

Overview of Jeremiah

By Bob Young

There are at least two ways to approach the study of the book Jeremiah. One method is to study the book consecutively (beginning in Chapter One and continuing through the book), trying to understand the book in the order we have it, as it was written or composed (likely put together somewhat after the time of Jeremiah, using a combined historical-topical approach). The second method, which is more consistent with the way the western mind works, is to try to study the book chronologically. To assist those who wish to use the second approach, an approximate historical timeline is provided to assist with putting the chapters in chronological order. This is a historical approach.

After the historical outline, you will find a topical outline that may be helpful for those who use a consecutive study. Finally, I provide six major lessons that can be taught or preached from Jeremiah, with multiple illustrations of these points from the book itself.

Approximate order of the chapters

1-6, early discourses

INSERT

26, Jeremiah threatened with death

7-10, temple sermon

11, the covenant is broken, Jeremiah threatened again

12, Jeremiah's complaint and God's answer

13-17, living prophecies—linen belt and wineskins

Predictions of captivity, drought and famine, disaster

Living prophecy—Jeremiah at gate condemns lack of Sabbath-keeping and lack of holiness

18-19, living prophecy--at the potter's house

20, Jeremiah beaten and imprisoned in stocks, Jeremiah's complaint

INSERT

25, Seventy years of captivity prophesied

45, Message to Baruch

46-51, messages about Egypt, Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar/Hazor, Elam, Babylon

35-36, living prophecy—lesson from the Recabites, Jeremiah's scroll burned

21-22, Zedekiah to be judged, evil kings to be judged

23-24, the righteous branch will come, the false prophets are lying

Living prophecy—two baskets of figs

27-29, Babylonian captivity foretold

30-33, promises of restoration

34, 37-39, another warning to Zedekiah, Jeremiah put in prison, the slaves released

Zedekiah warned, Jeremiah thrown in the cistern

Zedekiah questions Jeremiah again, Jerusalem falls

Note: the exact order of the chapters from 32-39 is difficult, the dates given in 35-36 justify their earlier insertion. Perhaps the easiest way to treat this part of the text (32-34, 37-39) is as a single unit with various intertwined lessons.

INSERT

52:1-30, another summary of the fall of Jerusalem, which serves as the end of the book

40-44, Gedaliah, some go to Egypt, prophecy against those who fled to Egypt

52:31-34, Jehoiachin released, conclusion of book

Topical approach

Jeremiah's Call; His warnings to Judah

1-10, Jeremiah's messages (what got him in trouble with the authorities)

11-20, specifics of Jeremiah's message, including various living prophecies, his rejection and punishment, his complaint to God (because he was faithfully doing what he was called to do)

21-33, judgment against Zedekiah, evil kings and false prophets; Babylonian captivity foretold; restoration is promised

34-35, appendix to the first section of the book

Zedekiah warned, freeing the slaves will not bring relief; the Recabites an example of faithfulness

Jeremiah's Sufferings (suffering servant)

36-38, the scroll, his imprisonments

Jerusalem's fall and subsequent events

39-45, fall of Jerusalem, assassination of Gedaliah, flight to Egypt, idolatry, message to Baruch that disaster is inevitable

46-51, prophecies against the nations

52, historical summary

Lessons from the Book

I like to study in detail the following sections.

- 7-10, temple sermon (focusing on things that do not matter, rituals, peripheral things)
- 18-19, potter's house (God is in control)
- 20, Jeremiah's complaint against God (we have no choice but to follow God)
- 32, Jeremiah buys a field (hope springs eternal)
- 36-38, encounters between Zedekiah and Jeremiah--scroll burned, in prison, in cistern (suffering for doing what is right)
- 44, a great message about the true nature of idolatry (what it means to follow God faithfully)