep his nations happy if he allowed them to return home. He ordered the exiles to **return** to their cities, worship their gods, and live according to their traditional cultures.

Some Jews returned. With help from Persian funds, they built another temple. This second temple was completed and dedicated to the LORD in 515 BC. Babylon had destroyed Solomon's temple in 586 BC. That's Jeremiah's *seventy years*.

3.4 “The plans I have for you” (Jeremiah 29)

This is a favourite verse for many:

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

We gravitate to promises like this because we look for a personal application when we read Scripture. But we need to read Scripture in context.

First, the *you* is **plural**. Jeremiah was addressing the generation being sent into exile. They had to settle down and live the rest of their lives in a foreign country where they did not want to be. They would die in Babylon.

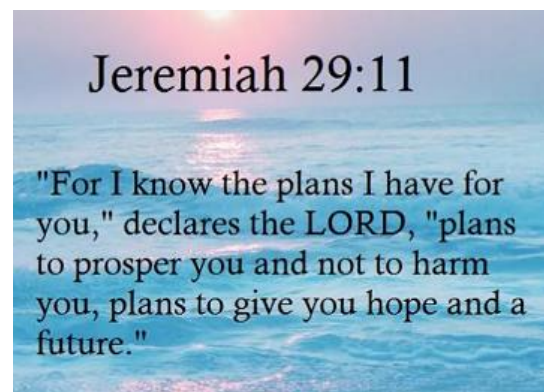
God was not promising them a good life. God was promising to bring their children home and reestablish them as his kingdom. Read the context:

Jeremiah 29:4-11 (NIV)

⁴ This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷ Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” ...

¹⁰ This is what the LORD says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

God is not promising me a wonderful life. He's promising us a restored world under his leadership. And he's calling us to participate in representing him now, in the difficult world where we live.



Now that Christ has come, we can see much more than they could. God is restoring the earth as a kingdom of God in his Anointed. We're not there yet; God's plans are still in process. God's reign has been established in Christ, but not everyone recognizes him.

So in a sense, we're still living as *exiles*, scattered among the kingdoms of the world (1 Peter 1:1) as we look forward to *the kingdom of the world becoming the kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah* (Revelation 11:15).

3.5 New covenant, new king (Jeremiah 31)

So, when did God restore the kingdom? When did a descendant of David begin to reign? Jeremiah says God would do that with *a new covenant*.

Here's the Jeremiah passage quoted most in the New Testament:



Jeremiah 31 (NIV)

³¹ "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a **new covenant** with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. ...

³³ "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

The Sinai covenant established Israel as a kingdom of God, when God rescued them from Pharaoh. That kingdom had fallen. They needed a **new exodus** from Babylon, a **new covenant** to re-establish them under God's reign. God promised to re-form them as a kingdom, with hearts willing to follow him.

The new covenant re-establishes divine sovereignty over his people: *They will be my people, and I will be their God* (32:38, compare Exodus 29:45-46).

600 years later, that's what God did in his anointed ruler (his Christ). The Christ established the new covenant not through bloodshed against their enemies, but through his own blood being shed. That's how the NT sees Jeremiah's promise fulfilled (Luke 22:20; Romans 11:27; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Hebrews 8:12; 10:16-17).

It's in the Christ that the kingdom of God is being restored. God gave the kingdom to the anointed son of David by raising him from the dead. Do you recall how Isaiah 11 spoke of the **Branch** sprouting from the dead stump of David's dynasty? Jeremiah uses that imagery too:

Jeremiah 33:14–16 (NIV)

¹⁴ "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. ¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will make a righteous **Branch** sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: **The LORD Our Righteous Saviour.**"

So, Jeremiah's message was simultaneously one of **judgement** and **hope**:

- Jerusalem would fall, for her people had abandoned God.
- God would save his people, for he had not abandoned them.

The *righteousness* of God is his faithfulness to them. God **does right** by his people, even when they did not do right by him. That's how the New Testament describes it:

Romans 3:21-22 (paraphrased)

The **righteousness of God** has been made known not in the Sinai covenant (though the Torah and Prophets bear testimony to God's faithfulness), but in the faithfulness of Messiah Jesus, not just for the Jewish people but for all who give him their trusting allegiance.

