

The Fall of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 52)



Why so few study Jeremiah? It is too long, too difficult, and too depressing. Why does Jeremiah end with a strange anti-climax of Jer 52? Jer 51:54, 'Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.' is a fitting end to the book. Jer 51 feels like the climax of the story, predicting the exciting reversal of Babylon and Jerusalem's destiny. Jer 52 is a flashback of the dark history of Jerusalem's fall with no direct word from Jeremiah. Jerusalem's fall was already covered in Jer 39 (C.f. 2 Kgs 25:30; 2 Chr 36:11-21). So why the 'anticlimactic' end to Jeremiah's book?

A. The Message of Jeremiah 52

Jer 52 describes the last days of Judah. What happened to (a) Judah's last king; (b) the temple and the furniture; (c) the people of Judah; and (d) shows a sudden glimmer of hope with the release of Jehoiachin.

1. Zedekiah, the last king of Judah (v1-16) Zedekiah became the last king of Judah at the age of 21 in 597BC (2 Kgs 24:17-18). He replaced Jehoiachin, his nephew who lasted only 3 months as king (c.f. 22:24-30). Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon, and the Babylonians took Jerusalem in 588BC in a terrible siege that lasted 18 months and led to a severe famine. The city's wall was breached shortly after (39:3) and Zedekiah escaped through the king's garden with his troops at night to the plains of Arabah. He was caught in Jericho and taken to Riblah where the Babylonians slew his sons before him so that his royal line was forever gone. Then they gouged out his eyes, so Zedekiah could never lead another rebellion but needed help with the most basic things. He was shut up in prison until he died. This is a picture of hell, a place of endless regret without any relief. How different his life would have turned out if he had followed God's prophetic word through Jeremiah! (Jer 38:17-23)
2. Temple and the Buildings (v17-23) They were systematically destroyed. Even to this day, there are no significant remains from this era. The magnificent temple they prided in was demolished, and the upper-middle-class citizens were carried off as slaves except for the poorest to keep the vineyards and farms going for taxation purposes. The temple furniture made of gold, silver, and bronze (1 Kings 7:27-36, 49-59) were taken to Babylon. This includes a gigantic bronze basin ~5m (diameter), ~2.5m (height), and 8cm (thick) stood on the base of 12 bronze oxen. The two large imposing bronze pillars at the entrance of Solomon's Temple were ~8m (height), 4m (circumference), and 8cm (thick) with massive capitals (~2.5m) crowning each pillar with 200 bronze pomegranates (1 Kings 7:20, 42). All of these were broken to pieces and carried away to Babylon just as Jeremiah predicted (27:19-22). Hananiah dramatically predicted the furnishings would be returned in 2 years, but in time Jeremiah's words proved true (52:17-23).
3. The People (v24-30) The exact number of the people taken to Babylon in exile is recorded because the future of Israel depended on this group. There were three deportations - i) 3,023 in 597BC (only adult males counted c.f. 2 Kgs 24:13,16 estimates ~10,000), ii) 832 in 586BC, iii) 745 in 581BC, totalling 4,600. (The first exiles to Babylon in 605BC are not mentioned here, 2 Kings 24:1) Judah's minister of defence, seven of the king's close associates, and sixty leaders were executed, making Judah's recovery harder. Later there were three returns from Babylon - i) 50,000 in 536BC; ii) 5,000 in 458BC; iii) 42,000 in 444BC, totalling 97,000. Among the company of captives was the high priest, Seraiah. Ezra is Seriah's son (Ezra 7:1) and Joshua the high priest after the Exile is Seriah's grandson (Hag 1:1).
4. Release of Jehoiachin (v31-34) The last section shows a glimmer of hope. The previous king Jehoiachin reigned for only 3 months at the age of 18, and spent most of his adult life in prison. After 35 years in prison (597-562 BC), Jehoiachin was treated well by Nebuchadnezzar's son, Evil-Merodach (lit. Man of Marduk). Evil-Merodach reigned only for a short time (562-560BC), and was much less of a tyrant. He treated Jehoiachin kindly. While excavating the Ishtar Gate archaeologists discovered a record of the daily rations given to Jehoiachin. So why end Jeremiah this way?

B. The Purpose of Jeremiah 52

1. The Scripture is not only the record of the words of God but also the works of God in history. The prediction of the disasters and the blessings of God are being fulfilled and unfolding into the future. When God speaks it comes to pass. It is not an empty promise or an empty threat. Jer 52 opens with the words,

'For because of the anger of the LORD this happened in Jerusalem and Judah, till He finally cast them out from His presence.' (v3) The king's eyes were gouged out, his sons were killed, the temple of God was destroyed, and the people of Judah were exiled all according to the word of the Lord (v3). Why? *'Because of the anger of the LORD.'* A sobering truth is that our generation is also facing the anger of God. The unrestrained vices, widespread sexual sins, rampant homosexual activity, and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases are the proof of God's anger resting on a society (Rom 1:18ff).

When we get the prophetic worldview, we are better equipped to understand the book of Revelation. There are 41 quotations from Jeremiah in the NT, and 26 of them in the book of Revelations. The Bible is both God's word and concrete prophetic history, unlike any other religious writings. The love of God would be incomprehensible until He raised a cross on the hill of Golgotha and sent His Son to be put to death on it. God so loved the world that He did something about it. So also, it is with the judgment of God. When God speaks, He means it and history backs up God's word.

27% of the Bible has specific predictions about the future. Jeremiah holds the greatest number of verses predicting one event – 222 times on the fall of Jerusalem. 80% has already come to pass exactly. We can trust the remaining 20% will come to pass just as exactly.

