

Jeremiah Begins His Prophetic Ministry to Judah (629t BC)

Jeremiah 1

Superscription

- 1 The following is a record of what Jeremiah son of Hilkiah prophesied. He was one of the priests who lived at Anathoth in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin.
- 2 The LORD began to speak to him in the thirteenth year that Josiah son of Amon ruled over Judah.
- 3 The LORD also spoke to him when Jehoiakim son of Josiah ruled over Judah, and he continued to speak to him until the fifth month of the eleventh year that Zedekiah son of Josiah ruled over Judah. That was when the people of Jerusalem were taken into exile.

Jeremiah's Call and Commission

- 4 The LORD said to me,
- 5 "Before I formed you in your mother's womb I chose you.
Before you were born I set you apart.
I appointed you to be a prophet to the nations."
- 6 I answered, "Oh, Lord God, I really do not know how to speak well enough for that, for I am too young."
- 7 The LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' But go to whomever I send you and say whatever I tell you.
- 8 Do not be afraid of those to whom I send you, for I will be with you to protect you," says the LORD.
- 9 Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I will most assuredly give you the words you are to speak for me.
- 10 Know for certain that I hereby give you the authority to announce to nations and kingdoms that they will be uprooted and torn down, destroyed and demolished, rebuilt and firmly planted."

Vision of the Branch of an Almond Tree

- 11 Later the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" I answered, "I see a branch of an almond tree."
- 12 Then the LORD said, "You have observed correctly. This means I am watching to make sure my threats are carried out."

Vision of a Boiling Pot

- 13 The LORD again asked me, "What do you see?" I answered, "I see a pot of boiling water; it is tipped toward us from the north."
- 14 Then the LORD said, "This means destruction will break out from the north on all who live in the land.
- 15 For I will soon summon all the peoples of the kingdoms of the north," says the LORD. "They will come and their kings will set up their thrones near the entrances of the gates of Jerusalem. They will attack all the walls surrounding it, and all the towns in Judah.
- 16 In this way I will pass sentence on the people of Jerusalem and Judah because of all their wickedness. For they rejected me and offered sacrifices to other gods, worshiping what they made with their own hands."

A Divine Challenge and Promise

- 17 "But you, Jeremiah, get yourself ready! Go and tell these people everything I instruct you to say. Do not be terrified of them, or I will give you good reason to be terrified of them.
- 18 I, the LORD, hereby promise to make you as strong as a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall. You will be able to stand up against all who live in the land, including the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and all the people of the land.
- 19 They will attack you but they will not be able to overcome you, for I will be with you to rescue you," says the LORD.

Jeremiah's Prophecy to Judah—God's Case Against Israel (c. 629t BC)

Jeremiah 2

God's Fond Memories of Israel's Youth

- 1 The LORD spoke to me. He said:
- 2 "Go and declare in the hearing of the people of Jerusalem: 'This is what the LORD says:

"I have fond memories of you,
how devoted you were to me in your early years.
I remember how you loved me like a new bride;
you followed me through the wilderness,
through a land that had never been planted.

- 3 Israel was set apart to the LORD;
they were like the first fruits of a harvest to him.
All who tried to devour them were punished;

disaster came upon them," says the LORD."

Israel's Current Apostasy

4 Now listen to what the Lord has to say, you descendants of Jacob, all you family groups from the nation of Israel.

5 This is what the Lord says:

"What fault could your ancestors have possibly found in me
that they strayed so far from me?
They paid allegiance to worthless idols, and so became worthless to me.

6 They did not ask:

'Where is the LORD who delivered us out of Egypt,
who brought us through the wilderness,
through a land of desert sands and rift valleys,
through a land of drought and deep darkness,
through a land in which no one travels, and where no one lives?'

7 I brought you into a fertile land

so you could enjoy its fruits and its rich bounty.
But when you entered my land, you defiled it;
you made the land I call my own loathsome to me.

8 Your priests did not ask, 'Where is the LORD?'

Those responsible for teaching my law did not really know me.
Your rulers rebelled against me.

Your prophets prophesied in the name of the god Baal.
They all worshiped idols that could not help them.

9 "So, once more I will state my case against you," says the LORD.

"I will also state it against your children and grandchildren.

10 Go west across the sea to the coasts of Cyprus and see.

Send someone east to Kedar and have them look carefully.
See if such a thing as this has ever happened:

11 Has a nation ever changed its gods

(even though they are not really gods at all)?
But my people have exchanged me, their glorious God,
for a god that cannot help them at all!

12 Be amazed at this, O heavens!

Be shocked and utterly dumbfounded," says the LORD.

13 "Do so because my people have committed a double wrong:

they have rejected me, the fountain of life-giving water,
and they have dug cisterns for themselves,
cracked cisterns which cannot even hold water."

