

## INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF

# Jeremiah

## Lamentations

**The Bible's** 24th and 25th books are amid the major prophets, from Isaiah to Ezekiel. Both came from the preaching of Jeremiah, penned by Baruch (ch. 36). Jeremiah's 52 chapters are fewer than Isaiah's 66, with a nearly equal amount of words. Only Psalms is longer.

**This weeping prophet** is noted for anguished expressions regarding the sins and impending doom of his people at the hands of Babylon. Jeremiah often told his personal pain in speaking God's words to the people (4:19; 8:21—9:1; 10:19; 12:1-5; 14:17; 15:10-18; 20:7-18). "Mr. Bad News," he was called.

**Lamentations** records Jeremiah's poetic sorrows and prayers after the destruction of the temple and city. Its five chapters are written as acrostics; chs. 1, 2, 4, and 5 have 22 verses each, corresponding to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet; ch. 3 has 66 verses — three per Hebrew letter.

**Jeremiah** preached in Jerusalem, 600 years before Christ. Predicting, then reporting, the conquest of the Jews by Babylon, Jeremiah began as a youth during the reign of Josiah (625 B.C.) and continued his stern warnings during Judah's last kings, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah (1:1-5). He foresaw and witnessed three invasions by Nebuchadnezzar's armies from the north — in 606 B.C., 598 B.C., and 587 B.C. The latter date brought the complete destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Around 60 years old when the final devastation came, Jeremiah fled to Egypt, reluctantly, with a few others who survived the siege.

**The era** of the Babylonian captivity and the Jews' return is the setting for ten books (Ezra, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Daniel, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah), plus por-

tions of 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah 40—66, and a few psalms. Nearly one-fourth of the Hebrew Bible deals with this period (625 - 450 B.C.), of which Jeremiah served the first 40 years.

**Jeremiah's book** begins with warnings and pleas to the residents and leaders in Jerusalem. Midway it becomes more historical, recording the prophet's mistreatment at the hands of Jewish authorities (chs. 26, 32, 37, 38), advance of the foreign invaders (chs. 21, 34), and the city's eventual fall (ch. 39). It tells of the refusal of a few stragglers to obey their conquerors' rule and of their flight to Egypt, despite the prophet's pleas for them to remain and submit (chs. 40-44). The latter chapters (46-51) are an appendix of oracles against nations that surrounded and conquered Judah. The last chapter is a review of Jerusalem's fall.

**Repeated themes**

- Idolatry was the chiefest (1:16; 2:5-28; 3:6-13; 5:7, 19; 7:18; 8:2, 19; 9:14; 10:2-15; 11:10-17; 13:10; 16:11, 13; 17:2; 18:15; 19:4, 5, 13; 22:9; 23:13, 27; 25:6; 32:29, 35; 35:15; 44:3-25) among many sins (5:1; 7:9), including Sabbath-breaking (17:19-27).
- Real repentance could save the day: "Turn" or "return" to the Lord (3:1-22; 4:1; 5:3; 8:4, 5; 18:8, 11; 24:7; 25:5; 34:15, 16; 35:15).
- Promising God's blessings while evil prevails is wrong: "'Peace, peace!' when there is no peace" (4:10; 6:14; 8:11; 23:16, 17; 28:9).
- Despite being punished for wicked ways, Israel has a bright future. God will return her to the land (23:7, 8; 24:6, 7; 25:11, 12; 29:10-14; chs. 30-33) and bring about messianic salvation under the new covenant by "the Lord our Righteousness" (3:12-23; 23:5, 6; 30:9; 31:31-34; 33:14-18).

**Worth rereading**

- Jeremiah's call and commission (1:4-10)
- several great verses (17:5-14)
- clay in the potter's hand (18:1-10)
- attention: pastors, prophets (ch. 23)
- concise summary of the book (25:1-11)
- hope for the future (29:11-13; Lam. 3:22-33)
- new covenant promised (31:31-34)

**Jeremiah in a sentence:** Called as a youth, the prophet cries against the sins of Jerusalem and Judah, warns of the Babylonian invasion, suffers for his preaching, watches as the city and nation fall to the Babylonian armies, and sees beyond to a brighter future.

**Lamentations in a sentence:** In the midst of overwhelming grief at the terrible calamity God permitted against His people and His holy city, there is still hope.