2. There are striking parallels between Jeremiah and Jesus. How often Jesus used Jeremiah's words to express His feelings toward Jerusalem, *'How often I was trying to gather you like a mother hen, but you were not willing. You, den of thieves. Not one stone will be left upon another.'* It took 40 years for Jeremiah's prophecy on Jerusalem's fall to come to pass. Jesus' prophecy concerning the destruction of the temple also came to pass after 40 years. Jeremiah suffered rejection, abuse, and imprisonment few men suffered - *'partaking of the reproaches of Christ,'* (c.f. Heb 11:26; Phil 3:10) In loneliness and inner turmoil Jeremiah cried out to God, *'Why did you forsake Me and deceive me?'* (c.f. Jer 20:14-18)

But in that loneliness and suffering, Jeremiah discovered a personal walk with God. He began to speak of the new covenant, of the heart, not external forms (Jer 31:33-34). He said, *'Can a leopard change its spots?'* (13:23) The core human problem is the ingrained sin in the very fabric of our hearts. Jeremiah saw from a distance a whole new way of relating to God – human hearts changed by the new covenant, Israel's only hope. The old covenant would not do. Jesus the night before His betrayal said, *'This is the cup of the new covenant in My blood...Do this in remembrance of Me.'* (Matt 26:28)

3. Jer 50-51 ends with Babylon's downfall. It is dangerous to end, rejoicing in our enemy's downfall, which distracts us from examining our own lives to make sure we partake in the future God has ordained for His people. When Israel rebelled against God, God's city fell though He is longsuffering. Judgment begins in the house of God and ends with Babylon. But it begins in God's own house, hence the final spotlight in the book of Jeremiah is on God's people, so we examine ourselves rather than our enemies.
4. The book of Jeremiah leads to the next book - the Lamentations of Jeremiah. It is wet with tears and filled with funeral dirges which Jewish people still sing today. We will find it difficult to understand this book because our reality is so removed from it. Jeremiah equips us to deal with disasters of such nature.

C. Why Study Jeremiah?

1. Know God's Ways - We need to know how God acts in history. Moses prayed for this understanding – of the ways of God. The only history we have accompanied by divine authoritative commentary is the history of Israel. Church, like Israel, also has approximately 2000 years of history but without divine commentary. Jeremiah recorded the dark history of Israel, what God said and how He dealt with Israel and provided insights into the ways of the Lord with the nations. He is still the same yesterday, today, and forever!
2. Know God's Heart & Emotions - Jeremiah was a sensitive young man called by God to speak very hard words to disobedient Israel. He often spoke of the anger of God. Jeremiah is known as the 'weeping prophet.' It is often too much weeping, doom and gloom for our 'refined' taste. Jesus's humanity is likened to Jeremiah among all the prophets. (c.f. Matt 16:16) We are told to behold both the goodness and severity of God. God's severity is the most neglected area of Bible study in the church. How relevant is this understanding of God to the church in the last days? Let's ask, 'What is the book of Revelation like?'

3. Receive the 'Burden of the Lord' & Discernment of Prophetic Ministry - God's word was sweet and delightful to Jeremiah at first, but later God's word turned bitter in his stomach when he digested it. His prophetic burden became like fire, and that fire separated Jeremiah out from the crowd. He ate alone in 'indignation' as God's burden became his own burden. It is not an easy yoke, nevertheless, it is essential to the authentic prophetic life. *'Because for Your sake I have borne reproach; shame has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my brothers. And an alien to my mother's children; Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.'* (Ps 69:7-9)

Let's pray our study of Jeremiah will restore to the church the holy fear of God.

4. Cope with Life's Pressures - Life of faith is not all bed of roses. Jeremiah suffered severe depression at times, but he became an example of enduring and overcoming faith amid pressure, persecution, and national collapse. *'My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed, we count them blessed who endure.'* (James 5:10-11) There is no word on the glory of resurrection in Jeremiah, yet he endured and overcame. How much more should we endure and overcome, who has the full gospel given to us?

D. 10 Quotes from Jeremiah

- i. *'See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant.'* (Jer 1:10)
- ii. *Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: 'I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown Israel was holiness to the Lord, The firstfruits of His increase. (Jer 2:1-3)*
- iii. *'For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water. (Jer 2:13)*
- iv. *Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, That I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! Oh, that I had in the wilderness A lodging place for travelers; That I might leave my people, and go from them! For they are all adulterers, An assembly of treacherous men. (Jer 9:1-2)*
- v. *Then the Lord said to me, 'Do not pray for this people, for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence.'* (Jer 14:11-12)
- vi. *Lord, you induced me, and I was persuaded; You are stronger than I, and have prevailed. I am in derision daily; Everyone mocks me. For when I spoke, I cried out; I shouted, 'Violence and plunder!' Because the word of the Lord was made to me A reproach and a derision daily. Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.'* But His word was in my heart like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not. (Jer 20:7-9)
- vii. *Cursed be the day in which I was born! Let the day not be blessed in which my mother bore me! Let the man be cursed Who brought news to my father, saying, 'A male child has been born to you!' Making him very glad. And let that man be like the cities Which the Lord overthrew, and did not relent; Let him hear the cry in the morning and the shouting at noon, because he did not kill me from the womb, That my mother might have been my grave, and her womb always enlarged with me. Why did I come forth from the womb to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame? (Jer 20:14-18)*
- viii. *For who has stood in the counsel of the Lord, and has perceived and heard His word? Who has marked His word and heard it? 'I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in My counsel, 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 23:18, 21-22)*
- ix. *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to*

you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the Lord... (Jer 29:11-14)

- x. *'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— not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: 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. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.'* (Jer 31:31-34)