

THE BIBLE

in a nutshell

Jeremiah & Lamentations

—by Peter Hammond



Jeremiah - the persecuted prophet

Jeremiah suffered for his stand, as the religious and civil authorities of Judah did not want to hear his condemnations of their immorality and idolatry. Jeremiah was mocked, threatened, thrown into prison and thrown down a well. He narrowly escaped death. Another faithful prophet, Uriah, was killed (Jeremiah 26:20-24).

"Before I formed you in the womb; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you as a prophet to the nations."

Jeremiah 1:5

Jeremiah began his prophetic mission in the thirteenth year of king Josiah (about 627 BC) and finished in the eleventh year of king Zedekiah (586). During this period, Josiah reformed Judah's religion, Babylon destroyed Assyria, Egypt briefly imposed vassal status on Judah, Babylon defeated Egypt and made Judah a Babylonian

and exiled its king and many of the leading citizens in 586, ending Judah's existence as an independent kingdom and inaugurating the Babylonian exile.

A message to unfaithful Judah

The people of Judah abandoned God. The Covenant was being ignored. Idols were being worshipped. Children were

Religious activities are futile if we do not fear God and obey His commandments... "let him who glories, glory in this, that he understands and knows Me" Jer 9:24

vassal (605), Judah revolted but was subjugated again by Babylon (597), and Judah revolted once more. This revolt was the final one: Babylon destroyed

Jerusalem and its Temple

being sacrificed and Judah was immoral and idolatrous. *"For they are all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men...They have bent their tongues for lies. They are not valiant for the truth...for they proceed from evil to evil and they do not know Me, says the Lord."* Jer 9:2-3.

Jeremiah warns that the religious activities of Judah are futile, because they do not fear God and obey His commandments (Jeremiah 2:19). *"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me."* Jer 9:23-24.



The message of Jeremiah

- Backsliding leads to bondage. Repentance leads to restoration
- God will surely punish sin, in His way and in His time
- Continual sin will harden your heart
- Religious activities can be used as a cover for sin
- Refusing God's discipline is rebellion
- God's patience can be exhausted by persistent sin
- If we focus on feelings and circumstances, we will grow weary
- God is faithful. Never compromise
- God is patient. But His patience has a limit.

"O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?" Jeremiah 4:14



Idolatry and unwise alliances

"Do not learn the way of the Gentiles...for the customs of the peoples are futile..." Jeremiah 10:2-3. The idols are exposed as futile and powerless. People who worship idols are described as: *"dull-hearted and foolish...without knowledge..."*

Jeremiah warns Judah against the danger of trusting in alliances with Egypt and Assyria. He warns of the threat of the rising

profaneness has gone out into all the land... they make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord. They continually say to those who despise Me: 'the Lord has said you shall have peace'; and to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say: 'No evil shall come upon you'. For who has stood in the council of the Lord, and who have perceived and

that are written in this Book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome Name, THE LORD YOUR GOD, then the Lord will bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues - great and prolonged plagues - and serious and »

Jeremiah's purpose was to expose the immorality and idolatry of the people and warn of impending disaster at the hands of the Babylonians.

power of Babylon, which is destined to overthrow the Assyrians, defeat Egypt and destroy Jerusalem.

