**Survey Old Testament**

**Book of Jeremiah**

Jeremiah prophesied to the kingdom of Judah during the reigns of kings Josiah (640–609 bc), Jehoahaz (609), Jehoiakim (609–597), Jehoiachin (597) and Zedekiah (597–587). The opening words of the book (1:2) tell us that his ministry began in 627 bc. Jeremiah was a successor to the great prophets of a century or so earlier (Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah), who had preached in the days when there were still two kingdoms, Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern). When Jeremiah first heard God’s word, Assyria was no longer the force it once had been. Nineveh the capital of Assyria, fell to the new power in the region, Babylon, which now represented the new threat to God’s people. Jeremiah pictures it as an army that would come ‘from the land of the north’ (6:22). One of the key words in the book is “backslide” (2:19; 3:6, 8, 11–12, 14, 22; 49:4).

**Jeremiah 1**

1. Jeremiah was the son of a priest, his birthplace was a city specially set aside for priestly families (Jos. 21:18). It was close to Jerusalem, and the priests would have made the short journey to the city as required in order to perform their duties. In the normal course of events, Jeremiah would have exercised the priestly office in due time. This was interrupted, however, by his call to be a prophet. The phrase “The word of the Lord” came to him (2) is a typical way of speaking about a prophet’s call in the OT (Ho. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Ezk. 1:3; Mi. 1:1). It shows well how the prophetic mission was not sought by the person to whom it came. Rather, God chose the person for his purpose. His will, once revealed, required that Jeremiah yield himself wholly to it.
2. Jeremiah’s first response to the call was most reluctant. He was only a young man (the word translated child might better be ‘youth’). The Lord, however, had anticipated his objection; he knew and appointed him before he was born. He had been brought to this hour for this purpose. Yet, of course, he must choose, and must obey, and continue to do so throughout his ministry.
3. Jeremiah was given visions to confirm God’s assurance to him that the call was authentic. The first vision, of an almond tree. The almond tree revealed that God was watching and would carry out His plan. The second, of a boiling pot, shows that the message would be one of judgment.

**Jeremiah 2 An abandoned love**

1. Chapter 2 contains the essence of the prophet’s accusation of Judah. In this opening passage the Lord recalls the earliest days of Israel’s life, when he brought her out of slavery in Egypt and made her his people by a covenant at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19–24). The time in the desert is remembered as one of faithfulness. In that unfruitful place it was essential to trust God for everything. And he had protected her from enemies (Ex. 17:8–13). (Israel had not always been faithful in the desert; note Ex. 32. Jeremiah, however, focuses on the desert as the place of true communion with God, as Hosea had also done; Ho. 2:14–15.)
2. The point of this picture of the faith of a past generation is to contrast it with the corruption of the people of Judah in Jeremiah’s day. The Lord now calls them to account. The covenant involved a commitment on both sides. The sin that had stolen the people’s hearts was nothing less than idolatry.

**Jeremiah 3-4 Can Judah return to God?**

1. This whole section concerns the need for Judah to turn back to the Lord in truth. There is a question, however, namely, whether the Lord can turn again in love to a people that has persistently broken the covenant.
2. In 3:1–5 a comparison is made between the separation of God and Israel and a divorce. The divorce law in Dt. 24:1–4 prohibited a woman who had been divorced and who had married another man from ever returning to her first husband. The Lord now pictures Judah as effectively divorced from him by her actions with other lovers, the gods of Canaan. With the divorce law, therefore, she could never hope that the Lord would take her back. The idea of a divorce is continued in 3:6–10. Here, the former northern kingdom of Israel is held out as an example (2 Ki. 17). By Jeremiah’s time, this was already an established fact of history. Israel’s fate, therefore, is a warning for Judah (2 Ki. 17:18–19)—but she has so far failed to take it to heart.
3. The argument goes farther in 3:11–14. Judah is actually worse than Israel had been. Jeremiah now proclaims repentance, he is making the point that the Lord always responds in mercy to true repentance.
4. Chapter 4 portrays the coming devastation of Judah.

**Jeremiah 5 Images of judgment against Judah**

1. Jeremiah 5:1–31 The theme of this whole chapter is due punishment. Its opening, a search for even one person who seeks the truth, for whose sake the Lord might spare the people, recalls Abraham’s prayer for Sodom (Gn. 18:22–33). The point is, however, that there is none; the corruption of Judah is total. On the other hand, is not Jeremiah himself one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth? We shall see that he will indeed have a special role in saving the people in the end.

