

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 topics that can be taught or preached from Jeremiah, Illustrations of these points are easily found in the book itself.

Approximate order of the chapters

FIRST PART OF BOOK

EARLY DISCOURSES, 626 BC

1-6, call of Jeremiah, early discourses

TEMPLE SERMONS, 609-608 BC

[Insert 26, Jeremiah threatened with death]

7-10, temple sermons

JEREMIAH'S CONFESSIONS, 11-20

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, living prophecy—Jeremiah beaten and imprisoned in stocks, Jeremiah's complaint

Note: Chapters 21-52 are organized more topically than chronologically

THE END IS PROPHESED--OVERVIEW (selected chapters from remainder of book)

25, Seventy years of captivity prophesied

34-35, historical summary

45, historical summary, message to Baruch, disaster is coming [see below]

52:1-30, historical summary of fall of Jerusalem

DENUNCIATIONS

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

23-24, the righteous branch will come, the false prophets are lying, two baskets of figs

[25, seventy years of captivity prophesied, see above]

[26, Jeremiah threatened with death, see chap. 7-10]

27-29, Babylonian captivity foretold

30-33, promises of restoration

34-35, historical summary / conclusion

34, another warning to Zedekiah

35, faithfulness of the Recabites

SECOND PART OF BOOK

JEREMIAH'S SUFFERING AND PERSECUTION

36, Jeremiah's scroll burned

37-39, 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 21-39 is difficult. Few specific dates are given, but see 21-22 and 34-35. This outline identifies basic units with various intertwined lessons.

FALL OF JERUSALEM AND EVENTS FOLLOWING

39-44, various prophecies, Gedaliah, some go to Egypt, prophecy against those who fled to Egypt

45, historical summary, message to Baruch, disaster is coming [see above]

THIRD SECTION OF BOOK

THE DESTINY OF THE NATIONS

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

52:1-30, historical summary of the fall of Jerusalem ends the section

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

In a short series on the book, I like to study in detail the following sections.

- 7-10, temple sermons (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)