

12. Jeremiah 26-52



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I. The Life and Times of Jeremiah Part 1

Hebrew Version: Chapters 26-29

Greek Version: 2. Chapters 33-36

II. Series of Oracles

Hebrew Version: Chapters 30-31

Greek Version: 3. Chapters 37-38

III. The Life and Times of Jeremiah Part 2

Hebrew Version: Chapters 32-45 (and 52)

Greek Version: 4. Chapters 39-52

IV. Oracles against the nations

Hebrew Version: Chapters 46-51

Greek Version: 1. Chapters 26-31

‘Greek Jeremiah translates a Hebrew Version prior to the scribal prose expansions.’ (Holladay, Volume 2, page 3).

I. The Life and Times of Jeremiah Part 1

Hebrew Version: Chapters 26-29

Greek Version: Chapters 33-36

Unique among the prophetic scrolls is the interest shown in the life and times of the prophet Jeremiah. This is not surprising when we consider that his ministry coincided with the final years of the Davidic dynasty in Judah. Jeremiah spoke for God during the tragic reigns of Jehoiakim (609-598), and Zedekiah (597-587), years which saw the devastation of Judah and the siege and capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army (598-597), and the second siege and destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 588-587.

Those taken off into exile in Babylon, and those who returned to rebuild the temple and their religion in the small province of Yehud within the vast Persian Empire, wanted to record the extraordinary ministry of this lone prophet who stood out against the leaders, the priests and the court prophets of his generation, and who alone spoke the truth. People wanted not to forget Jeremiah and his inspired words, lest they would see a repeat of the catastrophes he witnessed.



To read these stories is not unlike reading Shakespeare's Richard III. Some of the characteristics of Richard III in the play, and some of the situations dramatised, may well coincide with the life and times of the historical Richard III. But the drama cannot be read as a straight-out historical account. Shakespeare uses his creative artistic talent to present Richard III in a way that enables him to connect with his audience and invite them to examine their own lives. Much the same should be said of the authors of Part I. They no doubt draw on events that have been handed down in the tradition, but the character Jeremiah (as distinct from the Jeremiah of history) is being presented to portray what were considered essential elements of Yahwism to the exiles in Babylon and to the inhabitants of Yehud in the post-exilic period. Different 'schools' stressed different aspects of this, and we will find here, as in other parts of the scroll, unresolved inconsistencies that witness to the debates and arguments that went into the genesis of the text.

I. The Life and Times of Jeremiah Part I (26-29)

Chapter 26. During the reign of Jehoiakim:

Jeremiah's Temple oracle (Chapter 7) and Trial. Acquitted.

Chapter 27. During the reign of Zedekiah.

They must submit to Babylon.

Chapter 28. Debate: Jeremiah and Hananiah

Chapter 29. False prophets are giving false hope to the exiles.

Jeremiah's Letter to the Exiles

Jeremiah 29:4-9 : Letter sent to the Exiles

Thus says YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to YHWH on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. For thus says YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says YHWH.

Jeremiah 29:10-14

For thus says YHWH: Only when Babylon's seventy years (25:11-12) are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place.

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says YHWH, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says YHWH, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says YHWH, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

II. 'To Build and to plant' (1:10) (30-31)

Jeremiah 30:1-3

The word that came to Jeremiah from YHWH:

Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel:

Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you.

For the days are surely coming, says YHWH,

when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah,

and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their ancestors

and they shall take possession of it.

Jeremiah 30:4-7

These are the words that YHWH spoke concerning Israel and Judah:
Thus says YHWH: We have heard a cry of panic, of terror, and no peace.
Ask now, and see, can a man bear a child?
Why then do I see every man with his hands on his loins
like a woman in labour? Why has every face turned pale?
Alas! that day is so great there is none like it;
it is a time of distress for Jacob. Shall he be rescued from it?

Jeremiah 30:8-9 (later insertion)

On that day, says YHWH of hosts, I will break the yoke
from off his neck, and I will burst his bonds,
and strangers shall no more make a servant of him.
But they shall serve YHWH their God
and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.

Jeremiah 30:10-11

Have no fear, my servant Jacob, says YHWH,
and do not be dismayed, O Israel;
I am going to save you from far away, and your offspring
from the land of their captivity.
Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease,
and no one shall make him afraid.
For I am with you, says YHWH, to save you;
I will make an end of all the nations among which I scattered you,
but of you I will not make an end. I will chastise you in just measure,
and I will by no means leave you unpunished (see Exodus 34:7).

Jeremiah 30:12-15

Thus says YHWH: Your hurt is incurable, your wound is grievous.

There is no one to uphold your cause,

no medicine for your wound, no healing for you.

All your lovers have forgotten you; they care nothing for you;

for I have dealt you the blow of an enemy,

the punishment of a merciless foe, because your guilt is great,

because your sins are so numerous.

Why do you cry out over your hurt?

Your pain is incurable. Because your guilt is great,

because your sins are so numerous,

I have done these things to you.