**Jeremiah 6 The refining goes on in vain**

1. The chapter returns to the scenes of panic seen in chapter 4. The locations named are not far from Jerusalem. Jerusalem is depicted as a woman (Daughter of Zion), concerned for her beauty but about to be ravished by the attacker. The image is thus similar to 4:30. The words in vs 4–5 are spoken by the attacking Babylonians.
2. The Lord then turns again to depict the power of the approaching army. In v 24 words of anguished fear are put in the mouths of the people, recalling those of Jeremiah himself (4:19). The fear grips them as they realize that there is no escape from the trials ahead.
3. The final words of the chapter are addressed to Jeremiah. The image is based on the refining of silver. The refining process could fail for a variety of reasons and no pure silver be produced. The result would be rejected silver. Israel too, despite all God’s care to help her be a true covenant people, must finally be rejected.

**Jeremiah 7 False worship and false trust**

1. The theme of the so-called ‘temple sermon’ is misguided reliance on external religion. It is central to Jeremiah’s message. Jeremiah was evidently still preaching repentance at this time. The temple was the heart of the life of Judah. Jeremiah takes his stand at one of the gateways to the temple courtyard, through which large numbers of people were streaming (2), probably coming for one of the great feasts of the year (Ex. 23:14–17). The sermon is thus a highly visible challenge to the official religion and the practices of the mass of the people. It was an act of great courage.
2. The temple sermon ends with a word to Jeremiah himself: he is not to pray for the people (16). It was one of the functions of the prophet to intercede (Gn. 20:7; Ex. 32:9–14). The Lord indicates that the time of his patience with this people is at an end. The point is made repeatedly that calls to repent went unheeded, and that this finally led to judgment.

**Jeremiah 8 Weeping for apostate Zion**

1. The section opens with a short reflection on the idea of ‘turning’, ‘returning’ or ‘repenting’. Judah is blamed for consistently turning away from God.
2. The last section of the chapter is in the mouth of Jeremiah, but his words contain a kind of dialogue involving God and the people too. Jeremiah begins by expressing his grief to God, partly because of the pain of the people. The words of v 19 are the people’s, dismayed at the prospect of defeat. God’s promise made to King David (2 Sa. 7:11b–16) had seemed to assure him of God’s presence and of the king’s permanent victory over enemies (Ps. 2). The people believed that they had an unconditional guarantee from God. The last two verses are words of Jeremiah, expressing again his grief for the people.

**Jeremiah 9 Jeremiah Weeps for Sinful Judah**

1. A person used his tongue as an archer would use a bow- it became a weapon to shoot lies. Honesty was not being practiced by those living in Judah. One had to watch his friends, and no one could trust his brothers. God responded to Judah’s deception by seeking to refine and test her because of her sin (6:28–30; Ezek. 22:18–22).
2. Jeremiah began to weep and wail over the land of Judah because the Babylonian invasion and deportation made it desolate. God responded by indicating He would make Jerusalem a heap of ruins that would be inhabited only by wild jackals (10:22; 49:33; 51:37). He asked the wise men of Judah to explain why the land was ruined and laid waste. Before anyone could answer, God stated the obvious. The destruction came because the people had turned from God and had followed the Baals.

**Jeremiah 10 Idolatry Brings Destruction**

1. God addressed the entire house of Israel, which included the Northern Kingdom already in exile, and explained the foolishness of idols. Such idolatrous practices were worthless because the “gods” being honored were created by their worshipers (Isa. 40:18–20). A person would chop down a tree, give the wood to a craftsman who fashioned it to the desired shape. This “god” was then covered with silver and gold. Once the god was made by man it had to be carried to its destination. It was as lifeless as a scarecrow in a melon patch. Certainly such a “god” could not speak to impart knowledge to its followers.

**Jeremiah 11–12 The broken covenant**

1. The language of covenant is more explicit here than anywhere in Jeremiah. This covenant is the covenant made between God and the people at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19–24) and regularly renewed by the reading of its laws (Dt. 31:9–13). These words may have been spoken on the occasion of a covenant renewal, whether Josiah’s (2 Ki. 23:1–3), or a later one.
2. Jeremiah utters a number of prayers, often called his ‘confessions’, which reveal his inner turmoil. As Jeremiah’s family betrayed him, the Lord himself knows of a betrayal by those closest to him. His own house, Judah, has turned violently against him.

