

JEREMIAH

Jeremiah is the most personal of all the prophetic books. His experiences, feelings, friends and enemies are more fully portrayed than those of any other prophet. Although the book begins with a long section of warnings (which are really God's loving pleas for repentance), the story of Jeremiah picks up in chapter 11 and remains intertwined for the rest of the book. The combination of God's powerful, passionate words and Jeremiah's courageous life are compelling reading.

To get the most from your reading of Jeremiah, it is important to know something about the time of his ministry. He began prophesying in 626 B.C. during the reign of King Josiah. His story ends after 586 B.C. when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem. Josiah was a good king who brought in many reforms, returned to worshipping only Yahweh, and ruled with justice. However, previous kings – his father Manasseh was one of the worst – and succeeding kings led the nation even farther away from God. Jeremiah lived to see many of his warnings come true. In 586 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar's army overthrew Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. Many survivors were carried to Babylon to live in exile. Jeremiah stayed with the survivors in Jerusalem who later forced him to flee to Egypt

with them. II Kings 23-25 and II Chronicles 34-36 cover this time period.

Jeremiah is arranged thematically. Chapters 1 and 52 are the bookends. Chapter 1 leads off with Jeremiah's call. The last chapter is an historical summary. There are four major themes:

1. Judgment on Judah – Chapters 2-25
2. Judgment on other nations – Chapters 25 and 46-51
3. Stubborn leaders and Jeremiah's suffering – Chapters 26-29 and 36-45
4. Promises of salvation – Chapters 30-35

The book of Jeremiah is described as similar to a collection of letters, carefully arranged but not in chronological order. Jeremiah often speaks to kings and other national leaders. When you see the names of the five kings or the Babylonian appointed governor who ruled during Jeremiah's forty-year ministry, it will help you understand the order of events.

King Josiah	17 years
King Jehoahaz	3 months
King Jehoiakim	12 years
King Jehoiachin	3 months
King Zedekiah	11 years
Governor Gedaliah	7 months

Has God ever asked you to do a hard thing?

How has living and speaking God's will put you at odds with other people?

Does your ministry, the church's ministry, seem wasted on unresponsive people?

The prophet Jeremiah can help us as we try to do God's will. He is reluctant to be God's prophet: *I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy. (1:6)* He pours out his heart to God when his message is rejected. (12:1-4, 20:7-18) God's promises sustain him as he experiences rejection, threats, imprisonment in a muddy well, and betrayal. Finally, he suffers with his people when his words come true. He spoke the truth no one wanted to hear, but in the end, he is the voice of hope and comfort. (29:10-14, 31:1-40, 51:59-64)

As you read Jeremiah, look for insights for living as a Christian in our time.

How does Jeremiah's experience encourage you?

Try making a list of all the promises and encouragement which come to or through Jeremiah.