The Consequences of Israel's Apostasy

14 "Israel is not a slave, is he?

He was not born into slavery, was he?
If not, why then is he being carried off?

15 Like lions his enemies roar victoriously over him;

they raise their voices in triumph.
They have laid his land waste;
his cities have been burned down and deserted.

16 Even the soldiers from Memphis and Tahpanhes
have cracked your skulls, people of Israel.

17 You have brought all this on yourself, Israel,
by deserting the LORD your God
when he was leading you along the right path.

18 What good will it do you then to go down to Egypt
to seek help from the Egyptians?

What good will it do you to go over to Assyria
to seek help from the Assyrians?

19 Your own wickedness will bring about your punishment.

Your unfaithful acts will bring down discipline on you.
Know, then, and realize how utterly harmful
it was for you to reject me, the LORD your God,
to show no respect for me,”
says the Lord God who rules over all.

The Strange Fascination With and Futility of Idolatry

- 20 “Indeed, long ago you threw off my authority
and refused to be subject to me.
You said, ‘I will not serve you.’
Instead, you gave yourself to other gods on every high hill
and under every green tree,
like a prostitute sprawls out before her lovers.
- 21 I planted you in the land
like a special vine of the very best stock.
Why in the world have you turned into something like a wild vine
that produces rotten, foul-smelling grapes?
- 22 You can try to wash away your guilt with a strong detergent.
You can use as much soap as you want.
But the stain of your guilt is still there for me to see,”
says the Lord GOD.
- 23 “How can you say, ‘I have not made myself unclean.
I have not paid allegiance to the gods called Baal.’
Just look at the way you have behaved in the Valley of Hinnom!
Think about the things you have done there!
You are like a flighty, young female camel
that rushes here and there, crisscrossing its path.
- 24 You are like a wild female donkey brought up in the wilderness.
In her lust she sniffs the wind to get the scent of a male.
No one can hold her back when she is in heat.
None of the males need wear themselves out chasing after her.
At mating time she is easy to find.
- 25 Do not chase after other gods until your shoes wear out
and your throats become dry.
But you say, ‘It is useless for you to try and stop me
because I love those foreign gods and want to pursue them!’
- 26 Just as a thief has to suffer dishonor when he is caught,
so the people of Israel will suffer dishonor for what they have done.
So will their kings and officials,
their priests and their prophets.
- 27 They say to a wooden idol, ‘You are my father.’
They say to a stone image, ‘You gave birth to me.’
Yes, they have turned away from me instead of turning to me.
Yet when they are in trouble, they say, ‘Come and save us!’
- 28 But where are the gods you made for yourselves?
Let them save you when you are in trouble.
The sad fact is that you have as many gods
as you have towns, Judah.

Israel Deserves Judgment

- 29 “Why do you try to refute me?
All of you have rebelled against me,” says the LORD.
- 30 “It did no good for me to punish your people.
They did not respond to such correction.
You slaughtered your prophets
like a voracious lion.”
- 31 You people of this generation,
listen to what the LORD says.

- “Have I been like a wilderness to you, Israel?
 Have I been like a dark and dangerous land to you?
 Why then do you say, ‘We are free to wander.
 We will not come to you any more?’
- 32 Does a young woman forget to put on her jewels?
 Does a bride forget to put on her bridal attire?
 But my people have forgotten me
 for more days than can even be counted.
- 33 “My, how good you have become
 at chasing after your lovers!
 Why, you could even teach prostitutes a thing or two!
- 34 Even your clothes are stained with
 the lifeblood of the poor who had not done anything wrong;
 you did not catch them breaking into your homes.
 Yet, in spite of all these things you have done,
- 35 you say, ‘I have not done anything wrong,
 so the LORD cannot really be angry with me any more.’
 But, watch out! I will bring down judgment on you
 because you say, ‘I have not committed any sin.’
- 36 Why do you constantly go about
 changing your political allegiances?
 You will get no help from Egypt
 just as you got no help from Assyria.
- 37 Moreover, you will come away from Egypt
 with your hands covering your faces in sorrow and shame
 because the LORD will not allow your reliance on them to be successful
 and you will not gain any help from them.

Jeremiah's Prophecy to Judah—An Appeal to Return to God (c. 629t BC)

Jeremiah 3:1–4:4

A Faithless Wife

- 3:1 “If a man divorces his wife
 and she leaves him and becomes another man’s wife,
 he may not take her back again.
 Doing that would utterly defile the land. [cf. [Deut 24:1–4](#)]
 But you, Israel, have given yourself as a prostitute to many gods.
 So what makes you think you can return to me?” says the LORD.
- 2 “Look up at the hilltops and consider this.
 You have had sex with other gods on every one of them.
 You waited for those gods like a thief lying in wait in the desert.
 You defiled the land by your wicked prostitution to other gods.
- 3 That is why the rains have been withheld,
 and the spring rains have not come.
 Yet in spite of this you are obstinate as a prostitute.
 You refuse to be ashamed of what you have done.
- 4 Even now you say to me, ‘You are my father!
 You have been my faithful companion ever since I was young.
- 5 You will not always be angry with me, will you?
 You will not be mad at me forever, will you?’
 That is what you say,
 but you continually do all the evil that you can.”

