

ENDNOTES

1. The Latin title is “Canticles,” from the Vulgate, *canticum canticorum*.
2. The Hebrew syntax is not as clear as the English. The English reader may not see such flexibility in this phrase, but the Hebrew does allow for a variety of uses.
3. Garret argues that the similar formal elements and literary motifs between the Song of Songs and extant Egyptian love poetry supports “that the biblical work was written by someone who was familiar with Egyptian poetry and who lived when the motif’s common to both collections were current and appreciated.” Since Solomon married the daughter of an Egyptian Pharaoh, he had the background to know about this kind of poetry. See Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 1993), 350.
4. Mark Rooker, “The Book of the Song of Songs,” in Eugene Merrill, Mark Rooker, and Michael Grisanti, *The World and the Word* (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 547.
5. For examples of allegorical excess, see John Gill, *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon* (1724; repr.: London: Longmans, 1854), 211–13. Gill interprets the bushy black head of the bridegroom as the headship of Christ over the church and the locks of his hair as the multitude of believers.
6. Norman L. Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 225–27.
7. Although Bible translations often attribute the final portion of 5:1 to the “friends” of the bride (“Eat, O friends, O friends; drink your fill, O lovers” NIV), some have argued that the speaker was God Himself, celebrating the consummation of the marriage and approving of it as “good.” See Daniel J. Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 421.
8. Jack S. Deere, “Song of Songs,” *BKC* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1024.

MAJOR PROPHETS

The Major Prophets in the English Bible include the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Jeremiah’s poetic Lamentations. They are generally designated as “major” because of their **length and prominence** in the history of God’s revelation to Israel and the nations. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel were preaching prophets as well as writing prophets, whereas Daniel was an administrator who received divine revelations from God. He interpreted the dreams of others and recorded his own visions of the future, so it is not surprising that he was recognized as a prophet by Jesus (Matt 24:15).

The Hebrew prophets **spoke for God**. They wrote the books of history (“Former Prophets”) and the books of prophecy (“Latter Prophets”) in the Old Testament. The prophetic books of history are followed in the Hebrew Bible by the prophetic books of preaching and prediction. The two categories of prophetic books form a unit in the middle of the Hebrew Scriptures under the common term “prophets” (Hebrew, *nebi'im*).

THE PROPHETIC OFFICE

The Hebrew term *nabi'* itself designates the prophet as a spokesman for God. The **twofold aspect** of the prophet’s ministry included declaring God’s message for people of their day and foretelling God’s actions in the future. Thus, the prophet was also called a “seer” (Hebrew, *ro'eh*) because he could see future events before they happened.

The Bible depicts the prophet as one who was admitted into the **divine council chambers** where God “reveals His secret” (Amos 3:7 NASB). The Hebrew text of 1 Sam 9:15 pictures God “uncovering the ear” of the prophet (see KJV). By the process of divine inspiration, God revealed what was hidden (2 Sam 7:27) so the prophet perceived what the Lord said (Jer 23:18). This communion with God was essential for God’s truth to be revealed by the process of **prophetic inspiration**. The word of the Lord was communicated to the prophet and mediated to the people by the Holy Spirit with powerful conviction and precise accuracy.

The full picture of prophecy, then, is that it encompasses both a **foretelling** of God’s messages and a **foretelling** of God’s actions. Isaiah, for example, was such a man, addressing himself to his own times as he brought God’s direction to the kings

The Hebrew Prophets in History (9th–5th century BC)

Elijah	875–850	Tishbe	1Kg 17:1–2Kg 2:18	Yahweh, not Baal, is God	1Kg 18:21
Micah	850	Samaria	1Kg 22; 2Ch 18	Judgment on Ahab: proof of prophecy	1Kg 22:28
Elisha	855–800	Abel Meholah	1Kg 19:15–21; 2Kg 2:9–13	God's miraculous power	2Kg 5:15
Jonah	785–746	Gath Hepher	2Kg 14:25; Jonah	God's universal concern	Jnh 4:11
Hosea	785–746	Israel	Hosea	God's unquenchable love	hs 11:8–9
Amos	760–750	Telko	Amos	God's call for justice and righteousness	Am 5:24
Isaiah	740–698	Jerusalem	2Kg 19–20; Isaiah	Hope through repentance and suffering	Is 1:18; 53:4–6
Micah	735–710	Morasheth Gath/Jerusalem	Jr 28:18; Micah	Call for humble mercy and justice	Mc 6:8
Obed	733	Samaria	2Ch 28:9–11	Do not go beyond God's command	2Ch 28:9
Nahum	686–612	Elkosh	Nahum	God's jealousy protects His people	Nah 1:2–3
Zephaniah	646–621	?	Zephaniah	Hope for the humble and righteous	Zph 2:3
Jeremiah	626–584	Anathoth/Jerusalem	2Ch 36:12; Jeremiah	Faithful prophet points to new covenant	Jr 31:33–34
Huldah (the prophetess)	621	Jerusalem	2Kg 22; 2Ch 34	God's book is accurate	2Kg 22:16
Haabakkuk	608–598	?	Haabakkuk	God calls for faithfulness	Hab 2:4
Ezekiel	597–571	Babylon	Ezekiel	Future hope for new community of worship	Ezk 37:12–13
Obadiah	580	Jerusalem	Obadiah	Doom on Edom: to bring God's kingdom	Ob 21
Joel	539–531	Jerusalem	Joel	Call to repent and experience God's Spirit	Jl 2:28–29
Haggai	520	Jerusalem	Ezr 5:1; 6:14; Haggai	The priority of God's house	Hg 2:8–9
Zachariah	520–514	Jerusalem	Ezr 5:1; 6:14; Zachariah	Faithfulness will lead to God's universal rule	Zch 14:9
Malachi	500–450	Jerusalem	Malachi	Repent God and wait for His righteousness	Mal 4:2

MAJOR PROPHETS

of Judah, and also seeing far into the future to explain God's plans for His people in the last days.

THE PROPHETIC MINISTRY

The Hebrew term *nabi* identifies the prophet as a preacher or proclaimer of God's word, as does the Greek term *prophetes*. Biblical prophets were both preachers of truth and predictors of the future. Prophecy has its roots in **history**, but it also extends into the **future**. In other words, the nature of predictive prophecy arises out of the prophet's historical context as the revelation of God points him toward the future as well as the present. Thus, the prophets speak both to their own generation and to future generations as preachers and predictors.

The Old Testament prophets spoke for God. They believed they were sent by God with a specific message. Whereas the priests represented the people to God, the prophets presented God to the people. Thus, the prophets spoke with **divine authority** and divine enabling. Prophets were called by God, accountable to God, and empowered by God. The people of Israel acknowledged them as “holy men of God” who spoke the word of God (2 Pet 1:21).

PROPHETIC LANGUAGE

The prophets delivered their messages in **three basic ways**: verbally, in writing, and through symbolic acts. They preached it, wrote it, or demonstrated it. Their verbal declarations were “the word of the Lord” (Hebrew: *deblhar Yahweh*). The divine origin and inspiration of these declarations were presumed by their nature. God said to Amos (7:14–16 NASB), “Go prophesy to My people . . . Now hear the word of the Lord.”

Written prophecies were especially poignant because they often employed the Hebrew verbal form known as the **prophetic perfect**. The prophets used this form of speech to describe future events as though they were already happening, bringing the listener or reader into a direct experience with the full impact of their predictions.

PROPHETIC PREDICTIONS

One of the most unique features of the true Old Testament prophets was their ability to **predict future events** with perfect accuracy. God Himself predicted Israel's bondage in Egypt and subsequent deliverance (Gen 15:13–18). Moses predicted the Israelites' successful conquest of the Promised Land under Joshua (Deut 31:23). Samuel predicted the failure of Saul's dynasty (1 Sam 15:28). Nathan predicted the consequences of David's sin and its effects on his own family (2 Sam 12:7–12). Elijah predicted the deaths of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kgs 21:19–23). Isaiah predicted the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian invasion of Sennacherib (2 Kgs 19:34–37). Jeremiah predicted the Jews' 70-year captivity in Babylon.

The biblical prophets speak to future events as though they had already occurred. Thus, they foresee things yet to happen as though they were already in the present. The virgin is pregnant (Isa 7:14), the divine child is already born (Isa 9:6), the star of Jacob has already appeared (Num 24:17). Israel has already given into captivity (Isa 49:1). There are

but a few of the hundreds of examples of such language by which the prophet foresees the future and predicts its exact fulfillment with such certainty that he describes it as already having come to pass.

