



# JEREMIAH

## FAITHFUL TO THE MISSION

JANUARY BIBLE STUDY 2020  
PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

# LIFE BY DESIGN

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**We live in a broken world, seen in suffering, violence, poverty, pain, and death around us. Brokenness leads us to search for a way to make life work.**

The Bible tells us that God originally planned a world that worked perfectly—where everything and everyone fit together in harmony. God made each of us with a purpose—to worship Him and walk with Him. (See Gen. 1:31 and Ps. 19:1.)

Life doesn't work when we ignore God and His original design for our lives. We selfishly insist on doing things our own way. The Bible calls this sin. Sin leads to a place of brokenness. The consequence of our sin is separation from God—in this life and for all of eternity. (See Rom. 3:23 and Rom. 6:23.)

At this point we need a remedy—some good news. Because of His love, God did not leave us in our brokenness. Jesus, God in human flesh, came to us and lived perfectly according to God's design. Jesus came to rescue us—to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He took our sin and shame to the cross, paying the penalty of our sin by His death. Jesus was then raised from the dead—to provide the only way for us to be rescued and restored to a relationship with God. (See John 3:16; Col. 2:14; and 1 Cor. 15:3-4.)

We don't have the power to escape this brokenness on our own. We need to be rescued. We must ask God to forgive us—turning from sin to trust in Jesus. This is what it means to repent and believe. Believing, we receive new life through Jesus. God turns our lives in a new direction. (See Mark 1:15; Eph. 2:8-9; and Rom. 10:9.)

When God restores our relationship to Him, we begin to discover meaning and purpose in a broken world. Now we can pursue God's design in all areas of our lives. God's Spirit empowers us to recover His design and assures us of His presence in this life and for all of eternity. (See Phil. 2:13 and Eph. 2:10.)

Now that you have heard this good news, God wants you to respond to Him. You can talk to Him using words like these: My life is broken—I recognize it's because of my sin. I believe Christ came to live and to die, and that He was raised from the dead to rescue me from my sin. Forgive me. I turn from my selfish ways and put my trust in You. I know that Jesus is Lord of all, and I will follow Him.

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## Faithful to the MISSION



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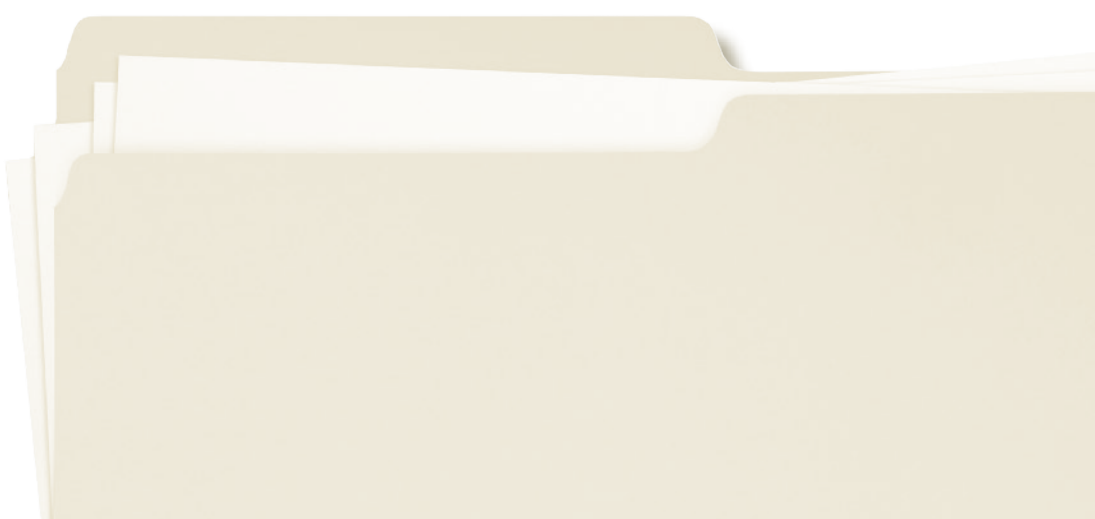
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# JEREMIAH

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**W**hen I was young, I went through a period when I was bullied for my faith. This was in part because I was naive about the kids at school, and in part because I was raised in a Christian home by very sincere and God-loving parents. The result was that I functioned in two very different worlds—worlds that were not compatible. I could choose to stay true to one or the other, but not both. Ultimately, I chose to stay true to the view instilled in me by my parents. This worldview centered on a love for God and Jesus and a love for others. As a child, it didn't occur to me to question the idea that Jesus was real and that He loved me. Likewise, it didn't occur to me that loving others and telling them about Jesus would not always be well received. To be quite honest, it did not enter my mind that others might view things differently and would not operate with the same set of beliefs. In my view, the way I understood the world was the only true way to understand the world.

