

Jeremiah

Biography / Overview

Jeremiah was a major Hebrew prophet who lived during the late 7th and early 6th centuries BCE, a time of political instability and spiritual crisis in the Kingdom of Judah. Born into a priestly family in Anathoth, near Jerusalem, Jeremiah was called by God as a youth to prophesy to Judah about its sins and the coming destruction by Babylon. He served as a prophet from roughly 627 BCE to after 586 BCE, witnessing the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the First Temple. Two figures are mentioned in the creation of Jeremiah: the prophet himself and an editor, Baruch ben Neriah.

Known as the “Weeping Prophet,” Jeremiah conveyed God’s deep sorrow over Israel’s disobedience. His messages combined judgment, lament, and hope, emphasizing the necessity of repentance and promising future restoration through a new covenant. Though persecuted and imprisoned for his prophecies, Jeremiah remained faithful to his divine calling.

Jeremiah is revered in all three Abrahamic religions but is particularly essential in Judaism and Christianity. Like other prophets, Jeremiah emphasizes the covenant between the Israelites and God, placing repentance at the center of its restoration. The English Jeremiad, a literary work which laments the state of society through complaint, is named after Jeremiah.

Main Message: Judgment is near—but so is restoration.

Sources: Wikipedia – Jeremiah, Christianity.com

Bibliography / Primary Sources

The Book of Jeremiah (c. 627–580 BCE): Includes oracles, laments, prose narratives, and visions. Often attributed to Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch.

Lamentations (traditionally attributed to Jeremiah): Poetic laments over the fall of Jerusalem.

Baruch (Deuterocanonical): Found in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles, attributed to Jeremiah’s scribe.

The Dead Sea Scrolls: Contain fragments of Jeremiah, confirming its ancient transmission.

Septuagint: The Greek version differs significantly from the Hebrew Masoretic Text in length and structure.

Birth Date / Death Date

Born: c. 650 BCE in Anathoth, Judah

Died: After 586 BCE, possibly in Egypt (exact date unknown)

Active: c. 627 BCE – post-586 BCE

Sources: Britannica – Jeremiah

Notable / Best-Known For

Warning Judah of Babylon's conquest due to idolatry and injustice.

Urging surrender to Babylon as God's judgment—leading to accusations of treason.

Weeping over Jerusalem's fate, embodying God's grief.

Proclaiming the New Covenant, emphasizing inner transformation and forgiveness (Jeremiah 31:31–34).

Preserving prophetic messages through Baruch, even after his writings were burned by the king.

◆◆ Sources: Bible Gateway – Jeremiah, My Jewish Learning – Jeremiah

Famous Quotes

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart...” – Jeremiah 1:5

“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” – Jeremiah 17:9

“Is there no balm in Gilead?” – Jeremiah 8:22

“For I know the plans I have for you... plans to prosper you and not to harm you...” – Jeremiah 29:11

“I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts...” – Jeremiah 31:33

Major Works / Textual Contents

Book of Jeremiah (52 chapters):

Chs. 1–25: Oracles of judgment against Judah and Jerusalem.

Chs. 26–45: Biographical and historical accounts.

Chs. 46–51: Oracles against foreign nations.

Ch. 52: Historical appendix on the fall of Jerusalem.

Lamentations: Poetic mourning over Jerusalem's destruction (5 chapters, acrostic form).

The Book of Baruch (for Catholic and Orthodox Bibles): A blend of history, wisdom, and prophecy.

Sources: Bible Project – Jeremiah Video, Sefaria – Jeremiah

Influences / Intellectual Context

Covenantal Theology: Jeremiah condemns Israel for breaking the Mosaic Covenant and calls for a new internal covenant.

Historical Events:

Fall of Assyria (c. 612 BCE)

Rise of Babylon and exile of Judah (586 BCE)

Prophetic Tradition: Builds on Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah but adds intense personal lament and emotional identification with God.

Scribal Literacy: Jeremiah's partnership with Baruch demonstrates early use of scribes in prophetic ministry.

Source: Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies

Legacy and Modern Significance

Religious Influence:

Judaism: Jeremiah is a key prophet in mourning rituals (e.g., Tisha B'Av) and theological reflection on exile.

Christianity: Jeremiah 31 is seen as a foreshadowing of the New Covenant through Jesus.

Islam: While not named in the Quran, some traditions associate him with a righteous prophet who warned Israel.

Literary Influence:

Inspired "balm in Gilead" as a metaphor in African American spirituals and poetry.

Influenced confessional literature for his introspective and emotional style.

Sources: Jewish Encyclopedia – Jeremiah, Bible Odyssey

Modern Moments / Impact on 21st Century Society

Civil Rights & Liberation Theology:

Jeremiah's call to justice and lament over sin are echoed in the works of Martin Luther King Jr., Desmond Tutu, and liberation theologians.

Public Discourse:

Jeremiah 29:11 is often quoted in graduation speeches, mental health discussions, and motivational contexts, sometimes abstracted from its context of exile.

Mental Health Reflections:

Scholars and faith leaders discuss Jeremiah as an early model of spiritual resilience, given his despair, trauma, and perseverance.

Digital Resources:

Jeremiah's writings are part of online Bible studies, mental wellness devotionals, and conflict resolution workshops.

Suggested Reading and Resources

Primary Texts:

Book of Jeremiah (Masoretic Text, Septuagint, Dead Sea Scrolls)

Lamentations

Baruch (in Catholic/Orthodox traditions)

Secondary Literature:

Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* – Theologically rich interpretation.

Jack Lundbom, *Jeremiah* (Anchor Yale Bible, 3 vols.) – Authoritative, scholarly commentary.

John Bright, *Jeremiah* – A classic, accessible introduction from a historical-critical perspective.

Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* – Insightful focus on lament and trauma.