PROPHETIC PATTERN

The prophets were essentially preachers who declared the message of God to their own generation. But their messages also influenced future generations. Hill and Walton observe that the message of the prophets is found in the proclamation of God's word to their contemporary audience, whereas its fulfillment often came later in the unfolding of history they foresaw.¹ In analyzing the pattern of prophetic speech, they suggest four categories of a prophetic oracle:

Indictment	Statement of the Offense
Judgment	Punishment Prescribed
Instruction	Repentant Response
Aftermath	Future Hope

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Isaiah dates his ministry from the reign of king Uzziah (c. 740 BC) into the reign of Hezekiah (c. 680 BC), clearly placing himself in the days of the Assyrian threats against Judah. During his lifetime Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, fell to



Isaiah's Mountain

the Assyrians in 722 BC. The northern tribes were scattered and replaced by Assyrian settlements in the hills of Galilee and Samaria.

By contrast, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel lived during the last days of Judah, the southern kingdom, and witnessed the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 605 BC (Daniel), 597 BC (Ezekiel), and 586 BC (Jeremiah). Within their lifetimes their beloved Jerusalem was conquered, Solomon's temple was destroyed, the royal line of the "house of David" was removed, and the Jews were deported to Babylon.

MESSAGE OF THE MAJOR PROPHETS

The English Bible includes five books of the Major Prophets. Among these, Isaiah and Jeremiah are the longest. They emphasize the preaching of these two great prophets of Judah. Ezekiel and Daniel both include apocalyptic visions of Israel's future and provide hope to the Jewish exiles that God is still on the throne.

- Isaiah: God Is with Us
- Jeremiah: The Babylonians Are Coming
- Lamentations: Jerusalem Is Burning
- Ezekiel: The Glory Will Return
- Daniel: The Messiah Will Come

The messages of the Major Prophets remind us that God holds all nations accountable for their behavior and policies. He alone is the One who sets up and takes down kings (Dan 4:17). He is the sovereign Lord of the universe before whom the nations are but "a drop in a bucket" (Isa 40:15). But He is also the God who gives us hope even in the most difficult times of our lives (Jer 29:11).

For Further Reading

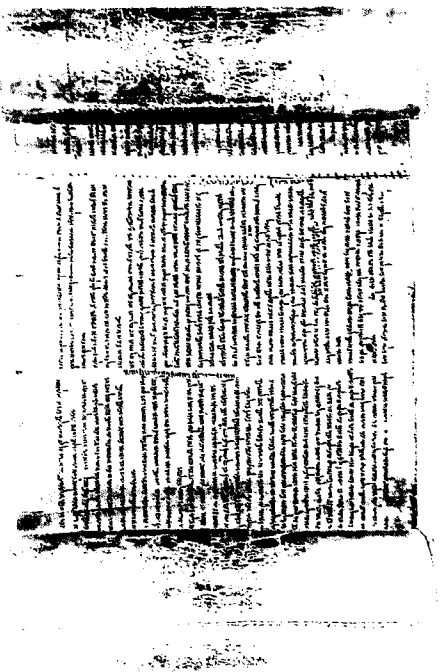
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ENDNOTE

1. Andrew Hill and John Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 509 ff.

ISAIAH God Is with Us

Isaiah stands at the peak of the Old Testament as the **literary genius** of the Hebrew prophets. This amazing book of prophecy includes Isaiah's unique prophecies about Immanuel (chaps. 7–12) and the suffering servant (chaps. 49–53). The book is set in the tumultuous days of the Assyrian and Babylonian threats to Judah's future and the survival of the messianic line of the "house of David." It combines elements of sublime poetry with preached sermons and prose narratives. It includes extended doublets, arch trajectories, and unique palindromes (sentences beginning and ending with the same words), chiasmic parables, and cross alliteration.¹ Thus, Isaiah has often been called the "Shakespeare of Israel" and the "Prince of the Prophets."



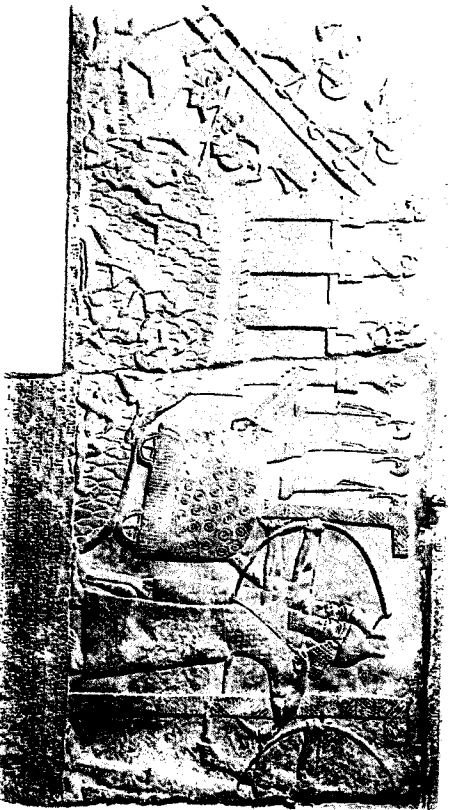
1. The Dead Sea Scrolls. (1) Isaiah found among the Dead Sea

court and gave advice on personal matters and foreign affairs to the kings of Judah (Isa 7:3–4; 37:5–7; 38:1–8; cf. 2 Kings 19–20). Isaiah was married to a prophetess (Isa 8:1) and had at least two children, Shear-Jashub ("A Remnant Shall Return") and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz ("Swift to the Plunder, Swift to the Spoil"). The names of these two sons served as prophetic "signs" illustrating and confirming Isaiah's message (Isa 8:18). Tradition (*The Ascension of Isaiah*) states that the wicked king Manasseh placed Isaiah in a hollow log and sawed it in half, and Heb 11:37 perhaps makes reference to this event.

BACKGROUND

Isaiah ministered in Judah c. 740–686 BC, during a time of great national crisis. The Lord commissioned Isaiah as a prophet in the year of King Uzziah's death after a long and effective reign that brought prosperity and stability to Judah. Isaiah subsequently served during the reigns of **four kings in Judah**—Jotham (750–735 BC), Ahaz (735–715 BC), Hezekiah (715–686 BC), and Manasseh (686–642 BC). Assyria became a major threat to Israel and Judah as they looked to expand their empire westward under the vigorous leadership of Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BC). After several decades of decline and internal problems, the Assyrians eventually established an empire that extended from present-day Iran in the east to Egypt in the west across the Fertile Crescent.

Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus (Aram) formed an alliance in an attempt to resist Assyrian control over Syria-Israel, but when Ahaz king of Judah refused to join their coalition, the **Syro-Ephraimite War** erupted in 734–732 BC (cf. 2 Kings 16; Isaiah 7–8). Pekah and Rezin invaded Judah and marched on Jerusalem, hoping to



Isaiah (in the *Midrash Talmud*) is said to have been the son of Amoz, was a prominent citizen in Jerusalem in the eighth century BC. Jewish tradition in the Talmud (Sota 105b) identifies Isaiah's father as the brother of King Amaziah, making Isaiah a cousin of King Uzziah. Whether this is true or not, Isaiah certainly had access to the royal

of the Holy Spirit. Long-range prophecies occur elsewhere in the Old Testament. These include the rise of Josiah in 1 Kgs 13:1–2, the details concerning the rise of the four world empires and the working out of the 70 sevens in Daniel 7–11, and the future rebuilding of the temple in Ezekiel 40–48. If one can accept Isaiah's ability to prophesy concerning the future Messiah 700 years in advance (Isaiah 53), then there is no reason to doubt Isaiah's ability to prophesy concerning Cyrus 150 years ahead of time.