This sort of simple, unquestioning faith is why Jesus upheld the children of the world as examples for our faith. In Matthew 19:14, Jesus stated, "Leave the children alone, and don't try to keep them from coming to me, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Similarly, in Matthew 18:2-3 we see Jesus upholding the faith of a child: "He called a child and had him stand among them. 'Truly I tell you,' he said, 'unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'" Children usually accept things as they are presented to them. They have not learned the mistrust or skepticism that comes from the experience of deceit and lies. Such was my own perspective.

When I went to school, I innocently shared the love of Jesus with my school friends. Naturally, this was not always well-received! As I struggled with the situation, I wondered where God

was and why He wasn't backing me up. At that early stage, I didn't wish for vengeance or judgment on those who were rejecting me. I just wanted God to show Himself and prove that my message was true. Sometimes even my teachers misunderstood and assumed I was intentionally stirring up trouble. God seemed strangely silent in all of this. I still trusted Him, but it was a frustrating experience.

As challenging as it was at the time, however, my experience of faith and frustration is nothing when compared to what the prophets went through. Their experiences were much more difficult than mine. And yet (and perhaps you can relate), my experience does give me some inkling of what the prophets went through when they brought their complete trust in God to bear in the communities in which they lived. The prophets of God could see things with absolute clarity. They saw events and people from the perspective of the Holy God. Thus, little sins were a big deal. Ongoing sins were downright dangerous. The prophets saw the certain judgment that would come if the people did not respond by repenting of their sins and turning back to God in faith. The prophets also understood how much God loved His people. They loved their people, as well. They felt the pain and grief evident in God's own heart as they called for the Israelites to open their eyes and love God fully and completely. They tried to explain the true worldview, but the people would not listen. Instead, their own people mocked and persecuted them, sometimes with jeering words and other times with physical violence. This experience left the prophets wondering why God wasn't intervening. They did not want their people to suffer judgment, but they also felt the pain of God's delay. Why didn't God do something? Why didn't He at least verify the truth of their message in some way?

The prophet Jeremiah is the perfect example of a prophet who went through both the joy and grief that comes from being totally committed to God. He was mocked and persecuted. He struggled with God and the seeming lack of action on His part. Jeremiah was a faithful man of God, yet he was also a fallen human being who struggled with understanding God and what God had asked him to do. For this reason, Jeremiah is very relatable to all who seek to follow God in a hostile world. Indeed, we all have times in our life in which everything seems to go wrong and we wonder what God is doing. What can make these periods in our lives even more difficult is that they are sometimes caused by God's own people. We look around and see behavior that makes us wonder why God allows such things. We start to wonder if God is really in

control or, if He is, if He really cares, since He doesn't seem to be doing anything. The Book of Jeremiah can be a great encouragement to us in these tough times. It offers hope. Hope because it shows us that we are not alone in our struggle. Hope because we can see how God has worked in the past and how we are benefiting from that now. Hope because we can see that God has been faithful and will continue to be so in the future.

## DATE AND SETTING

Before we delve into the study of the Book of Jeremiah, it is helpful to understand the setting of the book. Setting the scene will give us insight into the messages of the prophet, because these messages were given in a particular context.

First of all, the Book of Jeremiah was written, or at least dictated, by the prophet himself. We know that he had a friend and scribe named Baruch, who most likely wrote down Jeremiah's words and who was largely responsible for arranging Jeremiah's prophetic speeches in the form that we now have it.

Second, the ministry of Jeremiah occurred from 627 BC (the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign) until sometime after the fall





of Jerusalem and the temple in 587/6 BC. While we do not know the exact date of Jeremiah's death, we do know that he most likely died in the land of Egypt, having been forcibly relocated there by some of his countrymen.

The setting of the Book of Jeremiah is somewhat complex. After the reign of Solomon, the kingdom of Israel had split into two kingdoms: Israel in the north, and Judah in the south. God had enacted judgment on the Northern Kingdom for their sins by using the Empire of Assyria to destroy it and carry its people into exile in 722/1 BC. Thus, Judah was the last one standing. Unfortunately, Judah had not really learned a lesson from the fall of its northern sister country, and continued on a road paved with sinful behavior and the rejection of God and His commandments. There had been a few efforts at reform by some of Judah's kings (Hezekiah and Josiah, for example), but these reforms and the calls to follow God were short lived. Jeremiah witnessed the reign of Josiah and the failure of this king's reforms in turning the hearts of the people of God back to Him. This lack of repentance must have deeply grieved the prophet.

