

05. Jeremiah 1:1 - 4:4



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Jeremiah 1:1-2

The words of Jeremiah (May YHWH lift up?) son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth (4ks NE of Jerusalem) in the land of Benjamin,

Abiathar, the last chief priest of Eli's family, was exiled to his estate at Anathoth for having supported a rival of Solomon (see 1 Kings 2:26).

to whom the word of YHWH came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. [627]

King Josiah began his reign	640
Death of Ashurbanipal of Assyria	628
'Thirteenth year'	627
Reform	622
Killed by Pharaoh Necho	609

Jeremiah 1:3

The word of God came to Jeremiah also in the days of
King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah

Began his reign 609

Battle of Carchemish 605

(Babylonian army victorious over Assyria and Egypt)

Egypt defeats the Babylonians 601

(Chaldaeian, Aramaean, Moabite and Ammonite forces
ravaged Judah (see 2 Kings 24:2).

Died during siege of Jerusalem 598

and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah
of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

Began his reign 597

Zedekiah organises an anti-Babylonian coalition 594

Killed 586

Jeremiah 1:4-10

“The word of YHWH came to me saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I **knew** you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

Then I said, “Ah, Lord YHWH! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” But YHWH said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. (compare **Moses**, Exodus 7:2). Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you (compare Moses, Exodus 3:12) to deliver you, says YHWH.”

Then YHWH put out his hand and touched my mouth (compare Isaiah 6:6-7; Ezekiel 2:8-3:3); and YHWH said to me, “Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

Jeremiah 1:11-12

The word of YHWH came to me, saying, “Jeremiah, what do you see?” And I said, “I see a branch of an almond tree [shaqed] – first to bloom in the Spring.” Then YHWH said to me, “You have seen well, for I am watching over [shoqed] my word to perform it.” (compare Isaiah 55:10-11)



Jeremiah 1:13-15

The word of YHWH came to me a second time, saying, “What do you see?” And I said, “I see a boiling pot, tilted away from the north.” Then YHWH said to me: Out of the north disaster will break out on all the inhabitants of the land. For now I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, says YHWH; and they will come and all of them will set their thrones at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its surrounding walls and against all the cities of Judah (deciding their fate).



Jeremiah 1:16-19

I will utter my judgments against them, for all their wickedness in forsaking me; they have made offerings to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands (unfaithful to the covenant).

But you, gird up your loins; stand up and tell them everything that I command you. Do not break down before them (see 1:8), or I will break you before them. I for my part have made you today a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall, against the whole land – against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land.

They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you (see 1:3), says YHWH, to deliver you.

Jeremiah 2:1 – 4:4 Accusation and call to repent

Jeremiah 2:1-2

The word of YHWH came to me, saying:

Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says YHWH:

I have remembered (so expect action!)

the covenant love [ḥesed] of your youth, your love as a bride,

how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.

Hosea 2:14-20

'I will now allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her ... There she shall respond as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. On that day, says YHWH, you will call me, "My husband ... I will make for you a covenant on that day ... and I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in covenant love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know YHWH.

Jeremiah 2:3-5

Israel was **holy** to YHWH, the first fruits of his harvest.

All who ate of it were held guilty; disaster came upon them, says YHWH.

Hosea 9:10

Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel.

Like the first fruit on the fig tree, in its first season,

I saw your ancestors.

But they came to Baal-peor,

and consecrated themselves to a thing of shame,

and became detestable like the thing they loved.

Hear the word of YHWH, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. Thus says YHWH:

What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves?

Jeremiah 2:6-7

They did not say, “Where is YHWH
who brought us up from the land of Egypt,
who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits,
in a land of drought and deep darkness,
in a land that no one passes through, where no one lives?”

I brought you into a plentiful land
to eat its fruits and its good things.
But when you entered you defiled my land,
and made my heritage an abomination.

Jeremiah 2:8

The priests did not say, “Where is YHWH?”

‘Of what use to me is frankincense that comes from Sheba,
or sweet cane from a distant land?

Your burnt offerings are not acceptable,
nor are your sacrifices pleasing to me’ (Jeremiah 6:20; see 7:21-22; 14:12)

Those who handle the law did not know me.

The rulers transgressed against me.

The prophets prophesied by Baal.

Jeremiah also has a lot to say about so-called prophets who do not listen to God and so do not proclaim God’s word (see, for example, Jeremiah 5:13, 31; 6:13; 14:13-16; 23:14-40; 27:16; 29:8-9).

They all went after things that do not profit.

Jeremiah 2:9-12

Therefore once more I accuse you, says YHWH,
and I accuse your children's children.

Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look,
send to Kedar and examine with care;
see if there has ever been such a thing.



Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods?

But my people have changed their glory
for something that does not profit.

Be appalled, O heavens, at this,

be shocked, be utterly desolate, says YHWH,

Jeremiah 2:13

My people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water,



and dug out cisterns for themselves,
cracked cisterns that can hold no water.