Conservative scholars have pointed out several **unifying factors** in the whole of Isaiah. The use of the title "Holy One of Israel" appears equally in both "halves" of the book. Jesus quoted from both "halves" attributing both to Isaiah the prophet (John 12:38–40; Luke 4:17–21). Several scholars have pointed out that references to vegetation (plants and trees) and geography (locations and topography) in chaps. 40–66 reflect a Judean, not Babylonian, Jewish author. The reference to enemies at war with Israel in 41:10–13 argues against an exile setting because Israel experienced no wars while they were in exile. Smith comments on several *linguistic connections* between chap. 1 and chaps. 65–66.² Some of these include:

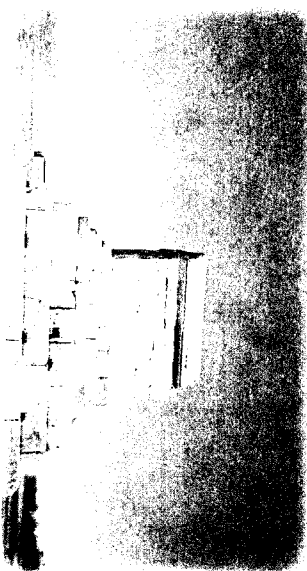
Heaven and Earth	1:2	65:17; 66:1,22
I Have No Pleasure	1:11	66:4
Seek	1:12	65:1
Hear the Word of the Lord	1:11	66:5
The Woman Zion	1:21,26	66:7–13
You Have Chosen	1:29	66:4
Fire Not Quenched	1:31	66:24

Motyer argues for a **single author** who both spoke and wrote his words and then edited them to pass on to his disciples.³ He argues: "There is no external, manuscriptal authority for the separate existence at any time for three supposed divisions of Isaiah."⁴ He concludes: "The whole book is a huge mosaic in which totally pre-exilic material is made to serve pre-exilic, exile, post-exilic and eschatological purposes."⁵ In other words, one prophet, Isaiah himself, spoke of events that would happen in the immediate future (deliverance from Assyria), the distant future (Babylonian captivity), the Messianic era (the Anointed One), and the eschatological future (new heavens and new earth).⁶

Isaiah's literary efforts may rightly be termed the classical period of Hebrew literature. The grandeur of style, the firefulness of energy, and the profusion of forceful phrases on words, vivid descriptions, and dramatic rhetorical touches undoubtedly make him the "prince of prophets."

The canonical witness of the New Testament confirms Isaiah's authorship of all parts of the book. Relevant New Testament references include Matt. 8:5 quoting Isa. 40:3; Luke 4:21 quoting Isa. 61:1–2; Luke 4:17 (introducing a quote of Isa. 61:1–2); Acts 8:26–35 quoting Isa. 53:7–8; and Acts 13:36 (introducing a quote of Isa. 53:1). Acts 8:26–35 and Acts 13:36 (introducing a quote of Isa. 53:1). These New Testament texts attribute Isaianic authorship

to passages critical scholars attribute to Second and Third Isaiah. Beyond just using the name Isaiah as a conventional form of citation, various expressions refer to Isaiah's personal involvement in the writing and prophesying of the book's contents. There are citations stating, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you" (Matt. 15:7 NIV; Mark 7:6 NIV) and, "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet" (Acts 28:25 NIV). No ancient manuscript evidence supports the division of Isaiah 1–39 and 40–66 as separate works. The oldest complete Hebrew text, the Great Isaiah Scroll from Qumran (1QIsa^a), contains no break in the text between chaps. 39 and 40.



The tomb of Cyrus the Great.

Outline

- I. Prophecies Against Judah (Isaiah 1–6)
 - A. Coming Judgment and Blessing (Isaiah 1–5)
 - B. Call of the Prophet (Isaiah 6)
- II. Promise of Immanuel (Isaiah 7–12)
- III. Prophecies Against the Nations (Isaiah 13–23)
- IV. Predictions of Judgment and Blessing (Isaiah 24–27)
- V. Perilous Woes (Isaiah 28–33)
- VI. Promise of Destruction and Triumph (Isaiah 34–35)
- VII. Prayers for Deliverance (Isaiah 36–39)
- VIII. Prophetic Consolation (Isaiah 40–66)
 - A. The Promise of Peace (Isaiah 40–48)
 - B. Provision of Peace (Isaiah 49–57)
 - C. Program of Peace (Isaiah 58–66)

MESSAGE

I. Prophecies Against Judah (Isaiah 1–6)

The book of Isaiah opens with five sermons that we might call "the best of Isaiah." They serve as a **thematic introduction** to the book. The opening chapters present

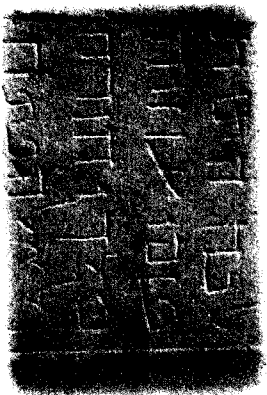
in abbreviated form the message of Isaiah as a whole—the Lord will send a purging judgment against His sinful people, producing a righteous remnant that will enjoy the future blessings of salvation and restoration. Standing over this section and the entire book is Isaiah's vision of the holiness of the Lord in chap. 6. Isaiah recognized both his own sinfulness and that of his people and accepted his commission to become the Lord's messenger of judgment until the cities of Israel and Judah were ruined and destroyed. It seems strange that Isaiah's call as a prophet in Isaiah 6 does not appear as the opening episode in the book, so there is a question if this is his first call or a recommitment to a new phase of ministry. Clearly these early messages in the book establish the guilt of Israel and Judah that provides the larger context of Isaiah's vision (6:5: "I . . . live among a people of unclean lips"). The holiness of the Lord and the sinfulness of His people stand in stark contrast to each other.

A. Coming Judgment and Blessing (Isaiah 1–5)

The opening message in Isaiah 1 is both a **covenant lawsuit** establishing Israel's guilt and a call to repentance exhorting the people to change their sinful ways. As an unfaithful covenant partner, the Lord's people were like a rebellious child deserving judgment (1:3–4; cf. Deut 21:18–21). Consequently the covenant curse of an invading enemy army left Judah bloody and battered (1:5–6). Even Judah's religious rituals become an offense to God. Yet, if they would repent and become both willing and obedient, they could be forgiven. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they will be as white as snow" (1:18). The people had a choice either to obey God and "eat" (*akal*) the best of the land or to persist in their rebellion and be "devoured" (*zakal*) by the sword in judgment (1:19–20).

In the second sermon, Isaiah foresees God coming to Zion to teach His ways to all people and to end all wars in the eschatological future of the "last days" (2:2–4). He will judge the proud so that God alone is exalted on the coming Day of the Lord (2:12). In the third sermon Isaiah indicts Judah's leaders and suggests that they will be replaced by people who act like unstable youths (3:3–4). Then he denounced the "daughters of Zion" because of their pride and materialism (2:19–20). Isaiah predicts the coming of the messianic Branch of the David and the gathering of every one who is holy to Jerusalem (4:2–6).

Isaiah sings the *Song of the Vineyard*.¹⁰ The harvest was a time of great celebration and the *song of the vineyard* reflects a love song (cf. Song 1:2–14; 3:15; 5:1, 20–12), and the allegory between the Lord and Israel is fractured by sin. The Lord's rejection made it possible for Israel to be a fruitful vineyard (cf. Is. 5:6–8–16), but



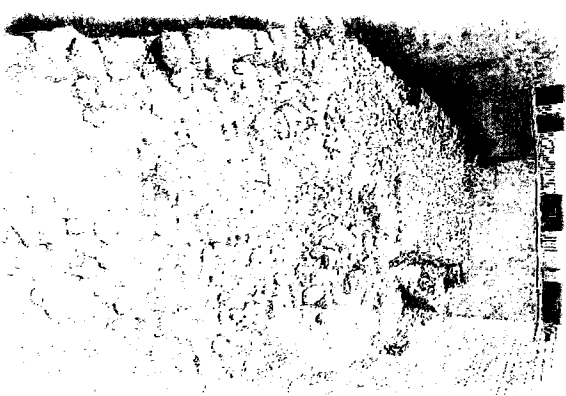
The restoration fragment inscription discovered in the 19th century of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, with the structure of the original inscription on the right.

Israel as a disobedient people gave the Lord the exact opposite of what He expected in return for His priceless investment. Instead of good grapes (*amurim*), they were worthless wild grapes (*beʿasim*) (5:4). Instead of standing up for doing justice (*mispat*), they promoted "bloodshed" (*misphach*); and instead of "righteousness" (*tsedeqah*), there was an outcry (*seʿaqah*) of distress because of the violence and oppression (5:7). The five "woes" that follow announced the Lord's judgment on the vineyard for its many sins. Jesus used similar imagery in Mat 21:33–42.