Judah More Guilty Than Israel

- 6 When Josiah was king of Judah, the LORD said to me, “Jeremiah, you have no doubt seen what wayward Israel has done. You have seen how she went up to every high hill and under every green tree to give herself like a prostitute to other gods.
 7 Yet even after she had done all that, I thought that she might come back to me. But she did not. Her sister, unfaithful Judah, saw what she did.

8 She also saw that I gave wayward Israel her divorce papers and sent her away because of her adulterous worship of other gods. Even after her unfaithful sister Judah had seen this, she still was not afraid, and she too went and gave herself like a prostitute to other gods.

9 Because she took her prostitution so lightly, she defiled the land through her adulterous worship of gods made of wood and stone.

10 In spite of all this, Israel's sister, unfaithful Judah, has not turned back to me with any sincerity; she has only pretended to do so," says the LORD.

11 Then the LORD said to me, "Under the circumstances, wayward Israel could even be considered less guilty than unfaithful Judah.

A Call for Repentance

12 "Go and shout this message to my people in the countries in the north. Tell them,

'Come back to me, wayward Israel,' says the LORD.

'I will not continue to look on you with displeasure.

For I am merciful,' says the LORD.

'I will not be angry with you forever.

13 However, you must confess that you have done wrong, and that you have rebelled against the LORD your God.

You must confess that you have given yourself to foreign gods under every green tree, and have not obeyed my commands,' says the LORD.

14a "Come back to me, my wayward sons," says the LORD, "for I am your true master.

Millennial Blessings

14b If you do, I will take one of you from each town and two of you from each family group, and I will bring you back to Zion.

15 I will give you leaders who will be faithful to me. They will lead you with knowledge and insight.

16 In those days, your population will greatly increase in the land. At that time," says the LORD, "people will no longer talk about having the ark that contains the LORD's covenant with us. They will not call it to mind, remember it, or miss it. No, that will not be done any more!

17 At that time the city of Jerusalem will be called the LORD's throne. All nations will gather there in Jerusalem to honor the LORD's name. They will no longer follow the stubborn inclinations of their own evil hearts.

18 At that time the nation of Judah and the nation of Israel will be reunited. Together they will come back from a land in the north to the land that I gave to your ancestors as a permanent possession."

God Describes the True Repentance He Desires

19 "I thought to myself,

'Oh what a joy it would be for me to treat you like a son!

What a joy it would be for me to give you a pleasant land,

the most beautiful piece of property there is in all the world!

I thought you would call me, 'Father'

and would never cease being loyal to me.

20 But, you have been unfaithful to me, nation of Israel, like an unfaithful wife who has left her husband," says the LORD.

21 "A noise is heard on the hilltops.

It is the sound of the people of Israel crying and pleading to their gods.

Indeed they have followed sinful ways;

they have forgotten to be true to the LORD their God.

22 Come back to me, you wayward people.

I want to cure your waywardness.

Say, 'Here we are. We come to you

because you are the LORD our God.

23 We know our noisy worship of false gods on the hills and mountains did not help us.

We know that the LORD our God

is the only one who can deliver Israel.

24 From earliest times our worship of that shameful god, Baal, has taken away all that our ancestors worked for.

It has taken away our flocks and our herds,

and even our sons and daughters.

- 25 Let us acknowledge our shame.
Let us bear the disgrace that we deserve.
For we have sinned against the LORD our God,
both we and our ancestors.
From earliest times to this very day
we have not obeyed the LORD our God.’
- 4:1 “If you, Israel, want to come back,” says the LORD,
“if you want to come back to me
you must get those disgusting idols out of my sight
and must no longer go astray.
- 2 You must be truthful, honest and upright
when you take an oath saying, ‘As surely as the LORD lives!’
If you do, the nations will pray to be as blessed by him as you are
and will make him the object of their boasting.”
- 3 Yes, the LORD has this to say
to the people of Judah and Jerusalem:
“Like a farmer breaking up hard unplowed ground,
you must break your rebellious will and make a new beginning;
just as a farmer must clear away thorns lest the seed is wasted,
you must get rid of the sin that is ruining your lives.
- 4 Just as ritual circumcision cuts away the foreskin
as an external symbol of dedicated covenant commitment,
you must genuinely dedicate yourselves to the LORD
and get rid of everything that hinders your commitment to me,
people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem.
If you do not, my anger will blaze up like a flaming fire against you
that no one will be able to extinguish.
That will happen because of the evil you have done.”