That's the gospel in Jeremiah. Anything you'd like to discuss?

3.6 Speaking for the enemy? (Jeremiah 37–40)

The leaders in Jerusalem do not like Jeremiah's message that the kingdom will fall. They treat Jeremiah as a false prophet—speaking not for God, but for Babylon. In their view, he's a deserter, discouraging others from fighting for their nation, their freedom:

Jeremiah 37 (NIV)

⁶ Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet:

⁷ "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the king of Judah ...

⁸ "The Babylonians will return and attack this city; they will capture it and burn it down."

¹² Jeremiah started to leave the city ... ¹³ But when he reached the Benjamin Gate, the captain of the guard ... arrested him and said, "You are deserting to the Babylonians!" ... ¹⁶ Jeremiah was put into a vaulted cell in a dungeon where he remained a long time.

For the Jerusalem authorities, Jeremiah is an enemy to their power:

Jeremiah 38 (NIV)

⁴ Then the officials said to the king, "This man should be put to death. He is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, as well as all the people, by the things he is saying to them. This man is not seeking the good of these people but their ruin." ...

⁶ So they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud.

⁷ But Ebed-Melek, a Cushite, an official in the royal palace ... said, ⁹ "My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all they have done to Jeremiah the prophet. They have thrown him into a cistern, where he will starve to death when there is no longer any bread in the city."

Jesus realized Israel's leaders would try to kill him as they had done to previous prophets. He was also announcing the fall of Jerusalem and the temple (Matthew 23:33–14:21). No wonder people thought he sounded like Jeremiah (Matthew 16:14).

But Jeremiah was delivering God's message, not Babylon's. That was evident when Jerusalem fell (Jeremiah 39). So, even the enemy acknowledged Jeremiah as a true prophet:

Jeremiah 40:2-4 (NIV)

² When the commander of the [Babylonian] guard found Jeremiah, he said to him, "The LORD your God decreed this disaster for this place.

³ And now the LORD has brought it about; he has done just as he said he would. All this happened because you people sinned against the LORD and did not obey him. ⁴ But today I am freeing you from the chains on your wrists. Come with me to Babylon, if you like, and I will look after you; but if you do not want to, then don't come. Look, the whole country lies before you; go wherever you please."

How's that for irony? God used Babylon to save Jeremiah from the king of Jerusalem!

Jeremiah says God's sovereign authority was not lost when the kingdom was lost:

- The exile affirms God's authority to sack the kings who misrepresent him, giving the people who refused to live under his authority what they wanted.
- Despite Israel's fall, God is in charge of all nations and the flow of history.

That's the message of the final ten chapters of Jeremiah.

3.7 God's reign when the kingdom is gone (Jeremiah 41–52)

The realization begins to sink in that they've lost the land. This was the land where God's anointed reigned among the nations. This was the land Joshua fought for. This was the Promised Land, the land God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It's gone. Like a giant game of Snakes and Ladders, they've slid back 700 years to the time before Moses led them to the Land. The leaders and influential people have been taken to Babylon. What should the rest do?

Should they go back to Egypt, relying on Pharaoh to protect them? That's the question they ask Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 42 (NIV)

⁹ He said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel ... says:

¹⁰ 'If you stay in this land, I will build you up and not tear you down ...

¹¹ Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon ...'

¹⁹ "Remnant of Judah, the LORD has told you, 'Do not go to Egypt.'"

The crucial question is who they **trust**. They're to trust YHWH as their sovereign, able to direct how the king of Babylon treats them. They are not to trust Pharaoh or the political might of Egypt to save them. They'll be saved by faith, if their faith is in the right authority.

But a whole group heads off to Egypt, relying on Egypt's political and spiritual powers for protection:

Jeremiah 43 (NIV)

⁷ So they entered Egypt in disobedience to the LORD ...

¹⁵ Then all the men who knew that their wives were burning incense to other gods ... said to Jeremiah, ¹⁶ “We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD! ... ¹⁸ Ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine.”

That is how religion works for many people: I'll serve God if God blesses me. Making God into something to serve me is a dangerous path to disillusionment.