B. Call of the Prophet (Isaiah 6)

In chap. 6 Isaiah recounts his **call to the prophetic ministry** undoubtedly many years prior to this writing, although his use of imperfect verbs indicates that he is describing the scene as it happened. He dates his call from the year that King Uzziah died (740 BC). Since Isaiah introduces himself as prophesying during the reign of Uzziah, some view this as a recommitment to prepare him for a difficult ministry in the reign of Ahaz. The **death of king Uzziah** also left Isaiah concerned about the future of the kingdom. Thus, the vision of Yahweh seated on the throne of heaven reassured him that God was still in control of the destiny of His people. The Hebrew text makes clear that Isaiah saw the Lord (*Adonay*) seated on the throne and that it was the LORD (*Yahweh*) the seraphs ("burning ones") worshipped. This substantiates that *Adonay* and *Yahweh* are One and the same. The triple declaration: Holy (*qadosh*) reflected the glory (*kabod*) of God.

Isaiah's confrontation with God (vv. 1–4) led to his confession: "Woe is me" (v. 5), but this is quickly followed by his consecration (vv. 6–7), call (v. 6), and commission (vv. 9–13). Isaiah recognized that he was "unclean" because he had seen the holy King, the Lord of hosts (*tsamtek Yehowah sebatoh*). This title appears in the book of Isaiah to identify the "King of glory" (also in Ps. 24:10). The vision of God radically changed Isaiah. When the Lord asked: "Who will go for Us?" Isaiah replied: "Here I am. Send me" (v. 8). Newly cleansed and commissioned, Isaiah launches on his prophetic ministry even though his audience in the time of Ahaz would close their ears to the messages he would deliver (6:9–10).



The fragments of the Great Scroll in Jerusalem attributed to the huddling activities of Zerubbabel as he prepared his step for revolt against the Assyrians.

II. Promise of Immanuel (Isaiah 7–12)

Ahaz ruled over Judah from 735 to 715 BC, and his refusal to trust in the Lord during the **Syro-Ephraimite** crisis early in his reign had disastrous consequences. In the years 735–732 BC, Syria and Israel formed a military alliance against Assyria as Tiglath-pileser III looked westward to expand his empire. Ahaz wisely refused to join the coalition, recognizing that resistance to Assyria was doomed to failure. In retaliation the armies of Syria and Israel marched south, attempting to force Judah to join their alliance and to replace Ahaz with a king named Tabeel who would support them as an ally. Isaiah encouraged Ahaz to trust the Lord and assured the king that his enemies would not succeed (7:4–5). The prophet even encouraged the king to ask the Lord for a confirming “sign” to strengthen his faith, but the king piously refused, stating that he would not put the Lord to the test.

Because of Ahaz’s unbelief, the Lord took the initiative to give a “sign” that portended both salvation and judgment (7:14). The birth of a son named **Immanuel** (“God with us”) would demonstrate God’s presence with His people and His commitment to preserve and protect the house of David. Before this child was old enough to know the difference between right and wrong, the kings of Syria and Israel would be destroyed. However, the child would also serve as a reminder of the foolishness of Ahaz’s unbelief. Because Ahaz had appealed to Assyria for military assistance against Syria and Israel rather than trusting in the Lord, the Assyrians would eventually invade the land of Judah. The **identity** of the promised child in 7:14 is a source of major controversy. While some have suggested it refers to the birth of a child at that time, the extended prophecy points beyond the immediate context to a divine child who is identified in 9:6 as the “Mighty God” (*‘el gibbor*). The ultimate fulfillment of the Immanuel prophecy was the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, who was literally God incarnate and who would preserve the line of David forever (Matt 1:21–23).⁷ Smith notes: “This ruler was not Ahaz’s son or Isaiah’s son, but an unknown future king specifically identified in 9:1–7 in clear messianic terms.”⁸

The invasion of foreign armies on the immediate horizon would fail, Isaiah promised. “For God is with us” (8:10). The prophet goes on to predict that “a great light” will shine in Galilee (9:2), a verse quoted in Matt 4:16 and Luke 1:79 in relation to

Hebrew Highlight

Believe. Hebrew *‘aman* (*‘aman*). The Immanuel Prophecy (Isa 7:10–14) was prompted by Ahaz’s refusal to “believe,” “stand firm,” or have “faith” in God. *Aman* is related to *‘emeth* (truth) and *‘emunah* (faithfulness). It is the basis of the English “amen” (Neh 8:6). Passive reflexive forms can mean endure, be faithful, or reliable. Participles imply faithful, trustworthy, assured, or certain. Causative verbs signify believe, trust, or rely. Isaiah’s challenge to the worried king to “stand firm in your faith” (7:9) emphasizes the significance of true faith or belief as a confident assurance in God’s promises.

Jesus’ Galilean ministry. Then he announces that a son will be born, given by God Himself (9:6). The **fourfold title** makes clear that this is not a typical human child. He is described as “Wonderful Counselor” (*Pele’ yofets*), “Mighty God” (*‘el gibbor*), “Everlasting Father” (*‘abi ‘ad*), “Prince of Peace” (*sar shalom*). His government is also described in a fourfold manner: (1) peace without end, (2) throne of David, (3) justice and righteousness, (4) reign forever. Again Smith notes these messianic promises, descriptive parameters, titles, and time frames rule out any possible human rulers.⁹ God Himself will come in the future to rule the world.

Ahaz epitomized the failed leadership of the past, but the future Messiah would fulfill every ideal the Lord had designed for the Davidic rulers. He would establish His throne with justice and righteousness and deliver His people from their oppressors (9:2–6). He would rule in the power of the Lord, and His kingdom would last forever. Unlike the arrogant Assyrian rulers who are depleted as lofty trees, Messiah would emerge as a tiny **Branch** from the stump of the felled Davidic dynasty (11:1–2). From this humble origin, His kingdom would extend over the nations and bring peace and harmony to the earth, reversing even the effects of the fall and the curse upon humanity and the creation (11:6–11). “In that day” (in the future) the Lord’s people will sing for joy because of the blessings of His reign over them (12:1–6). This hymn of thanksgiving ends with the assurance that the “Holy One of Israel is among you” (12:6), again emphasizing the Immanuel (“God is with us”) connection throughout these chapters.

III. Prophecies Against the Nations (Isaiah 13–23)

The Lord’s judgment would extend beyond Israel and Judah to include all of the nations and people surrounding them. Isaiah’s oracles against the **nations** include messages directed against:

- Babylon (13:1–14:23)
- Assyria (14:24–27)
- Philistia (14:28–32)
- Moab (15:1–16:14)
- Syria and Israel (17:1–14)
- Cush and Egypt (18:1–20:6)
- Babylon (21:1–10)
- Dumnah (21:11–12)
- Arabia (21:13–17)
- Jerusalem (22:1–25)
- Tyre (23:1–18)

The Lord would judge both the great superpowers and the smaller nation-states that were struggling for survival just like Israel and Judah. These oracles focused primarily on other nations (*goyim*, “Gentiles”) but were delivered for the benefit of God’s people. These messages served to assert the Lord’s sovereignty over the nations. Yahweh was not just a nationalistic deity, but the ruler and judge of all peoples. The promise of God’s judgment of Israel’s enemies offered hope for the future and provided assurance.

that the Lord had not abandoned His people. The Lord would reverse Israel's fortunes by punishing her oppressors (14:1–3). The nations that attacked Israel were like the raging waters of the sea, but the Lord would drive them away (17:12–14). When the Lord restores Israel, He will place a Davidic king on the throne who will seek justice and righteousness (16:8). For the more immediate future, these oracles were also a warning against Israel's forming political alliances with these nations that stood under God's judgment.

The Lord would judge the nations for their **excessive pride** (13:11,19; 14:11; 16:6; 17:7–11; 23:9), which caused them to practice evil and to put their trust in idols, wealth, and military prowess. The extreme example of pride in this section is the king of Babylon who boasted that he would ascend into heaven and make himself like the Most High (14:12–15). Instead, the Lord would bring the king of Babylon down to the grave, and the kings of the nations he had slain in battle would rejoice when he joined them in the underworld (14:9–11,15–20). In demonstration of His sovereign power, the Lord would bring down both Babylon and its false gods (13:9; 21:9–10).