The moral and spiritual failure of the people of Judah to remain faithful to God could have but one conclusion: destruction

**Modern Anathoth, the home of Jeremiah the prophet, about three miles northeast of Jerusalem.**

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ  
(9-19-2)



and exile. This imminent threat was Jeremiah's primary message and the setting for most of the book. Jeremiah had the unfortunate experience of seeing his prophecies about the fall of his country come true. He witnessed the efforts of the people to save themselves instead of turning to God for deliverance. When God brought the Babylonian Empire to power, the king and people of Judah turned to negotiations, money, and other foreign powers for salvation, while continuing to live in ways that were offensive to the Lord God.

Jeremiah would beg and plead with his people to repent, but they would not listen. Eventually, it was too late, and Jeremiah warned them of God's coming judgment. Even then, the people were urged to repent and to seek God. Jeremiah was instructed to tell the people that they should willingly submit to Babylon as evidence of their repentance and trust in God. Of course, they did not listen. As a result, in 587/6 BC, the kingdom of Judah was overthrown and both the city of Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. Many of the people were carried into captivity, and those left in the land had to scramble to survive. Even after all these events and destruction, the people still did not listen to Jeremiah; they refused to believe that the fall of the country was proof that Jeremiah was correct.

Thankfully, Jeremiah's message was not all doom and gloom. The Lord had promised him that part of his message would be "to build and plant" (1:10). Thus, there are notes of hope sprinkled throughout the book. Judgment must come, but it is not the end. Hope and restoration are promised, and we as believers have experienced some of these promises in our own lives.

## AUTHOR

The man Jeremiah was called to be a prophet by God (ch. 1) and was given no room to back out of this call. Jeremiah's ministry illustrates that the call to be a prophet was usually a call to a great deal of suffering and frustration. Being a prophet was not something that Jeremiah wanted, and his complaints about the struggles of his office make him very relatable. On the one side, he desperately cried out to the people to listen to God's message and to change their ways. On the other, he pleaded with God to show more grace and to give the people more time. Neither side seemed to listen. Yet Jeremiah fulfilled his calling faithfully. When he tried to resist, he found that he could not (20:9). In Jeremiah, then, we

find both the call of God and the frailty of humanity on display. In our times of struggle, it is good to know that we are in such good company when we seek to follow God even when it is difficult.

## FOCUS AND MESSAGE

The primary focus of Jeremiah is that the righteous God will bring judgment on sin among His people. While we may think that this does not apply to us as Christians, we should be mindful that God does discipline those He loves (Prov. 3:12; Heb. 12:6). Likewise, true followers of God are known by their desire to do what pleases God. Jeremiah offers us a reminder of what it looks like to have a heart fully committed to God. Secondly, and just as important, is the message that there is always hope for the future. No matter what situation or difficulty we may face, judgment is not the end of the story. God is working toward restoration and the faithful can be reassured by this in the darkest of times.

## ORGANIZATION

The Book of Jeremiah has six sections:

- The Call—Chapter 1
- The Sermons—Chapters 2–24 (Messiah predicted, 23:5–6)
- The Opposition—Chapters 25–35 (The New Covenant, 31:31–34)
- The Collapse—Chapters 36–45
- The Nations—Chapters 46–51
- The Conclusion—Chapter 52

This study will include the following eight lessons:

1. Understanding His Call: Jeremiah 1
2. Courage to Tell: Jeremiah 26
3. Judgment and Hope: Jeremiah 29–31
4. The Problem with Promises: Jeremiah 34
5. The Faithful Honored: Jeremiah 35
6. God's Eternal Word: Jeremiah 36
7. No Compromise: Jeremiah 37–39
8. The Loving Messenger: Jeremiah 42–44

With these things in mind, let's get started!



# UNDERSTANDING HIS CALL

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JEREMIAH 1

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**M**ost of us can remember a time or place when we committed our lives to follow Jesus. As I noted in the introduction, I found the initial decision to follow Jesus to be a relatively easy one. Later, when I was faced with the fear of rejection from my classmates, I had to decide just how deep my commitment to following Jesus was. In the first movie of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Frodo is tasked with taking the evil ring of power to the land of Mordor so that it can be destroyed. The destruction of the ring was the only chance that the free peoples of middle earth had at winning against the evil lord Sauron. Bearing the ring was not a task Frodo wanted. In the council in which the decision was made that he would be the ring bearer, Frodo is seen wrestling with whether to volunteer to take the ring. He knew it would be dangerous and might cost him his life. However, as he looked around at the bickering council members, he realized that taking the ring would be the only way to help the other people survive. With a heavy heart, he cries out that he would take the ring. For the sake of others, Frodo put his life on the line to do what must be done, knowing that it would cost him dearly.