The authors responsible for the Jeremiah scroll saw infidelity to an exclusive covenant with YHWH and failure to follow YHWH's revealed will as the main reason for what they understood to be YHWH's abandoning Jerusalem to destruction, and its leaders to exile.

They found in Jeremiah a prophet who confronted the leaders and the people in the years leading up to these terrible events, and they are preserving Jeremiah's words in the hope that the people will learn their lesson so that Judah will not be destroyed again.

This is explained by the times in which Jeremiah ministered. The sin of Judah that brought down God's punishment is expressed succinctly by Jeremiah:

'My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water' (Jeremiah 2:13).

'I YHWH test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their deeds' (Jeremiah 17:10).

Jeremiah 2:14-16

Is Israel a captive-slave? Is he a house-born slave?

Why then has he become plunder?

The lions have roared against him, they have roared loudly.

They have made his land a waste;

his cities are in ruins, without inhabitant.

Even the people of Memphis and Tahpanhes

have broken the crown of your head.

(Necho & Josiah 609)

Israel was a free nation, liberated by YHWH. The enslavement they experience is the consequence of the choices they have made. Memphis was the capital of lower Egypt, and Tahpanhes was a border fortress east of the Nile delta.



Jeremiah 2:17-19

Have you not brought this upon yourself
by forsaking YHWH your God,
while he led you in the way?

What then do you gain by going to Egypt,
to drink the waters of the Nile?

Or what do you gain by going to Assyria,
to drink the waters of the Euphrates?

Your wickedness will punish you,
and your apostasies will convict you.

Know and see that it is evil and bitter
for you to forsake YHWH your God;
the **fear of me** is not in you,
says the Lord YHWH of hosts.

Jeremiah 2:20-21

For long ago you broke your **yoke** and burst your bonds,
and you said, “I will not serve!”

On every high hill and under every green tree
you sprawled and played the whore.

Yet I planted you as a choice **vine**, from the purest stock.
How then did you turn degenerate and become a wild vine?



Jeremiah 2:22-24

Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap,
the stain of your guilt is still before me, says the Lord YHWH.
How can you say, “I am not defiled, I have not gone after the Baals”?
Look at your way in the valley; know what you have done –
a restive young camel interlacing her tracks,
a wild ass at home in the wilderness, in her heat sniffing the wind!
Who can restrain her lust?
None who seek her need weary themselves;
in her month they will find her.



Jeremiah 2:25-28

Stop before your sandals are worn out,
and your throat parched with thirst.

But you said, “It is hopeless, for I love strangers,
and after them I will go.”

As a thief is shamed when caught,
so the house of Israel shall be shamed –
they, their kings, their officials, their priests, and their prophets,
who say to a tree, “You are my father,”
and to a stone, “You gave me birth.”

For they have turned their backs to me, and not their faces.

But in the time of their trouble they say, “Come and save us!”

Where are your gods that you made for yourself?

Let them come, if they can save you, in your time of trouble;
for you have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah.

Jeremiah 2:29-32

Why do you complain against me?

You have all rebelled against me, says YHWH.

In vain I have struck down your children;
they accepted no correction.

Your own sword devoured your prophets
like a ravaging lion.

And you, O generation, behold the word of YHWH!

Have I been a wilderness to Israel,
or a land of thick darkness?

Why then do my people say, “We are free,
we will come to you no more”?

Can a girl forget her ornaments,
or a bride her attire?

Yet my people have forgotten me,
days without number.

Jeremiah 2:33-37

How well you direct your course to seek lovers!

So that even to wicked women you have taught your ways.

Also on your palms is found the lifeblood of **the innocent poor**,
though you did not catch them breaking in.

Yet in spite of all these things you say, “I am innocent;
surely his anger has turned from me.”

Now I am bringing you to judgment for saying, “I have not sinned.”

How lightly you gad about, changing your ways!

You shall be put to shame by Egypt
as you were put to shame by Assyria.

From there also you will come away with your hands on your head;
for YHWH has rejected those in whom you trust,
and you will not prosper through them.

Jeremiah 3:1 – 4:4 : the call to repentance

Jeremiah 3:1-3

If a man divorces his wife and she goes from him (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

and becomes another man's wife, will he return to her? (see 2:2)

Would not such a land be greatly polluted?

You have played the whore with many lovers;

and would you return to me? says YHWH.

Look up to the bare heights, and see!

Where have you not been lain with?

By the waysides you have sat waiting for lovers,

like a nomad in the wilderness.

You have polluted the land with your whoring and wickedness.

Therefore the showers have been withheld,

and the spring rain has not come;

yet you have the forehead of a whore, you refuse to be ashamed.

Jeremiah 3:4-7

Have you not just now called to me,

“My Father, you are the friend of my youth –
will he be angry forever, will he be indignant to the end?”

This is how you have spoken,

but you have done all the evil that you could.

YHWH said to me **in the days of King Josiah:** (see 25:3; 36:2)

Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel,
how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree,
and played the whore there?

And I thought, “After she has done all this she will return to me”;
but she did not return, (Israel collapsed in 721)

and her false sister Judah saw it. (so more guilty!)