Isaiah's oracles against the nations contain two especially **surprising elements**. The first surprise element is the inclusion of messages against Israel and Judah in the context of these oracles dealing with the judgment of their enemies (17:1–11; 22:1–14). Their special status as the Lord's chosen people would not exempt them from judgment. In fact it made them more culpable than the pagan nations around them. The second surprising element is that tucked within these messages of judgment against the nations are grand promises of the inclusion of people from some of these nations in God's glorious future kingdom. The Lord as righteous judge would punish the nations for their sins, but He also had a redemptive concern for these people (19:19–25).

IV. Predictions of Judgment and Blessing (Isaiah 24–27)

Some scholars have called this section “The Little Apocalypse” because of its similarities to the book of Revelation. The previous chapters focus on the historical judgment of the nations surrounding Israel and Judah that were involved in the international conflicts and political intrigues of Isaiah's day, but this portion of Isaiah's message looks forward to the final judgment of all nations and the coming of God's eschatological kingdom to earth on the day of the Lord. The recurring phrase “On that day” (24:21; 25:9; 26:1; 27:1) refers to a future day and reflects the eschatological perspective of this section.

The Lord's final judgment of the wicked will usher in the **eschatological kingdom**, in which the righteous will enjoy a lavish banquet on Mount Zion (25:1–13). The ultimate promise for the righteous is that the Lord will destroy and “swallow up” death itself (25:7 & 8; 26:19). While the hope of a personal resurrection is expressed in earlier times (cf. Job 19:25–26; Ps 16:11), the promise of physical resurrection is clearly stated by Isa 26:19. The Lord promises that the “dead will live” and “their bodies will rise” up out of the dust. Isaiah also promises the future resurrection of the suffering servant (53:10–12), and Ezekiel employs the image of resurrection to depict the future restoration of Israel (Ezekiel 37). Daniel adds to the Old Testament

Pictures of Christ in Isaiah

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Virgin Birth (7:14) | 13. Incarnate God (40:9) |
| 2. Light in Galilee (9:1–2) | 14. Servant of the Lord (42:1–4) |
| 3. Divine Child (9:6) | 15. Redeemer of Israel (44:6) |
| 4. Mighty God (9:6) | 16. Light of the Gentiles (49:6) |
| 5. Wonderful Counselor (9:6) | 17. Suffering Servant (52:13–53:12) |
| 6. Prince of Peace (9:6) | 18. Resurrected Lord (53:10) |
| 7. Branch of Jesse (11:1) | 19. Anointed Messiah (61:1–3) |
| 8. Anointed King (11:2) | 20. Coming Conqueror (66:15–16) |
| 9. Banner of the Nations (11:10) | |
| 10. Holy One of Israel (12:6) | |
| 11. Angel of the Lord (37:36) | |
| 12. A Forerunner Prepares His Way (40:3) | |

understanding of resurrection by revealing that there will be resurrection to life for the righteous and resurrection to judgment for the wicked (Dan 12:1–2).

V. Perilous Woes (Isaiah 28–33)

A series of five **woe oracles** (28:1; 29:1,15; 30:1; 31:1) announced the coming destruction of Israel and Judah, and then a final woe (33:1) announces the doom of Assyria. Israel's leaders were drunkards lacking moral and spiritual sense (28:1–13). Since they have dismissed the prophetic calls to trust in God as simplistic baby talk in contrast to their wise military strategies, the Lord will speak to them through the foreign language of the invading Assyrian army that would sweep through their land. The Lord Himself will wage warfare against the city of Jerusalem (29:1–3) to purge the city of its sin. The issue of trust in man versus trust in God once again comes to the forefront (28:16; 31:1–3). Isaiah dismisses the treaties that they think will keep them safe, calling them a covenant with death (28:14).

The woe against Assyria in chap. 33 offered **hope for Israel's future**—the Lord will establish justice by destroying the “destroyer.” The judgment of Assyria prefigures God's judgment of all nations (34:1–7). However, Isaiah warned that the sinners among God's own people should also be terrified because they too would be destroyed by God's fiery judgment (33:3–4). This purging judgment would be the prelude to Israel's restoration and the future kingdom of peace and prosperity. Israel will finally have a king who will rule over them with justice and righteousness (32:1). As the center of the Lord's earthly kingdom, Zion will become a place of peace and security and will never again be subjected to enemy attack (33:16–20).

VI. Promise of Destruction and Triumph (Isaiah 34–35)

These two prophesies are **apocalyptic** in nature. God will judge all the nations with cataclysmic catastrophes. The mountains will melt, and the heavens will dissolve in the Lord's "day of vengeance" (34:1–10). The "birds of prey" will be gathered by the Lord to the great day of battle (34:16). The language is similar to the description of the battle of Armageddon in Rev 16:14–16. After the "day of vengeance," the desert will "blossom like a rose" and the people "will see the glory of the LORD" (35:1–2). The redeemed will walk on the highway of holiness and "come to Zion with singing" (35:8–10). Thus, this section ends with the promise of triumph in the future.

VII. Prayers for Deliverance (Isaiah 36–39)

These narratives dealing with the reign of Hezekiah, his passionate prayer, and the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian army in 701 BC function as a **hinge** for the two halves of the book of Isaiah. The story of Hezekiah's faith and the deliverance of Jerusalem in chaps. 36–37 provide closure to the first half of the book as the Lord brings the *Assyrian* crisis to an end. The Lord used Assyria to punish His people, but then He will deliver Judah from their enemy. The story of Hezekiah's healing and the visit of the Babylonian envoys to Jerusalem in chaps. 38–39 introduces the threat of *Babylonian* invasion and exile that will be taken up in the second half of the book (chaps. 40–66). The Lord's deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyria offered assurance that He was willing and able to deliver His people from the power of any foreign nation, even from Babylon.

Hezekiah's faith was not perfect, and he often turned to political intrigue and military alliances in the midst of threatening circumstances (chaps. 30–31; 39), but in the end Hezekiah displayed great faith in the Lord as his sole source of security when the Assyrian army surrounded the city of Jerusalem in 701 BC. In fact, Hezekiah is remembered as the king of incomparable faith in 2 Kgs 18:5. The Assyrian military commander sent a threatening letter demanding the surrender of Jerusalem and warning that the Lord would not be able to thwart the Assyrian army. Hezekiah laid the letter out before the Lord at the temple and prayed for deliverance. Isaiah announced that the Lord heard the king's prayer and He would deliver Jerusalem from its attackers. The angel of the Lord went out in the middle of the night to kill 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, causing Sennacherib to return to his homeland with what was left of his army (37:36–37).

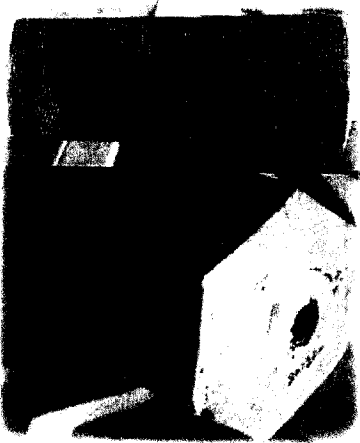
Isaiah 7:8 and 36–39 are the two **narrative portions** in the book, and these sections directly contrast Hezekiah's faith in the Lord with his father Ahaz's lack of faith. The parallels and similarities between the two stories highlight the stark contrast between the two: Ahaz trusts in armies while Hezekiah trusts in God. The choices of these two kings represent the options facing God's people at this time: Will they trust in their man-made gods, political leaders, building projects, and military alliances, or will they look to the Lord as their sole source of security? The prophet Isaiah also has "earful" messages in the second half of the book (41:10, 13, 14; 43:1, 5; 44:2, 8; 51:7; 54:1). The next generation must make the choice to act in faith on the Lord's promises.

The story of **Hezekiah's healing** from a life-threatening illness in chap. 38 further demonstrates the king's faith and the power of prayer. Hezekiah petitioned the Lord after Isaiah announced that he was going to die from his illness, and the Lord graciously extended the king's life for 15 years. The healing of the king also reflected how the Lord would extend the life of Judah as a nation and not bring judgment from Babylon until after the time of Hezekiah. The narrative in Isaiah 39, however, reflects a significant lapse in judgment by Hezekiah. The envoys of Merodach-baladan, the king of Babylon, came to congratulate Hezekiah after his recovery from his illness. However, Hezekiah failed to take advantage of a significant opportunity to honor the greatness of the Lord and instead showed off his temple treasures in an attempt to demonstrate that he was a worthy treaty partner. Isaiah rebuked the king and warned that his actions would lead the Babylonians to return to Jerusalem for these treasures.