When we agree to follow Jesus, we are saying our whole life is to be dedicated to him. There are times when it may seem easy and others when it may seem virtually impossible. Likewise, when the prophets were called to be messengers and representatives of God, they put their lives on the line. It was a life, and sometimes death, commitment. In this week's lesson we will see God's call to

Jeremiah to lay his life on the line for God and for his fellow Judeans. Like Frodo, Jeremiah had some awareness of the potential cost to serve God, yet he still agreed to do it.

## THE TIMES, THEY ARE A CHANGIN'

Jeremiah 1 starts out with two important pieces of background information to set the scene. First, we see a description of the prophet's heritage: Jeremiah came from a line of priests and could have become a priest himself in different circumstances. Of course, God had other plans.

Secondly, we are provided with a brief description of the kings of Judah who ruled during Jeremiah's ministry. While the identities of the kings listed in verses 2-3 may seem unimportant to us, knowing who they are actually tells us a lot.

When Jeremiah started his role as a prophet, **Josiah** was the king of Judah. In some ways, this seems like a strange time for God to call Jeremiah to preach to the people of Judah. After all, Josiah was a good king who sought to bring the Judeans back to the proper worship of the Lord (2 Kings 22). Of course, the Lord knew that the efforts of Josiah would fail to change the hearts of the nation. This is why Jeremiah would be needed as a witness to the ongoing hard-heartedness of the people. And indeed, after the death of Josiah, **Jehoiakim** would come to the throne and prove himself to be a wicked king. In fact, it was his reign that put the final nail in the proverbial coffin of Judah's doom. As with many of the other Judean kings, Jehoiakim "did what was evil in the LORD's sight" (Jer. 23:37). The last king, **Zedekiah**, was a puppet king. He was put on the throne by the Babylonian ruler, Nebuchadnezzar II. As a result, his rule was a constant balancing act between keeping both the nobles of the Judean court and his foreign sponsor, the king of Babylon, happy. Over time, this proved to be impossible, and Zedekiah's interest in self-preservation made him a weak king. At times he showed genuine interest in listening to God's message from Jeremiah, but his convictions would waver when faced with other threats.

These were the times that Jeremiah faced. There were a few righteous people, such as Josiah, who sought to be faithful to God, but by and large, the majority of the people were inclined to do what they pleased. Their hearts were hard toward God, and Jeremiah's words fell on deaf ears. His was not a pleasant task.

## THE CALL OF THE PROPHET

The call of Jeremiah to be a prophet (Jer. 1:4-19) had to be both amazing and terrifying for the prophet. The first thing we notice is that God had His plans for Jeremiah set before Jeremiah was conceived! When my wife and I learned that we were expecting our first child, we were both excited and terrified. We couldn't wait to meet our daughter, and yet we had no idea what our little girl would be like as she grew into an adult, or if we would be up to the task of raising her. We loved her from before she was born, but that was the extent of our future knowledge and plans for her. What a contrast with God's words for Jeremiah in verse 5:

### NINE FUN FACTS ABOUT JEREMIAH

*Which of these facts about Jeremiah most impresses you and why?*

- 1. The Book of Jeremiah provides more details of Jeremiah's life than any other Bible prophetic book relates about its namesake.*
- 2. Jeremiah was likely a teenager when he was called to be a prophet (he called himself a youth).*
- 3. Jeremiah was called during the time a good king (Josiah) reigned in Judah. Josiah worked to bring people back to proper respect and worship of God.*
- 4. Apparently Jeremiah initially feared the people he would be speaking to.*
- 5. God touched Jeremiah's mouth as part of the process of equipping him to do his mission.*
- 6. Jeremiah's message did not end in judgment.*
- 7. Jeremiah saw a vision about an almond tree.*
- 8. Jeremiah also saw a vision of a pot tipping over.*
- 9. Jeremiah was more afraid of God than of people.*

**“I chose you before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born. I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”** God’s plans for Jeremiah went far back before the prophet’s birth. In a similar way, God’s plans for us predate our birth, as well! Most of us feel lost from time to time and wonder what God has in store. Even when we do not feel certain about where life is headed, however, we can rest assured that God has a plan. His plan for us predates our very existence and we need only to be faithful to Him each and every day.

The three ‘I’ statements in God’s call to Jeremiah in verse 5 (“I chose you ... I set you apart ... I appointed you ...”) emphasize that God is the One in charge and His plan will not be frustrated. This is not to say that Jeremiah somehow had no choice in how he lived his life. We may be tempted to look at God’s message to Jeremiah and see some sort of divine plan that leaves no room for free will, but that really misses the point of the passage. Instead, the point is that God is accomplishing His purpose in Jeremiah’s life and in the life of Judah. The fact that God is doing this and has planned for this all along is amazing. It can give us great assurance when we feel lost or uncertain. Our choices can neither cause problems in God’s plan nor remove us from God’s hand.