But even those who do not acknowledge God are subject to his sovereign authority. Jeremiah proclaims the Lord's authority over all the nations of the region:

- Egypt (Jeremiah 46)
- Philistia (47)
- Moab (48)
- Ammon, Edom, Syria, Elam (49)
- Babylon (50–51)

Babylon has not taken the world from God. The nation that captured God's people will itself fall, for God has decreed it. Like Assyria before it, Babylon will fall (50:18) because of her arrogance against God's authority (50:31). *At the sound of Babylon's capture the earth will tremble; its cry will resound among the nations (50:46).*

In the short term, it looked like Babylon won. But longer term, the great city of Babylon falls into the dust, while Zion—the city of God's reign—is restored.

So God calls his people to leave the political systems of the world and cling to the one true ruler of all the earth and all time:

Jeremiah 51 (NIV)

⁶ Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives!
Do not be destroyed because of her sins.
It is time for the LORD's vengeance;
he will repay her what she deserves.

⁷ Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD's hand;
she made the whole earth drunk.
The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad.

⁸ Babylon will suddenly fall and be broken. Wail over her!
Get balm for her pain; perhaps she can be healed.



THE FLIGHT TO EGYPT
CA. 586 BCE
map 8(163-164) chapter 15

THE EXILE FROM JUDAH
597 TO 582 BCE

Source: Paul H. Wright, *Understanding Biblical Kingdoms & Empires: An Introductory Atlas & Comparative View*, (Carta Jerusalem, 2010), 23

⁹ 'We would have healed Babylon, but she cannot be healed; let us leave her and each go to our own land, for her judgment reaches to the skies, it rises as high as the heavens.'

¹⁰ 'The LORD has vindicated us; come, let us tell in Zion what the LORD our God has done.'

Babylon—the kingdom that rose to such power and then sank into the dust—became a symbol for everything that's wrong with the world: the oppressive nature of political power, people trying to dominate each other, disregard for what God decreed for the earth. That's the symbolic use of "Babylon" in the Book of Revelation.

So many of Jeremiah's phrases about Babylon are reused in Revelation 14–18 to describe the utter failure of every other political power that stands in opposition to the authority of earth's true sovereign. Then Revelation 21 goes on to describe the new Jerusalem, the reconstructed seat of the reign of the Lord God and the Lamb who receives all authority and makes all things new.

Like Jeremiah said, the rebellion against God's authority falls to ruins in the end:

Jeremiah 51:37 (NIV)

Babylon will be a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals, an object of horror and scorn, a place where no one lives.

The final chapter of Jeremiah is an addendum not written by the prophet (50:64). It's a historical summary of the fall of Jerusalem, similar to 2 Kings 25.

Any questions on Jeremiah?

In preparation for next week, read Ezekiel 1 and 34.



Babylon Today. <https://history.howstuffworks.com/history-vs-myth/babylon.htm>

3.8 Resources

Posts at <https://allenbrowne.blog>

- [Temple as God's presence](#) (Jeremiah 7)
- [The hands that shape history](#) (Jeremiah 18)
- [The plans I have for you](#) (Jeremiah 29)
- [New covenant, new king](#) (Jeremiah 31)
- [Speaking for the enemy?](#) (Jeremiah 37–40)
- Where is God's reign when the kingdom falls? (Jeremiah 41–52)

Video from Bible Project:

- <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/jeremiah/> (7 minutes)

Commentaries:

- Christopher J. H. Wright. *The Message of Jeremiah: Grace in the End*. The Bible Speaks Today. Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2014.
- John Goldingay. *The Book of Jeremiah*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021.

Verses from Jeremiah quoted in the New Testament:

Prophet	Quotation
Jeremiah 7:11	Matthew 21:13 Mark 11:17 Luke 19:46
Jeremiah 9:24	1 Corinthians 1:32
Jeremiah 9:24	2 Corinthians 10:17
Jeremiah 19:1-13	Matthew 27:10
Jeremiah 31:15	Matthew 2:18
Jeremiah 31:31-34	Hebrews 8:12
Jeremiah 31:33	Hebrews 10:16
Jeremiah 31:33-34	Romans 11:27
Jeremiah 31:34	Hebrews 10:17
Jeremiah 32:6-9	Matthew 27:10
Jeremiah 32:38	2 Corinthians 6:16