Chronologically, the events in chaps. 38–39 occurred before the deliverance of Jerusalem narrated in chaps. 36–37, but these events were placed at the end of the first half of the book to lead into the promise of the return from Babylon in chaps. 40–66. This arrangement also reveals that Hezekiah's prayer for healing strengthened his faith to pray for help in light of the greater crisis of the invasion of Jerusalem.

VIII. Prophetic Consolation (Isaiah 40–66)

The section of Isaiah from chap. 40 to 66 forms the "**Book of Consolation**." The second half of the book of Isaiah differs from the first in several key ways. Chapters 1–39 focus primarily on trusting God in the midst of the Assyrian crisis rather than trusting in silver and gold; alliances with pagan nations; or trusting in one's own strength. Chapters 40–66 argue that one should trust God because the idols are nothing; only God has the ability to predict the future. God's Servant will establish justice on earth and suffer for the sins of many. God's people will one day return to their land, and in the end many people from many nations will come to worship God in His glorious kingdom. The first half of the book is primarily a message of judgment, recording preached sermons, while the second half of the book is predominantly a message of salvation and hope written in exquisite poetry. In the first half of the book, the future Messiah is portrayed more as a triumphant King, while in the second half of the book, He assumes the role of a suffering Servant before becoming an Anointed Conqueror. While the future Babylonian captivity is in view in some of these chapters,



The Taylor Prism recounting King Sennacherib's third campaign, including his conquests in Judah.

(44:20–45:13), the prophet's audience is preexilic, and several references in these chapters predate the exile.¹⁰

A. The Promise of Peace (Isaiah 40–48)

Isaiah was called to proclaim the judgment of Israel and Judah in chap. 6, but here the prophet and the future inhabitants of Jerusalem receive a renewed call to share the **eschatological news** of comfort because their mighty God will come to gather His people and rule the earth like a shepherd takes care of his sheep (40:1–11). The prophet's message was that Israel's days of warfare would be complete, its sins would be forgiven, and the Lord would come to reward His people. Isaiah described this eschatological gathering in terms similar to the Exodus (43:16–21; 51:9–11; 52:10–12; 55:12–13). Ultimately, the Lord would gather His people out of many nations (43:5–7), and all nations would observe the Lord's power to save (52:10–12). Israel would not need to leave the land of bondage in haste as they did from Egypt (52:12), and the wilderness would be transformed into a paradise as the Hebrew people made their way home (41:8–20; 43:19–21).

Isaiah announced that **two figures** would play a key role in Israel's restoration and renewal. The Lord would raise up the Persian ruler Cyrus as His "anointed one" to secure Israel's release from exile (44:28–45:7). Cyrus, who reigned over Persia from 559 to 530 BC, would solve Israel's immediate problem by conquering Babylon and issuing the decree that would allow the Jews to return to their homeland (fulfilled in Ezra 1:1–5). Beyond Israel's military subjugation to Babylon, the larger issue impeding their restoration was the problem of Israel's sin and separation from the Lord. Rather than a conquering king, a Suffering Servant would accomplish Israel's ultimate restoration by giving His own life as a sin offering for the people. The role and mission of this figure are highlighted in a series of four Servant Songs (42:1–7; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12).

Isaiah highlighted several key themes in order to show the Israelites why they could trust in the Lord's promises to restore them. Isaiah reminded the people of the Lord's power to fulfill His promises as the Creator of the universe (40:12–17). The military power of their enemies was great, but the strength of all of the nations was nothing more than a drop in the bucket when compared to the Lord's power. As Creator, the Lord is also superior to the idols and false gods made of wood and plated with gold (40:18–26). The Lord is not only all-powerful, but He is also able to share His strength with His people so they mount up and fly like eagles even when they are weak and wearied (40:27–31).

One of the common speech forms in this section of Isaiah is the **trial speech** in which the prophet invites his audience into the courtroom as he demonstrates the superiority of the Lord to the gods of other nations. The gods of the nations are mute and silent, but the Lord announces His plans and actions before they come to pass (41:21–26; 42:9; 43:9; 44:7–9; 45:20–21; 48:5–7). The Lord revealed Cyrus as Israel's future deliverer and provided extensive details concerning his conquests so the

Hebrews would know that the Lord had accomplished these things. This section makes an apologetic appeal to God's ability to predict the future (46:10–11).

The prophet also engaged in a **sarcastic polemic** to demonstrate the folly of idol worship. A man may cover a god with gold or silver, but first he must make sure the idol is made of wood that will not rot and is constructed well so it does not topple (40:19–20). The idol worshipper cuts down a tree and uses half of the wood as fuel to cook his food and half to craft the idol as his object of worship (44:6–20). The gods have to be "carried" (*nasa'*) by their devotees (46:1, 7), but the Lord has "carried" (*nasa'*) His people throughout their history (46:3–4). Idols have to be "lifted up" (*sabal*) so they can be carried on the shoulders (46:7), while the Lord promises to "sustain" (*sabal*) Israel (46:4). The gods are unable to "rescue" (*malat*) (46:2) and "save" (*yasha'*) their people as they are taken away into exile, but the Lord promises to "rescue" (*malat*) the exiles (46:4) because He is a God of "salvation" (*yeshuah*) (46:13).

B. Provision of Peace (Isaiah 49–57)

The identity of the **Servant of the Lord** in Isaiah 40–55 is a major source of discussion and controversy because some view the Servant as Israel, others point to the prophet Isaiah, a few think he is Cyrus, but the New Testament claims the Servant is Jesus. The Servant in Isaiah has both corporate and individual features. In some places the Servant is identified as Israel (41:8; 42:1; 43:10; 44:21; 45:4; 49:3). As the Lord's national Servant, Israel was commissioned with the task of reflecting the Lord's greatness to the nations, but Israel failed in its mission by not obeying the Lord (42:18–22). Because of Israel's disobedience, the Lord would commission an individual Servant to restore His people. The individual features of the Servant are especially prominent in the four Servant Songs. This individual would be identified with Israel (49:3) but would also have a ministry to Israel. Unlike unfaithful Israel the individual Servant would be obedient to God's instruction (50:4–5). Israel's as God's Servant was blind and deaf (42:18), but the role of the individual Servant was to open the eyes of the blind (42:7). While Israel suffered for its own sins (40:2; 42:24–25; 43:24–25; 44:21–22; 48:1–8), the Servant would suffer for the sins of others (53:4–6, 10–12).

The most detailed and well-known of the Servant Songs in Isaiah 52:13–53:12 prophesies more extensively and specifically concerning the **sacrificial atonement** of the Servant and points ahead to the death and resurrection of Jesus. This song consists of five stanzas (52:13–15; 53:1–3, 4–6, 7–9, 10–12). The opening and closing stanzas portray the Servant's exaltation. After His horrific suffering and disfigurement, the Servant will receive blessing, honor, and vindication from the Lord. Even the kings of the earth will be amazed at this startling reversal (52:13–15; cf. 49:7).

The remaining three stanzas focus on the nature of the Servant's mission and the divine purpose behind His suffering. The Servant's obscure origins and suffering would cause Israel not to recognize Him as their deliverer. They would fail to see how the Lord's saving power could be demonstrated through such a weak and despised figure (53:1–3). The Servant would be crushed by God for Israel's sins. His punishment would bring healing and restoration for God's sinful people (53:4–6). The

Servant would be like an innocent lamb led to slaughter, and he would be “cut off from the land of the living” (53:7–9). After the Servant completed His mission, the Lord would vindicate Him and restore Him to a place of honor and blessing because of His willingness to offer His life as a guilt offering for others (53:10–12). This final stanza ultimately implies the resurrection of the Servant to share in the spoils of His victory after His death.

Through His innocent suffering, the Servant would give His life as a sin offering that would make many righteous (53:11) and would restore Israel to its honored status as the Lord’s national Servant (54:16–17; 65:18–19). Every use of the word “servant” following the song of the suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 appears in the plural and refers to the collective rather than the individual Servant (54:17; 56:6; 63:17; 65:8–9, 13–15; 66:14). This corporate servant would include the **faithful remnant** from Israel as well as those from the nations who would turn to the Lord (56:3–8; 66:18–21). The Servant’s role was not only to restore Israel but also to be a light leading the nations to the Lord as well (42:6; 49:6).