For Jeremiah, the call of God produced a response of fear. I don’t know about you, but I don’t really fault Jeremiah for this reaction. In fact, I actually find Jeremiah’s struggle to do what God asks reassuring. Why? It means that I am not the only one with such struggles. Even Jeremiah—a man who would become a great prophet of God and whose ministry would be recorded in the Bible—struggled with wanting to do what he was called to do.

With that being said, God put a quick end to Jeremiah’s protests about his ability! When Jeremiah protested that he was not good at speaking (v. 6; cf. Ex. 4:10), the **LORD** told him to stop it. The implication is that Jeremiah would go wherever God sent him, whether Jeremiah liked it or not! More to the point, the Lord got right to the heart of Jeremiah’s concern. The prophet was afraid of the people he would be speaking to and how they would react to him. How very human Jeremiah was in this moment! How often do we fail to share the good news of Jesus with those around us because we are afraid of what they might think or how they might react? Jeremiah’s situation was even scarier. He most likely knew that his message would not be good news to the people of Judah. From a human perspective, his fear is understandable. Yet, God did not let him off the hook. In fact, God gave Jeremiah



some amazing reassurance. The Lord told Jeremiah, **“I will be with you”** (v. 8). We sometimes associate the idea of God’s being with us with the notion of spiritual comfort. We do not always expect God to do anything. However, in Jeremiah’s case, God specifically stated that He would **rescue** the prophet. In other words, God would physically intervene, and God expected Jeremiah to trust Him to do so.

## THE MISSION OF THE PROPHET

In verses 9-10, God gave Jeremiah his mission. He did this by touching Jeremiah’s mouth. This physical touch was very similar to the calling of the prophet Isaiah. When Isaiah was given his mission, his lips were touched with a coal from the altar in his vision (Isa. 6:6-7). In both cases, God purified His messengers so that they could speak His word truly and faithfully. While this event may seem strange to us, it is important to realize that as Christians, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, who grants us the holiness and purity necessary to deliver God’s message. Our hearts are changed, and we can be bold in sharing the good news, even as the prophets were challenged to be bold in delivering that message.

Jeremiah’s mission is described in verse 10: **“See, I have appointed you today over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and demolish, to build and plant.”** God first restated that Jeremiah has been “appointed,” reaffirming Jeremiah’s call to prophesy to both Judah and the other nations of the ancient world in spite of his fears. Jeremiah did not have the option to say no. There are a couple of interesting patterns to the words that describe Jeremiah’s task. First of all, we see that the first four are negative (“to uproot and tear down, to destroy and demolish”), while the last two take a more positive turn (“to build and plant”). The second pattern is one that works from the outside in. The first and last terms (“to uproot,” “plant”) are agricultural. The second and fifth terms relate to construction (“tear down,” “to build”). The pair in the middle relate to warfare (“to destroy and demolish”). The overall effect is to paint a picture of widespread destruction—both militarily and of the land.<sup>1</sup> Once the warfare ended, however, new construction and planting would begin.

**To uproot and tear down** form the first pair. These words are more than just destructive. They show the need for all traces of the society of Judah to be completely removed. This idea goes back to the commands of Moses and Joshua regarding the



promised land. The people of Israel had to remove all the potential influence of the Canaanites in order to carry out the pure worship that God required (see Deut. 12; Rom. 1:21-25). The irony is that by the time of Jeremiah, Judah itself had become so corrupt that it would have to be completely scrapped and rebuilt. Those who struggle with repetitive sin know that they must remove the temptation completely in order to survive the temptation. For example, people who struggle with alcohol abuse often have to remove all traces of alcohol from their homes, have an accountability partner, and avoid places that serve alcohol. In a similar fashion, Judah needed to completely uproot and tear down its established lifestyle if there was to be any hope for the future. Part of Jeremiah's mission was to stage an intervention and help Judah come to understand this process.

The second pair, **to destroy and demolish**, reflects the type of purging God would use in order to restore His people: foreign invasion and war. Through God's message, Jeremiah was to warn the people that warfare and judgment were coming at the hands of the Babylonians. I was once involved in a church business meeting in which there was tension and conflict between the pastor and several of the members. One of the members leaned over to me before the meeting started and said, "I am going to bring the rain." In the context, this was not a promise of life-giving water, but a commitment to speak about things he felt should be dealt with, even if it caused anger and frustration. He was anticipating verbal battle. In a similar way, God's message to His people—through the prophet Jeremiah—was that battle was coming. And not just a verbal battle; there would be very physical destruction at the hands of the Babylonians. The people of Judah had repeatedly broken their covenant with God and had refused to turn back to Him. Therefore, much like the Canaanites (and Adam and Eve in Genesis 3), they had to be removed from their place of complacency as punishment for their unfaithfulness.