Jeremiah 30:16-17

Therefore all who devour you shall be devoured,
and all your foes, everyone of them, shall go into captivity;
those who plunder you shall be plundered,
and all who prey on you I will make a prey.

I will restore health to you,
and your wounds I will heal, says YHWH,
because they have called you an outcast:
“It is Zion; no one cares for her!”

Jeremiah 30:18-19

Thus says YHWH:

I am going to restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob,
and have compassion on his dwellings;

the city shall be rebuilt upon its mound,
and the citadel set on its rightful site.

Out of them shall come thanksgiving, and the sound of merrymakers.

Jeremiah 30:21-22

Their prince shall be one of their own,

their ruler shall come from their midst;

I will bring him near, and he shall approach me,

for who would otherwise dare to approach me? says YHWH.

And you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

The special love YHWH has for his people.

Jeremiah 31:3

‘I have loved you with an everlasting love;
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.’

Jeremiah 32:8

‘You show steadfast love to the thousandth generation,
but repay the guilt of parents into the laps of their
children after them, O great and mighty God whose
name is YHWH of hosts.’

Jeremiah 31:7-8

For thus says YHWH: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say,
“YHWH has saved his people, the remnant of Israel.”
See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame,
those with child and those in labour;
a great company, they shall return here.

Jeremiah 31:9-10

With weeping they shall come,
with consolations I will lead them back,
I will let them walk by brooks of water,
on a level road in which they shall not stumble;
for I have been a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Hear the word of YHWH, O nations,
and declare in the distant coastlands:
“He who scattered Israel will gather him,
and will keep him as a shepherd tends his flock.”

Jeremiah 31:11-14

YHWH has ransomed Jacob,
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.
They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of YHWH,
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and over the young of the flock and the herd;
their life will become like a watered garden,
and they shall never languish again.

Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.
I will turn their mourning into joy,
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.
I will give the priests their fill of fatness,
and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says YHWH.

Jeremiah 31:15 (see Matthew 2:17-18)

Thus says YHWH:

A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping.

Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted because they are no more.

Jeremiah 31:20

Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he the child I delight in?

As often as I speak against him, I still remember him.

Therefore I am deeply moved for him;

I will surely have mercy on him, says YHWH.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The days are surely coming, says YHWH, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their lord, says YHWH. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says YHWH: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know YHWH,” for they shall all **know me**, from the least of them to the greatest, says YHWH; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

III. The Life and Times of Jeremiah Part 2 (32-45)

Chapter 32. Jerusalem besieged by Babylonian army (588)

Jeremiah buys a field from his cousin in Anathoth
Contract entrusted to **Baruch**

Jeremiah 32:37-39

See, I am going to gather them from all the lands to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation; I will bring them back to this place, and I will settle them in safety.

They shall be my people, and I will be their God.

I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for all time, for their own good and the good of their children after them.

Jeremiah 32:40-41

I will make an everlasting covenant with them, never to draw back from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, so that they may not turn from me.

I will rejoice in doing good to them, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.

Chapter 33. Jeremiah is confined in the Court of the Guard (see 12)
God will use Babylon to punish Jerusalem
But!

Jeremiah 33:6-9

I am going to bring it recovery and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security. I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them; they shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it.

Chapters 34-35 Jeremiah's warnings to King Zedekiah

Rechabites (Ascetics) : example of fidelity

Introduction to 36-45

It is clear from Jeremiah's oracles that he was critical of the political and religious leadership in Jerusalem under King Jehoiakim in the years that preceded the capture of the city by the Babylonian army in 597, and under his brother Zedekiah, the puppet ruler in the years between 597 and 587, when Jerusalem was sacked.

Jeremiah saw the collapse of Jerusalem as divine punishment for the failure of the leaders and the people to obey the Torah. They gave mouth service to Yahwism, but neglected to obey the Torah, and so showed their failure to grasp the essence of what it means to be in a covenant relationship with YHWH.

Clearly there were those in Jerusalem at this time who favoured resistance to Babylon and who favoured throwing in their lot with Egypt. There was also a minority group who favoured submitting to what they saw as inevitable. They were in favour of avoiding resistance to Babylon. They failed to win the day, but the calamitous events of 597 and 587 demonstrated the abysmal failure of the official ideology. Judah was ravaged, Jerusalem and its temple destroyed, and the Promised Land lost. It was this group that favoured submitting to Babylon that came into its own in exile.

The prophet Jeremiah was largely ignored and persecuted during the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, but the pro-Babylonian (or perhaps better, the not-contra Babylonian) party was happy to claim him as one of them, once his oracles were proved true by events.