The progress of revelation from the Old Testament to the New clearly identifies **Jesus Christ** as the Isaianic Servant. In Acts 8, Philip explains to the Ethiopian eunuch that the innocent lamb led to slaughter in Isaiah 53 refers to Jesus (Acts 8:32–34). In several other passages the New Testament quotes from the Servant Songs and applies these passages to the person and work of Jesus:

1. Matthew 8:17 quotes from Isa 53:4 (“He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.” NIV).
2. Luke 22:37 quotes from Isa 53:12 (“And he was numbered with the transgressors.” NIV).



“The innocent lamb led to the slaughter . . . He did not open His mouth.” (Isa. 53:7)

3. John 12:38 quotes from Isa 53:1 (“Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” NIV)
4. First Peter 2:21–25 cites and quotes from Isa 53:4–5, 9, 11–12 (“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth;” and “by his wounds you have been healed.” NIV).

Numerous other allusions and references apply Isaiah’s Servant Songs to Jesus in the New Testament. The declaration of Jesus that He came to serve others and “*give his life as a ransom for many*” in Mark 10:45 (NIV) likely alludes back to Isa 53:11–12. The description of Jesus as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” in John 1:29 likely recalls Isa 53:7. Paul’s description of Jesus as a “servant” who experiences death so that He might be ultimately exalted and recognized as Lord over all in Phil 2:6–11 also reflects how Jesus fulfills the role of Isaiah’s Suffering Servant.

C. Program of Peace (Isaiah 58–66)

Isaiah 40–57 promises Israel’s return, but the **full restoration of Israel** would only occur when the people truly repented of their sinful ways and returned to the Lord (chap. 55). Isaiah saw the sinful patterns of the present carrying over into the time when the people would return to the land. In many ways the return from exile was a disappointment. Israel would continue to live under foreign oppression. The return from Babylon would only be the first stage of Israel’s restoration, and their complete salvation would await the future time when God’s kingdom would come to earth and the Lord would deliver His people from their sins once for all.

The prophet called for a true fast of repentance and a commitment to righteousness (58). The only cure for Israel’s sin was that the Lord would have to arm Himself as an Anointed Warrior and deliver them. The Lord would exact vengeance on Israel’s enemies, but the real enemy to be destroyed was sin itself. The Lord’s mighty arm would destroy sin, and the gift of the Spirit as part of His **new covenant** with Israel would enable His people to live in righteousness and obedience (59:20–21; cf. Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 36:25–29).

The focus of chaps. 60–62 is the future glories of Zion as the center of the **Lord’s earthly kingdom**. The nations will be drawn to Jerusalem and to the light of God’s salvation. As in the days of Solomon’s empire but on a grander scale, the nations will bring tribute to Zion in honor of the Lord. The inclusion of the Gentiles in the blessings of the future kingdom is a prominent theme in Isaiah. Premillennialists believe these passages describe the future millennial (1,000-year) reign of Christ (Rev. 20:1–6).

Isaiah was the Lord’s herald to announce Israel’s future salvation and their Day of Jubilee (61:1–3). Jesus specifically claimed that this prophecy was fulfilled in Him (cf. Luke 4:16–30). Jesus not only announced the deliverance but also accomplished Israel’s salvation through His sacrificial death. The **fulfillment** of Isaiah 61 in the ministry of Jesus demonstrates that the final restoration of Israel points to the Kingdom blessings that will be consummated at His Second Coming.

Portions of Isaiah 63–66 reveal that a **tribulation and judgment** will precede the coming of the Lord’s earthly kingdom. This judgment will separate sinners from

the righteous and purge the earth of its wickedness. The Lord will march out as the Anointed Warrior to exact His vengeance on the Edomites (who represent all God's enemies) and return from battle with the blood of His enemies spattered on His garments. This same imagery appears in Rev 19:11–16, describing the triumphal return of Jesus Christ as the Divine Warrior from heaven who comes to rule as the King of kings.

The book of Isaiah ends much as it began, with a message of both impending doom (“The Lord will come with fire,” 66:15) and potential deliverance (“all mankind will come to worship Me,” 66:23). The one recurring **theme** is that “God is with us.” Jesus Christ (*yeshua hameleah*) is the virgin’s Son, Immanuel, the Branch of the Lord, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace, the coming Messiah, the Suffering Servant, the Anointed Warrior, the Glorious King! “All the prophets testify about Him” (Acts 10:43).

THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The message of Isaiah has significantly impacted the New Testament presentation of the **person and work of Jesus Christ**. Next to Psalms, Isaiah is the most referenced Old Testament book in the New Testament, with approximately 100 citations and 500 allusions. Some estimate that 1 out of every 17 verses in the New Testament contains material taken from Isaiah. The New Testament announces that the blessings of the eschatological kingdom prophesied by Isaiah are fulfilled in the person of Jesus. The eschatological kingdom of God is inaugurated at the first coming of Jesus and will be consummated at His Second Coming. Jesus is the promised Messiah who will reign over the earth in justice and peace (Isa 9:2–6; 11:1–5). At the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus declared that He was the fulfillment of Isaiah’s promise of a Spirit-anointed messenger proclaiming freedom and deliverance for the people of Israel (Isa 61:1–2; Luke 4:16–21).

In **His sacrificial death** Jesus would take on the role of the Suffering Servant in providing salvation for His people (Matt 8:26–27; Mark 10:45; Acts 8:26–35; 1 Pet 2:22–25). Jesus would die as the sacrificial lamb for the sins of the world (Isa 53:7; John 1:29). More than any other prophet, Isaiah anticipated the inclusion of Gentiles as participants in the blessings of the Lord’s future salvation.

In the **future kingdom** established at Christ’s Second Coming, Jesus will rule over all and all will bow before Him in recognition of His sovereignty (Phil 2:10–11). Jesus will triumph over death by raising up those who have trusted in Him in fulfillment of Isaiah’s promise that the Lord would “swallow up” death forever (Isa 25:6–8; 1 Cor 15:23–28, 51–55). In preparation for the eschatological kingdom, the Lord will bring about the national restoration of Israel as the people turn from their unbelief and embrace Jesus as their Messiah (Isa 59:20; Rom 11:26–28). In the millennial kingdom the nations will come to Zion to worship and serve the Lord (Isa 2:1–4; 60:1–9; Rev 20:1–10) in anticipation of the new heavens, new earth, and new Jerusalem where the righteous will dwell with God forever (Revelation 21–22).

For Further Reading

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Study Questions

1. What is the major difference between Isaiah 1–39 and 40–66? sections?
2. How would you defend the unity of the authorship of both sections?
3. How does the Immanuel Prophecy (Isaiah 7–12) emphasize the deity of Christ?
4. What does God’s judgment of the nations indicate about His sovereignty over the whole world?
5. What lessons in prayer did Hezekiah learn, and how did they affect his life and the city of Jerusalem?
6. How did God use Cyrus the Great to accomplish His sovereign purposes?
7. How did the Suffering Servant Prophecy (Isaiah 52–53) predict the death and resurrection of Christ?

ENDNOTES

1. See the extended discussion and examples cited by J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 13–25.
2. Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*. NAC 15B (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 95–97.
3. J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 13–34.
4. *Ibid.*, 27.
5. *Ibid.*, 31.
6. See the excellent article by G. K. Beale, “A Specific Problem Confronting the Authority of the Bible,” in L. Tripson and J. Waddington, eds., *Resurrection and Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2008), 135–76.

7. For an extended discussion see E. Hindson, *Isaiah's Immanuel* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978).
8. Smith, *Isaiah #0–66*, 219.
9. *Ibid.*, 242.
10. See *ibid.*, 26–51. He argues for an Assyrian crisis setting for chaps. 40–66 with an early destruction of Babylon (chaps. 46–47) by Sennacherib in 689 BC.