Thankfully, however, Jeremiah's call did not end with judgment. Indeed, God's message never does. Throughout the Bible, judgment is always a means toward salvation. The message of Jeremiah holds true to this pattern. After the destruction there was the promise of hope. The last pair of words in verse 10, **to build and to plant**, reflect this hope. Even in the midst of judgment, when all seemed lost, God would be working to restore His people.

It often seems the darkest hour is just before dawn. We love stories that follow this classic pattern, when events descend

into seeming hopelessness only for the good to triumph when all seems lost. We see this pattern in one of my favorite scenes in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy. In the second film, *The Two Towers*, the people of Rohan are trapped in the fortress of Helm's Deep and all seems lost. They have fought hard and many have died. Defeat and death seem certain. The king of Rohan, near despair, wonders, "What can men do against such reckless hate?" Despite the dire outlook, one of the heroes of the story encourages the king to make one last stand against the encroaching enemy. The king agrees and they ride forth to die in the battle against evil. Just at that point, when defeat seems certain, the sun crests the hill and reinforcements top the ridge and ride to the king's aid. Evil is vanquished; the day is saved.

In a way, this was the hope of Jeremiah too. The battle would come. Many would die. Still, it would not be the end. God would crest the hill in all of His glory and rebuild and replant. In the end, good would triumph because God will triumph. While Jeremiah must preach the news of the coming judgment, his message remained a point of hope because judgment is not the end. Salvation and restoration will come to those who remain faithful.

## **A CLOSER LOOK**

### *Conflict*

**W**e tend to think all conflict is bad. Conflict is certainly uncomfortable, so it can be tempting to avoid it. Jeremiah gives us reassurance that conflict and suffering are not outside the realm of God's control and plan. The Bible uses a few other metaphors for the process of conflict, too, such as the pruning of food-producing plants and the refining of metals. While these times of judgment and correction are not pleasant experiences, we can take hope that standing up for God's truth is right, no matter the cost. Jeremiah experienced the truth of suffering and judgment for doing the right thing. While he did not enjoy it, he did not give up. As dark as the judgment in Jeremiah can be, there is hope that this judgment, in and of itself, is an act of grace and prepares us for greater blessing through restored fellowship with God.

## JEREMIAH'S VISIONS

After Jeremiah was commissioned to be a prophet, he received two visions from God (Jer. 1:11-16). In both visions, Jeremiah was shown a common item that represented an idea or event. The first vision Jeremiah saw was the **branch of an almond tree**. There's a fun little word play in the Hebrew here. When Jeremiah told God what he was staring at, he used the word *šaqed*, which is translated as "almond tree." God replied that He was *šoqed*, which means "watching" (v. 12). In other words, God would make certain His Word came to pass. As with the mission of Jeremiah, this promise had both a fearful and encouraging element to it. On the one hand, God's pronouncements of coming punishment would come true. On the other hand, Jeremiah could count on God to keep His promise and not abandon the prophet. God is faithful to keep His Word and Jeremiah would need this encouragement during his long ministry.

The second vision was of a pot with boiling liquid tipping from the north to release its scalding contents on the south—a metaphor for the fact judgment would come from the north. Judah was a land bridge between Egypt to their south and Mesopotamia to their north. To the west of the country was the Mediterranean Sea and to the east was a desert. The only direction that an attack would come from, then, was from the north or the south. In this case, the threat was from the Babylonians and their allies who would head along the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, then descend southwards to invade Judah. Like the burning liquid, they would come from the north and conquer all of the cities of Judah, including Jerusalem. The land of Judah would be destroyed, reduced to a territory under foreign control. This had to be a terrible prophecy for Jeremiah who loved his people and country!

With these prophecies clearly in his mind, Jeremiah was reminded why the predicted disasters must come (v. 16): the people repeatedly had been unfaithful to the covenant with God. Let's clarify what this means. When we think of a covenant, we tend to think in terms of a contract, an agreement such as the one we make with a credit card company or a contractor working on our house. In a contract, both parties have certain obligations; when those obligations are not met, penalties apply. While sometimes those penalties can be serious, they are not usually personal, and they are not a matter of life and death. A broken biblical covenant, however, is much more than that. It is not just a matter of obligations not being met; it is a broken relationship. God's people had promised to trust Him and worship Him alone.