Jeremiah 3:8-11

She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel,
I had sent her away with a decree of divorce;
yet her false sister Judah did not fear,
but she too went and played the whore.
Because she took her whoredom so lightly,
she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree.
Yet for all this her false sister Judah
did not return to me with her whole heart,
but only in pretence, says YHWH.

Then YHWH said to me:

Faithless Israel has shown herself less guilty than false Judah.

Jeremiah 3:12-14

Go and proclaim these words **toward the north**, and say:

Return, faithless **Israel**, says YHWH.

I will not look on you in anger, for I am faithful (**ḥasid**), says YHWH;

I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your guilt,

that you have rebelled against YHWH your God

and scattered your favours among strangers under every green tree,

and have not obeyed my voice, says YHWH.

Return, O faithless children, says YHWH, for I am your master;

I will take you, one from a city and two from a family,

and I will bring you to Zion.

Jeremiah 3:15

I will give you
shepherds after my own heart,
who will feed you
with knowledge
and understanding.



Jeremiah 3:16-18

And when you have multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, says YHWH, they shall no longer say, “The ark of the covenant of YHWH.” It shall not come to mind, or be remembered, or missed; nor shall another one be made. (see legend in 2 Maccabees 2:1-18)

At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of YHWH, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of YHWH in Jerusalem, and they shall no longer stubbornly follow their own evil will.

In those days the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel, and together they shall come from the land of the north to the land that I gave your ancestors for a heritage.

Jeremiah 3:19-22

I thought how I would set you up as sons (and so inheritors),
and give you a pleasant land,
the most beautiful heritage of all the nations.
And I thought you would call me, My Father, אָבִי
and would not turn from following me.

Instead, as a faithless wife leaves her husband,
so you have been faithless to me, O house of Israel, says YHWH

A voice on the bare heights is heard,
the plaintive weeping of Israel's children,
because they have perverted their way,
they have forgotten YHWH their God:
Return, O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness.

Jeremiah 3:22-25

“Here we come to you; for you are YHWH our God.
Truly the hills are a delusion, the orgies on the mountains.
Truly in YHWH our God is the salvation of Israel.

But from our youth the shameful thing has devoured
all for which our ancestors had laboured,
their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters.
Let us lie down in our shame, and let our dishonour cover us;
for we have sinned against YHWH our God, we and our ancestors,
from our youth even to this day;
and we have not obeyed the voice of YHWH our God.”

Jeremiah 4:1-4

If you return, O Israel, says YHWH, if you return to me,
if you remove your abominations from my presence, and do not waver,
and if you swear, “As YHWH lives!”
in truth, in justice, and in uprightness,
then nations shall be blessed by Him, and by Him they shall boast.
For thus says YHWH to the people of Judah
and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem:
Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns.
Circumcise yourselves to YHWH, remove the foreskin of your hearts,
O people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem.

‘Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart’ (Deuteronomy 10:16).

Or else my wrath will go forth like fire,
and burn with no one to quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

William Holladay Vol 1, page 131

‘Jeremiah was preoccupied from the earliest years of his career by the process of “returning”: during the reign of Josiah it was the northerners who were called to “return” from exile, but that return was at the same time a return to union with Judah, return to the cult in Jerusalem, return to the covenant with Yahweh – a return which was to be in the context of Yahweh’s accusation to the north of covenant disloyalty.

‘Jeremiah portrays Yahweh as using a dazzling variety of rhetorical turns in his appeal: he poses the rhetorical question, “What did your fathers find wrong with me?” (2:5), he raises a specific issue in Israelite law between husband and wife as a parallel for the monstrous broken relation between Israel and himself (3:1), he quotes what Israel is supposed to have called him (3:4), he states what his hope from the covenantal relation has been (3:19), and spins out his expectation of the way in which Israel might find her way back to his embrace once more (3:22–25), all this punctuated by appeals to return (3:12, 14, 22) which suggest that his hope for the restoration of his relation to the people might not be altogether forlorn.

‘He portrays Israel as harlotrous (3:2) and complacent (3:4–5) and depicts her attempts to return as superficial (3:22–25). And the rhetoric is crowned by Yahweh’s specific requirements for Israel’s repentance, requirements couched in the form of reminiscences of the Decalogue and of the promise to Abraham (4:1–2). These verses are optimistic, but they will later be overlaid by others that are not so optimistic; Yahweh may hope for a change of heart, but in the long run it will prove an impossible possibility.

‘Both appeal and accusation (especially the latter) were expanded and made more specific when the audience of Yahweh’s words became Judah; after all, Judah was still an intact political entity, whereas the northern kingdom was a thing of the past.

Yahweh (in Jeremiah’s understanding) appealed to Judah by depicting the wilderness period as an ideal time, the time when Israel had been loyal to Yahweh (2:1–3), in contrast to the more recent period of apostasy: here he is in contrast to Ezekiel, who was convinced that Israel was always in rebellion against Yahweh, even in the wilderness (Ezekiel 20:13).’