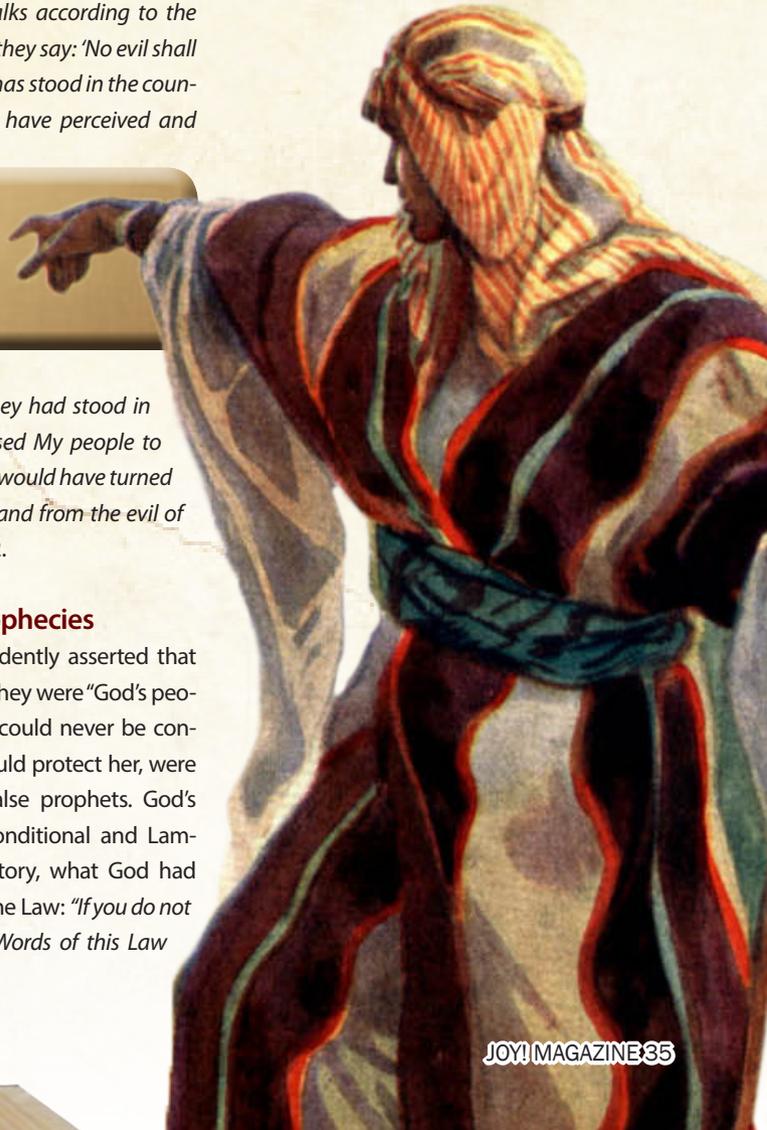
False shepherds

The religious leaders of Judah are condemned as "dull-hearted" Jer 10:21. *"For both prophet and priest are profane; yes, in My House, I have found their wickedness...slippery ways...darkness...folly...they cause My people Israel to err. Also I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem; they commit adultery and walk in lies; they also strengthen the hands of evil-doers so that no one turns back from their wickedness. All of them are like Sodom to me, her inhabitants like Gomorrah..."*

heard His Word? But if they had stood in My council and had caused My people to hear My Words, then they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings," Jer 23:11-22.

The fruit of false prophecies

Those who had so confidently asserted that Judah was safe because they were "God's people", and that Jerusalem could never be conquered because God would protect her, were exposed as worthless false prophets. God's Covenant was always conditional and Lamentations records, in history, what God had warned at the giving of the Law: *"If you do not carefully observe all the Words of this Law*



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"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked...I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind...to give every man according to his ways...the fruit of his doings." Jeremiah 17:8-10

A New Covenant

Jeremiah prophesied of a New Covenant, not involving slaughtered animals and exterior laws, but involving the transformation of hearts and minds. "Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new Covenant with the House of Israel and with the House of Judah...I will put My Law in their minds and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God; and they shall be My people...and they shall all know Me...I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." Jer 31:31-34.

Jesus in Jeremiah

"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "That I will raise to David a Branch of Righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His Name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (YHWH Tsidkenu)." Jer 23:5-6.

prolonged sicknesses...to destroy you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess. Then the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other... And among those nations you shall find no rest...Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life." Deuteronomy 28:58-68

"...they have refused to receive correction.

marry, as a sign of the loneliness that would come upon the apostate people of Judah, when they were exiled from the land.

Jeremiah walked with a yolk around his neck to demonstrate that the stiff-necked people of Judah were going to come under foreign oppression (Jer 27:1-13). When the Babylonians were already invading the land, Jeremiah bought a field. While this seemed to be a waste of money, it was a prophetic

"Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord; let us lift our hearts and hands to God in Heaven. We have transgressed and rebelled."
Lam 3:40-42

They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to return...They are foolish; for they do not know the way of the Lord, the judgment of their God." Jer 5:3-4.

"Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people - the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not heeded My Words, nor My Law, but rejected it." Jeremiah 6:19.

A dramatic and visual prophet...

To dramatise the message entrusted to him by God, the prophet Jeremiah often used symbolic visual illustrations. Jeremiah smashed a clay jar in front of the leaders of Jerusalem to dramatise how Jerusalem and the Temple were going to be smashed (Chapter 19:1-15). Jeremiah

act to indicate that the land would, 70 years later, come back under the control of God's people (Jer 27:32-33).

A message of hope

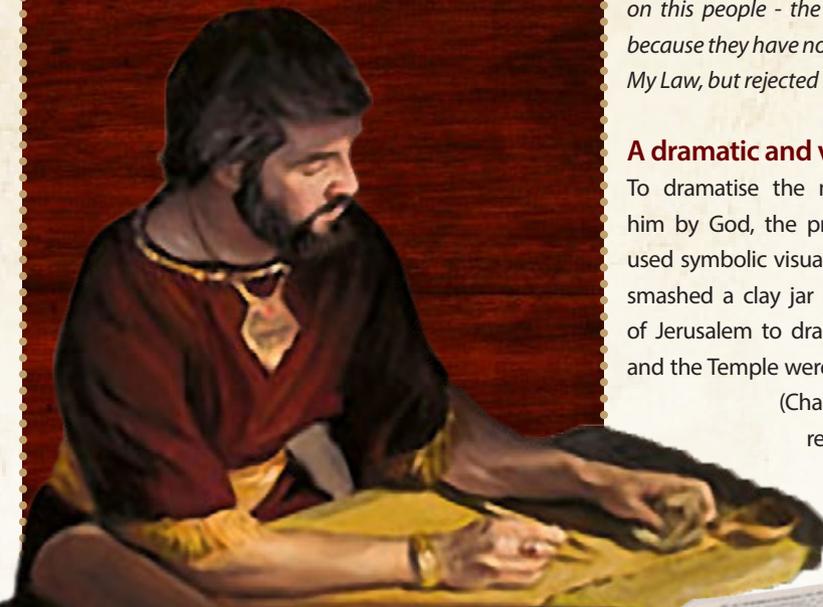
Although Judah would fall and the Temple would be destroyed, Jeremiah pointed towards a future restoration. After 70 years of exile in Babylon, a remnant would return, rebuild the Temple and restore Jerusalem.

The book of Lamentations

The book consists of five separate poems.

- In the first Chapter, the city sits as a desolate, weeping widow
- In Chapter 2, these miseries are connected with national sins and acts of God.
- Chapter 3 speaks of hope for the people of God: the chastisement would only be for their good; a better future was coming

remained celibate, having been instructed by God not to





- Chapter 4 laments the ruin and desolation of the city and Temple
- Chapter 5 is a prayer that Zion's reproach may be taken away in the repentance and recovery of the people.

Judgement on sinful Jerusalem

Lamentations is structured as an acrostic poem for the first four chapters, each verse beginning with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Jeremiah describes what he witnessed of the judgement of God upon immoral and idolatrous Jerusalem; deserted, destroyed, in distress, desolate, devastated, dishonoured, despised, and destitute.

Originally Lamentations and Jeremiah were part of the same book, as the prophet wrote both of them.

Because she broke God's Law and refused to obey Him as Lord, she had lost her land. No Law. No Lord. No Land. *"Her adversaries have become the master, her enemies prosper; for the Lord has afflicted her because of the multitude of her transgressions. Her children have gone into captivity before the enemy...all her splendour has departed..."* Lam 1:5-6.

"The yoke of my transgressions was bound; they were woven together by His hands, and thrust upon my neck. He made my strength fail; the Lord delivered me into the hands of those whom I am not able to withstand" Lam 1:14.

Hope amongst the ashes

"Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." Lam 3:22-23. *"Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies."* Lam 3:32.

"Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord; let us lift our hearts and hands to God in Heaven. We have transgressed and rebelled." Lam 3:40-42.

A prayer for revival

"Turn us back to You, O Lord, and we will be restored; renew our days as of old" (Lam 5:21). ■

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