## THEOLOGICAL THEMES IN JEREMIAH

*Jeremiah identified four areas in which God is active:*

1. *God is active in the lives of individuals.*
2. *God is active in the lives of His covenant people.*
3. *God is active in the history of nations.*
4. *God is active in His creation.*

*How did Jeremiah see God acting in each of these four areas?*

1.

2.

3.

4.

*How do we see God acting in these areas today?*

1.

2.

3.

4.

However, the Judeans' worship of other gods and idols, and their rejection of the Lord, was a complete breach of trust, akin to the betrayal of one spouse by the other spouse having an affair. Getting over such infidelity is difficult and takes some serious work. So, too, is the betrayal of the people by worshiping other gods in the Lord's eyes, and therefore in the eyes of Jeremiah as well.

## A CONCLUDING WARNING AND ENCOURAGEMENT

At the end of chapter one, God reaffirmed His call of Jeremiah with a warning and an encouragement (vv. 17-19). In these verses, Jeremiah was reminded that he did not have a choice when it came to relaying God's message to the people; instead, he had a call to action. God recognized again that Jeremiah was likely afraid of the people and how they would respond to the prophet's message. Yet God told Jeremiah the Lord was the One Jeremiah should really fear. Jeremiah would face trouble and backlash for his message, but God would make him like an impenetrable fort. No one would be able to overcome him. However, should Jeremiah fear the people more than God, the Lord warned him the end result would be terrible hardship from both sides. If you have a choice between having God on your side or everyone else, choosing God's team is always the better choice. Of course, this is often easier said than done. God can seem distant and slow to act, whereas the attacks of others are readily apparent to our human perspective. In the end, however, like Jeremiah, we are left with a choice to make.

Ultimately, Jesus faced a similar choice, and He chose to submit to the will of God the Father. His decision cost Him everything, but also rewarded Him with everything. Jesus calls us to make a choice, and it is not that different from the decision Jeremiah had to make (Matt. 16:24-26). Will we choose God and seek to follow His instructions no matter the cost? When faced with suffering and persecution, will we fear people more than God? Jeremiah gives us hope, and that hope is fulfilled in Jesus. If we are faithful to God, He will ultimately rescue us. We may not always know how, when, or why things work the way they do, but we can know, as Jeremiah knew, that God is in control and He is worth the ultimate commitment. Whom will we trust and whom will we fear more—God or man?

