

# Jeremiah: Prophet on the Edge

## Introduction

Here are several reasons for not studying **Jeremiah!** –

- It is a long book, the longest in the Bible apart from **Psalms**.
- Much of it is gloomy – **Jeremiah** has been compared to 'a funeral director at a wedding' (Wright)!
- Much of it makes uncomfortable reading – **Jeremiah** was not looking for approval.
- It is the spiritual and emotional equivalent of a 'big dipper' at Alton Towers!
- **Jeremiah** is not easy to follow – it's a mixture of poetry and prose and events often do not come in the order in which they happened.

But there are many good reasons why we should want to study **Jeremiah!** –

- It teaches us so much about God – His power, His ways of speaking to us, His justice, His love and His grace.
- It is quoted about 40 times in the New Testament (e.g. **Jer 7:11** in **Matt 21:13**).
- In some ways Jesus was like **Jeremiah** – he too was a 'suffering prophet', a “**lamb led to the slaughter**” (**Jer 11:19**).
- It is a brutally honest book – **Jeremiah** allows us to see the depth of his pain, giving us permission to be totally honest with God about ours.
- **Jeremiah's** trust in God's promises for himself and his people was earthed in real life, forged in the grimmest of circumstances.



**Timeline** (Dates are BC = 'Before Christ')

- 640–609 **Josiah** (a great reformer) king of Judah
- 627 **Jeremiah** begins prophesying as a young man
- 609 **Jehoahaz**, Josiah's son, king briefly before exile in Egypt
- 609–597 **Jehoiakim** (a tyrant), another son of Josiah, king
- 597 Babylonians invade and capture Jerusalem; Jehoiakim dies; **Jehoachin**, his son, king briefly before Babylonians take him to Babylon and replace him with another of Josiah's sons, Jehoachin's uncle **Zedekiah** (weak and pliable)
- 587 Babylonians capture Jerusalem for second time and sack it; Zedekiah deposed and taken as captive to Babylon

## Jeremiah's World

**Jeremiah** lived in troubled times – like us. One brutal great power, Assyria, was in decline; Babylon, every bit as nasty, was replacing it. Assyria had already gobbled up the northern Jewish kingdom of Israel. Its smaller neighbour Judah (to the south of Israel on the map) was conquered by Babylon in **Jeremiah's** lifetime.

**Jeremiah** was there when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians and many Jews were taken into exile in Babylon. Another group of Jews later fled to Egypt, taking **Jeremiah** with them as a captive. There he vanishes from our sight – we don't know what then happened to him.



Street in Jerusalem



View near Anathoth, **Jeremiah's** Home

## Exploring Further

John Goldingay's book *Jeremiah for Everyone* is a helpful introduction – good for reading through bit by bit alongside the SML morning talks and Life Group studies.

For going deeper, Chris Wright's *The Message of Jeremiah* in *The Bible Speaks Today* series is excellent.

## Jeremiah's Call (Jer 1:1–10)

**Jeremiah** was young (perhaps in his late teens) when he was called to be a prophet: “**I am only a boy,**” he said (1:6). His culture, like some traditional societies today, respected the wisdom of age and looked down on youth. We tend to do the opposite! *What can we learn from this about God's call to us?*

Many of us suffer from lack of self-esteem. “**Formed... knew... consecrated... appointed**” (1:5) – these verbs express God's estimate of us. *Which speaks to you most powerfully about yourself?*

Every call is individual – **Jeremiah's** was unique to him. God calls each of us to unique tasks, however apparently great or small, whatever our age. *So what is His call to you at present?*

This call may well not be easy; it certainly wasn't for **Jeremiah!** “**Do not be afraid..., for I am with you,**” says God (1:8). *How can we better experience this in practice?*

**Courage is fear that has said its prayers.'**