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Chronological Notes

1) Jeremiah.

A) Josiah’s 13th Year.

- (1) In Jeremiah 25:3, the prophet counted 23 years from the 13th year of Josiah to the 4th year of Jehoiakim, 606t. The cardinal number 23 is given without any preposition or modifier and must be taken in an absolute (accession) sense; this puts the 13th year of Josiah in 606t + 23 = 629t. By Jeremiah’s non-accession reckoning, Josiah’s beginning year can be calculated as 629t + 12 (acc.) = 641t. This date for the accession of Josiah provides the means of determining if the 31 years for his reign given in 2 Kings 22:1 is an accession or non-accession figure. The Babylonian Chronicles allow the date of his death to be calculated as the fourth month of 609 BC, which was in the year 610t. This was 31 years after the beginning of Josiah’s reign in 641t, so the reign length as given in 2 Kings 22:1 is by accession reckoning, showing, incidentally, that somewhere between 2 Kings 22:1 and 24:1 the counting system changed from accession to non-accession (*Important: Josiah’s 13th year in Jer 1:2 = Josiah’s 12th year in 2 Chr 34:3).¹

B) Chronological Arrangement of Jeremiah.

- (1) Jeremiah’s ministry spanned the reigns of Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah and the governorship of Gedaliah (cf. Jer 1:1–3; 40:7). The book of Jeremiah contains many chronological references which date the various events and prophecies:

¹ Rodger C. Young, “When Did Jerusalem Fall?” *JETS* 47.1 (Mar 2004): 35.

- Jeremiah 1:1–3 — the 13th year of Josiah’s reign.
- Jeremiah 3:6 — during Josiah’s reign.
- Jeremiah 21:1 — during Nebuchadnezzar’s siege of Jerusalem in Zedekiah’s reign.
- Jeremiah 22:10–13 — just after Josiah’s death, Jehoahaz’s (Shallum’s) exile and Jehoiakim’s accession.
- Jeremiah 24:1 — after Nebuchadnezzar deported Jehoiachin to Babylon.
- Jeremiah 25:1 — the 4th year of Jehoiakim’s reign.
- Jeremiah 25:3 — marks 23 years of ministry between Josiah’s 13th year and Jehoiakim’s 4th year.
- Jeremiah 26:1 — the beginning of Jehoiakim’s reign.
- Jeremiah 27:1 — early in Zedekiah’s reign.
- Jeremiah 28:1 — the 5th month of the 4th year of Zedekiah’s reign.
- Jeremiah 29:1–2 — after Nebuchadnezzar deported Jehoiachin to Babylon.
- Jeremiah 32:1 — the 10th year of Zedekiah’s reign (Nebuchadnezzar’s 18th year).
- Jeremiah 32:2, 8 — when Jeremiah was confined in the courtyard of the guardhouse during Zedekiah’s reign.
- Jeremiah 33:1 — when Jeremiah was confined in the courtyard of the guardhouse during Zedekiah’s reign.
- Jeremiah 34:1–10 — during Nebuchadnezzar’s siege of Jerusalem during Zedekiah’s reign.
- Jeremiah 36:1–8 — the 4th year of Jehoiakim’s reign.
- Jeremiah 36:9–32 — the 9th month of the 5th year of Jehoiakim’s reign
- Jeremiah 37:1–5 — the brief respite in Nebuchadnezzar’s siege of Jerusalem during Zedekiah’s reign.
- Jeremiah 37:21 — Jeremiah is committed to the courtyard of the guardhouse during Zedekiah’s reign.
- Jeremiah 39:1 — the 10th month of the 9th year of Zedekiah’s reign.
- Jeremiah 39:15 — when Jeremiah was confined in the courtyard of the guardhouse during Zedekiah’s reign.
- Jeremiah 41:1 — the 7th month of 587.
- Jeremiah 45:1 — the 4th year of Jehoiakim’s reign.
- Jeremiah 46:1 — the 4th year of Jehoiakim’s reign.
- Jeremiah 47:1 — before Pharaoh attacked Gaza.
- Jeremiah 49:34 — early in the reign of Zedekiah.
- Jeremiah 51:59 — the 4th year of Zedekiah’s reign.

(2) The chronological data above makes it clear that the canonical order of Jeremiah does not follow the historical order. This has given rise to various attempts to organize Jeremiah chronologically.² For the most part, I will be following the arrangement of J. Barton Payne.

² Charles H. Dyer, “Jeremiah,” *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, chart on p. 1126; J. Barton Payne, “The Arrangement of Jeremiah’s Prophecies,” *JETS* 7.4 (Fall 1964), chart on p. 125; Charles L. Feinberg, “Jeremiah,” *EBC*, Vol. 6, 358.