## A CLOSER LOOK

### *An Unenviable Task— Being a Prophet of God.*

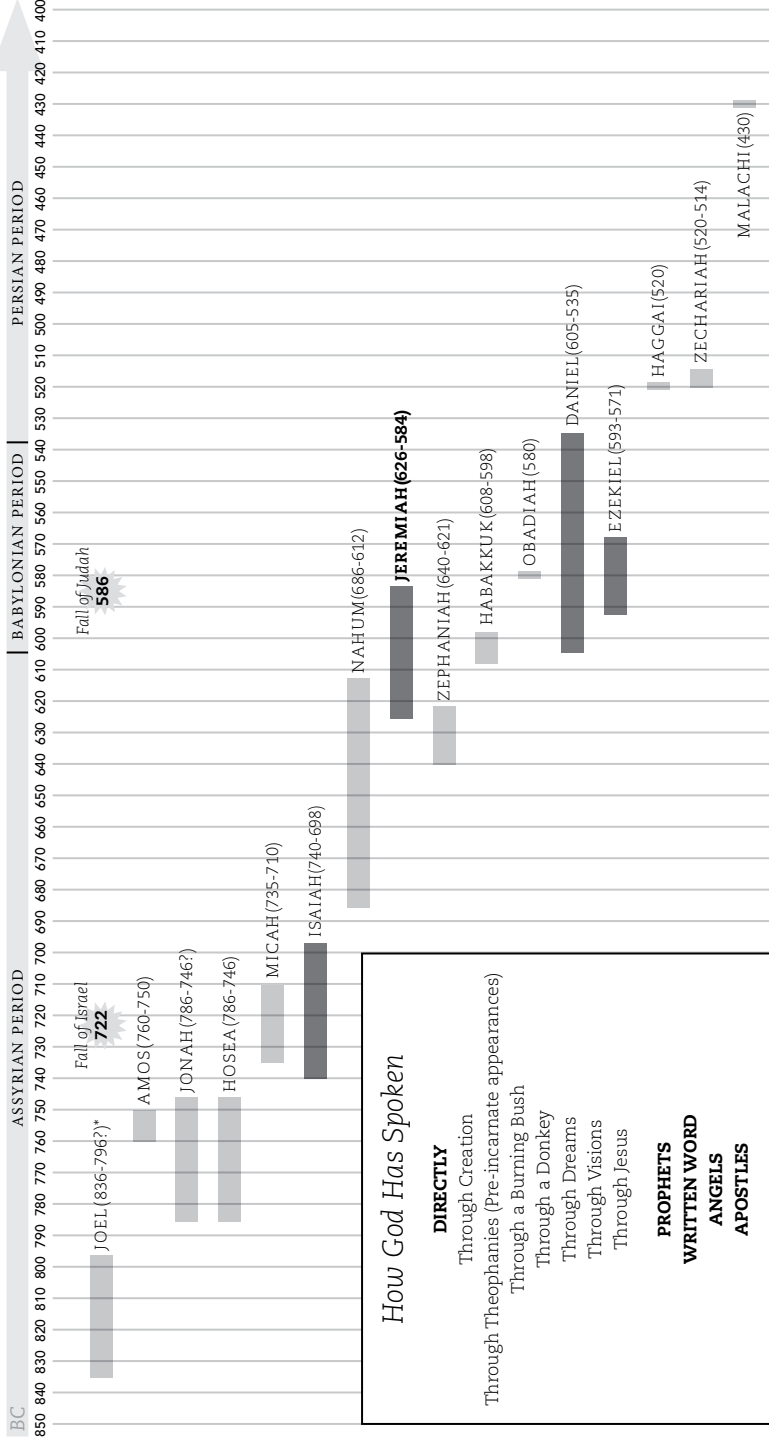
**W**e often think of the prophets as great men of God who were largely unwavering in their commitment to and faith in God. When I was younger, I thought it would be amazing to have the same level of direct communication with God the way the prophets did. I envisioned the respect that must have been given to God's prophets. Upon looking more closely at the stories of the prophets, though, I realized my perceptions were very much off target. You see, the prophets were caught between two worlds. They could see God's perspective on things and shared God's view. On the other hand, they identified with their people and wanted to see them turn and repent so judgment did not befall them. They could feel the pain of God's heart at the betrayal of the people. At the same time, they could understand the confusion of the faithful about how God was dealing with things. They had a God-given passion to declare God's message, but the people did not listen. They stood as representatives of humanity before God and as representatives of God before humanity. They often felt their words fell on deaf ears, but their message would be a testimony to God's children. In short, being a prophet was a difficult and unenviable task. Picture it this way: it was as if they stood inside the door of a building set on fire by God and cried warnings to the residents. Often all they received for their trouble was hate and scorn. However, no one else could see the engulfing flames. Still, the prophet with a heart for God and His people faithfully gave warning.

### **Personal Reflection**

- 1. How have you seen God's plan unfold in your life?*
- 2. Are there patterns of sin in your life that require the complete removal of all temptation so you can begin to rebuild with God's help? When will you make that commitment?*
- 3. What evidence does your life give that you have committed to follow God and stay faithful to His commands and instruction, as found in the Book of Jeremiah and the Bible as a whole?*

1. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Message of Jeremiah in The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 55-56.

# Ministry of the Prophets



## How God Has Spoken

### DIRECTLY

- Through Creation
- Through Theophanies (Pre-incarnate appearances)
- Through a Burning Bush
- Through a Donkey
- Through Dreams
- Through Visions
- Through Jesus

### PROPHETS

### WRITTEN WORD

### ANGELS

### APOSTLES

\* OPTIONAL DATES FOR THE MINISTRY OF JOEL, AS LATE AS 500 BC

**J**eremiah served as a prophet during the final years of the Southern Kingdom (Judah). The Book of Jeremiah provides a record of his sermons, discourses, and prophecies, but also gives us insight into his life and how to faithfully carry out God's kingdom work in a challenging world. Jeremiah continually sought to turn people back to God in spite of their refusal to heed his warnings.

The focus of this study is to understand the heart of the prophet and the need for believers today to faithfully proclaim the truth of the gospel. Much like Jeremiah, we live in a world filled with rebellion against God. We too are called to proclaim God's judgment against sin, pointing to the hope found in Christ. We will examine the life and message of Jeremiah to gain insight into how believers today can be faithful to the call of God in their lives.

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Karen Dockrey wrote the personal learning activities and suggested teaching plans for this study. Karen earned a Master of Divinity degree from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. She is a freelance writer, editor, designer of custom curriculum and Bible-based products, and former LifeWay Christian Resources editor. Karen is the author of more than thirty books including the *Student Bible Dictionary: Revised and Expanded* in both Spanish and English. She and her husband, Bill, are the parents of two grown daughters.

An item related to teaching this Personal Study Guide is the January Bible Study 2020 Leader Guide (ISBN: 978-1-5359-3959-1). The Leader Guide includes commentary, teaching plans, and a redeemable code for a digital download with additional helps.

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