**Jeremiah 13 Signs of judgment**

1. Prophets were not only given words to speak, but sometimes signs to perform as well. They are more than a ‘visual aid’, for like the words, they bear the authority of the Lord. The five signs in this chapter are of a belt, wineskins, a flock, a woman in labour, and stubble—all signs of rejection.

**Jeremiah 14-15 Famine, sword and plague**

1. The supply of water could never be taken for granted in ancient Israel. Huge cisterns (3), carved out of rock, would retain water from flash flooding in the rainy seasons. Since water is so fundamental to life, its supply is a basic covenant blessing, and its with-holding a great curse (Dt. 28:12, 24). Whereas droughts in general may be seen simply as natural disasters, within Judah’s covenant relationship with God such a thing must be seen as his judgment on them.
2. Even the intercessory prayer of Moses or Samuel could not stop God’s judgment. Jeremiah’s unpopular task was to preach death, sword, famine and captivity. Nothing could avert the impending disaster.

**Jeremiah 16-17Jeremiah’s restrictions and Judah’s sin**

1. God placed several restrictions on Jeremiah’s personal life that were intended as object lessons for the people.  The first restriction was the command not to marry and raise a family.
2. The second restriction placed on Jeremiah was not to enter a house where a funeral meal was being eaten, or mourn or show sympathy (Ezek. 24:15–24). He was not to display the normal emotion of grief or to offer comfort when someone died.
3. The third restriction placed on Jeremiah was not to enter a house where there was feasting. The purpose of this prohibition was to indicate that times of feasting and happiness would soon cease.

**Jeremiah 18–20 The potter and the broken jar**

1. The Parable of the Potter (chap. 18) demonstrated God’s sovereign dealings with Judah. This was followed by the symbolic breaking of a potter’s jar to show God’s impending judgment (chap. 19). Chapter 20 prepares the reader for the open opposition and specific prophecies of judgment that follow.
2. Jeremiah thought about giving up but reveals to us it was the Word of God inside him that kept him going. Jeremiah 20:9 (NLT): But if I say I’ll never mention the Lord or speak in his name, his word burns in my heart like a fire. It’s like a fire in my bones! I am worn out trying to hold it in! I can’t do it!

**Jeremiah 21–25 Jeremiah’s four specific prophecies of judgment**

1. The message to Zedekiah (Jeremiah 21:1-9). This message was given some time between 588 b.c. and 586 b.c.  Unfortunately for Zedekiah, Jeremiah’s message was one he did not wish to hear. Instead of rescuing Jerusalem, God would turn against her the very weapons of war she had in her hands.
2. The message to Jehoahaz (22:10–12).  Jehoahaz was a son of Josiah, and succeeded Josiah to the throne in 609 b.c. after Josiah was killed by Pharaoh (2 Kings 23:29–33). Jeremiah predicted that Shallum would never return to Jerusalem. Instead, he would die in the place where he had been deported as a captive.
3. The message to Jehoiakim (22:13–23). Because of Jehoiakim’s heavy-handed oppression, the people would not mourn for him at his death. Instead of the lavish funeral normally given a monarch, Jehoiakim, Jeremiah predicted, would have the burial of a donkey. When an animal died in the city it was simply dragged away from the spot where it died and thrown outside the gates. Jehoiakim’s body would be treated with the same contempt. Jehoiakim died in late 598 b.c. as Nebuchadnezzar was advancing on Jerusalem to punish the city for rebellion.
4. The message to Jehoiachin (22:24–30).  Jehoiachin followed his father Jehoiakim to the throne. After a three-month reign Jehoiachin surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar and was deported to Babylon where he lived the rest of his life (52:31–34). God indicated that even if Jehoiachin were as valuable to Him as a signet ring, He would still pull him off because of his sins. A signet ring was most valuable because it was used to impress its owner’s signature or seal on various documents. Even if … Jehoiachin were this important to God (and the clear implication is that he was not), God would rather remove him than allow him to continue sinning. By a series of questions, Jeremiah indicated that God was responsible for Jehoiachin’s judgment.