

## Jeremiah

1. Introduction – Jeremiah is the largest of the prophetic books. Jeremiah prophesied to the people of Judah just before and during the exile to Babylon. He called the people to repentance. When this message was steadfastly resisted, his message became one of certain judgment and eventual restoration.
2. Author and date – The book is a record of the ministry of Jeremiah. Baruch the scribe is said to have recorded the words of Jeremiah (36:4,32). He may have recorded the book as a whole. Much of the content of the book is directly attributed to the Lord. The phrase “says the Lord” occurs well over 100 times in the book. Many passages in both the OT and NT attribute the book to Jeremiah (2 Chron. 36:22, Dan. 9:2, Matt. 2:17-18). There are actually two quite different manuscript traditions of Jeremiah—one associated with the Septuagint translation and the other with the Masoretic text. They differ primarily in arrangement and length. The former text is about 1/7 shorter than the latter. Scholars theorize that the former may have been an earlier version of the book, possibly even a version associated with the one that King Jehoiakim burned (ch. 36). The Septuagint version may have been circulated by Jeremiah during his time in Egypt (41:16–44:30). The more extended version could have been written by Jeremiah later in life or expanded by his scribe Baruch after Jeremiah’s death. Our modern version is based primarily on the Masoretic text. Jeremiah’s ministry began during the reign of Josiah and continued through the fall to Babylon and the appointment of Babylonian governors over Judah.
3. Background and purpose – Josiah was the last king of whom it is said that “he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD.” Subsequently, three of his sons and one grandson ruled, always under the domination of either Egypt or Babylon. The Assyrian empire had disintegrated, and Judah was now caught between the aspirations of Egypt and Babylon. Reforms were begun under Josiah, but the people were not committed to these from the heart. They were given to idolatry in their hearts. They were putting their hope in political power and alliances rather than in the Lord (Jer. 2:18,36). Jeremiah called them to repent and interceded on their behalf. Eventually, the Lord instructed Jeremiah not to continue to intercede for the people (7:16); judgment was now certain. The people were called to submit to the rule of the Babylonians; the exiles already there were told to settle down and live there (Jer. 29:4-7). Jeremiah was strongly opposed by the king and other officials as well as by many false prophets; he was whipped, put in stocks, accused of treason, lowered into a cistern, and arrested. Jeremiah records not only the call of God on the people but his own struggles with his suffering and feelings of being abandoned by God.
4. Major themes and ideas:
  - a. God’s sovereignty: Throughout the book, Jeremiah lifts up God’s sovereignty. He rules over the nations and calls them to account. He is especially the God of Israel, but he exercises dominion and authority over the nations as well. He is the one who destroys as well as builds among the nations (1:10). God’s word will accomplish its purposes (4:28).
  - b. Covenant faithfulness from the heart: Mere outward conformity to God’s law or to a religious tradition is unacceptable to God. God would still call them to account for their covenant unfaithfulness according to the curses announced in Deut. 27-28. The presence of the temple among them would not be sufficient to shelter them or ward off God’s anger (7:1-6).
  - c. The new covenant: Even though judgment was certain, God held out hope of his steadfast love and mercy. He would one day do such a work in his people that their hearts would incline to him. His law would be written there, and they would know him and be cleansed by him (31:31-34). A righteous branch of David would spring forth to rule justly and to save and protect God’s people (23:5-6; 33:15-16)

Reference:

*An Introduction to the Old Testament*, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.