Chapter 36 During reign of Jehoiakim (605-604)

Jeremiah not free to preach so gets Baruch to write

Jehoiakim has scroll burnt

Chapters 37-44 Jeremiah gets Baruch to write a second scroll
During reign of Zedekiah

1. Jeremiah urges surrender (imprisoned) (in pit)
Destruction. Zedekiah blinded and taken to Babylon
Jeremiah treated well, opted to stay in Jerusalem
2. After 487 events leading to assassination of Gedaliah
by Ishmael 'of the royal family'.
3. Party favouring resistance to Babylon flees to Egypt
taking Jeremiah with them

Chapter 45 Back to 604. Jehoiakim's rejection of YHWH's Word

IV. Oracles against the nations

Introduced 25:15-38 (Greek 32:15-38) (see Presentation II)

Hebrew Version: Chapters 46-51

Greek Version: Chapters 26-31

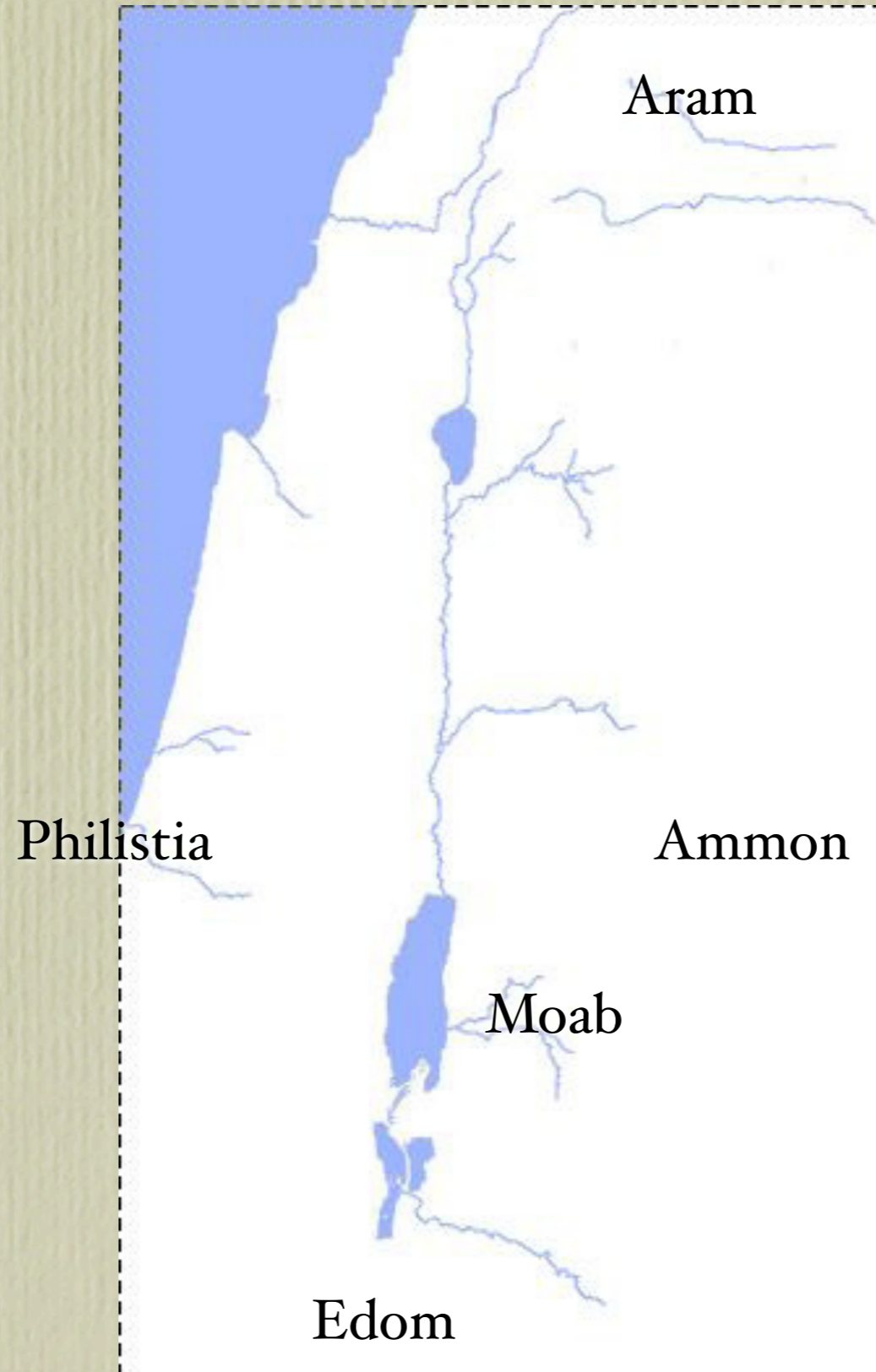
Judah is not the only nation to be punished by God

McKane agrees with those who think that Jeremiah's prophetic mission was directed to Judah, and that he did not utter the oracles against foreign nations. They belong to a later hand.

Oracles against the Nations

Hebrew Version 46-51

- Egypt 46:2-28
- Philistia 47:1-7
- Moab 48:1-47
- Ammon 49:1-6
- Edom 49:7-22
- Aram 49:23-27



Oracles against the Nations

- Kedar 49:28-33
- Elam 49:34-39
- Babylon 50:1 – 51:64



Let us give Jeremiah the last word

Jeremiah 29:4-9 : Letter sent to the Exiles

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Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says YHWH, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says YHWH, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.