CHAPTER 22

JEREMIAH

The Babylonians Are Coming

Jeremiah (“Yahweh lifts up”) was one of Judah’s greatest prophets. His ministry spanned half a century in the darkest days of Judah’s history. In spite of his numerous warnings to the people and kings of Judah, the “weeping prophet” lived to see his beloved Jerusalem destroyed by the Babylonians. In the early days of his ministry, Jeremiah called the people of Judah to repent of their sinful ways and return to the Lord. His early ministry coincided with that of Zephaniah and Habakkuk and the priestly ministry of Hilkiah, all of which cumulated in the great revival of 622 BC under King Josiah.¹

BACKGROUND

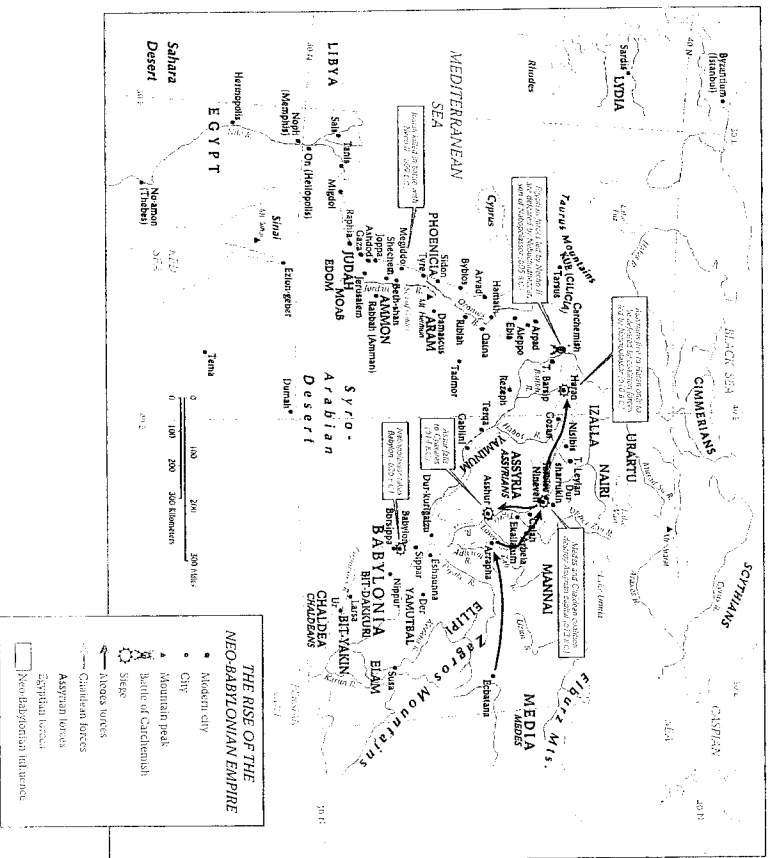
Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry in 626 BC and prophesied during Judah’s last days as a nation, warning of the coming Babylonian exile as the Lord’s punishment for Judah’s sins. Jeremiah prophesied during the reign of **Judah’s last five kings**:

Josiah (640–609 BC): Judah’s last godly king who carried out significant religious reforms motivated in part by the discovery of the Mosaic book of the law in 622 BC. Josiah was killed in battle against the Egyptians in 609 BC, and his reform movement died with him. Jeremiah composed laments for Josiah when he died.

Jehoiachin (609 BC): Reigned only three months until Pharaoh Necho of Egypt removed him from the throne and took him to Egypt, where he died.

Jehoiakim (609–597 BC): the Egyptians installed him as king over his younger brother. However, he vassilated between Egypt and Babylon. This brought Babylonian reprisals for his attempted rebellions, but he died before Babylonians could take the city in 597 BC. He was a wicked and unjust ruler who was hostile to Jeremiah and burned the scroll of Jeremiah’s prophecies in 605 BC.

Jehoiachin (597–587 BC): Reigned only three months before the Babylonians captured Jerusalem and took him away to Babylon. He was later released from imprisonment he died in Babylon.



Zedekiah (597–586 BC): He was placed on the throne as a Babylonian puppet but foolishly did not follow Jeremiah's counsel and rebelled against the Babylonians, leading to the capture and destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. After the execution of his sons, Zedekiah was blinded and taken as a prisoner to Babylon, where he died.

The **moral failure** of Judah's leadership was largely responsible for the spiritual corruption of the nation. The covenant between the Lord and David promised an eternal dynasty to David, but it also warned that the Lord would punish David's sons if they were disobedient (2 Sam 7:14–16). During the ministry of Jeremiah, the Lord brought the Davidic dynasty to a temporary end, but Jeremiah promised that the Lord would raise up an ideal Davidic ruler (the Messiah) in the future (cf. Jer 23:5–6; 30:8–9; 21: 33:15–17).

Jeremiah warned that the Lord was sending the **Babylonians** to punish Judah. In 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar led the Babylonian army to victory over the Egyptians at Carchemish, establishing his control over Syria and northern Israel. Next, Nebuchadnezzar marched south to Jerusalem and took away the first wave of exiles, including Daniel. Jerusalem became a cesspool of Babylonian barbed in 602 BC

and again in 597 BC. Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem in 597 BC and deported King Jehoiachin and 50,000 more exiles, including Ezekiel. The third stage of the exile occurred when Nebuchadnezzar responded to Zedekiah's rebellion with a siege on Jerusalem that lasted 18 months in 588–586 BC. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, and Judah came to an end as a nation. Zedekiah and most of the people in Judah were deported to Babylon in August 586 BC.

The Babylonians allowed Jeremiah to remain in the land of Judah, and he ministered there until he and his scribe Baruch were kidnapped by a faction of Jews and taken away as **hostages to Egypt**. Jeremiah likely continued his prophetic ministry to the Jewish community in Egypt until his death.

AUTHORSHIP

The book of Jeremiah appears to have a long and complex **compositional history**. Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch (cf. 36:4–21; 43:1–7; 45:1–5) were largely responsible for the contents of the book. The Lord commissioned Jeremiah and Baruch to compose a scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies in 605 BC, more than 20 years after the prophet began his ministry. This original scroll likely contained only the oracles and messages found in Jeremiah 1–25. When King Jehoiachin destroyed this scroll, Jeremiah and Baruch composed an expanded version. Baruch likely continued to collect messages and narratives of Jeremiah throughout his ministry, including the reference to the release of Jehoiachin in 562 BC in chap. 52.

Outline

- I. Call of the Prophet: Fire Within (Jeremiah 1)
- II. Concern of the Prophet: Doom of Judah (Jeremiah 2–25)
 - A. Judah's Unfaithfulness (Jeremiah 2–6)
 - B. Judah's False Hope (Jeremiah 7–10)
 - C. Judah's Impending Disaster (Jeremiah 11–20)
 - D. Judah's Unfaithful Leaders (Jeremiah 21–25)
- III. Rejection of the Prophet: Personal Illustrations (Jeremiah 26–45)
 - A. Problem with Jeremiah's Message (Jeremiah 26–45)
 - B. Promise of Restoration (Jeremiah 30–33)
 - C. Problem of Judah's Response (Jeremiah 26–29)
- IV. Oracles Against the Nations: Words of the Lord (Jeremiah 46–51)
- V. Epilogue: The Fall of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 52)

MESSAGE

I. Call of the Prophet: Fire Within (Jeremiah 1)

The Lord called Jeremiah in Judah's last days to warn of the impending Babylonian exile and to provide one final opportunity for the people to repent and avoid national destruction. Jeremiah objected that he was too young and did not know what to speak.

but the Lord promised to put His words in the prophet's mouth. The call of Jeremiah reflects the same basic elements found in other Old Testament call passages (see chart).

THE CALL OF THE LORD

	<i>Jeremiah</i>	<i>Moses</i>	<i>Gideon</i>	<i>Isaiah</i>	<i>Ezekiel</i>
Vision of God Voice of God	"The word of the Lord came to me."	Burning Bush	Angel of the Lord Appears	Sees the Lord Seated on His Throne	Vision of God on the Chariot Throne
Commission to Task	"I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."	"I am sending you to Pharaoh."	"Go and save Israel out of Midian's hand."	"Go and tell this people."	"Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites."
Objection of Unworthiness	"I do not know how to speak; I am only a child."	"Who am I?"	"How can I save Israel?"	"Woe is me! I am undone. For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips."	"When I saw it [the glory of God], I fell facedown." "I sat among them for seven days over-whelmed."
Promises of God's Protection and Enablement	"Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you."	"I will be with you."	"The Lord is with you mighty warrior."	"Your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for."	"Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions."

Despite the enormity of the task, the Lord promised that He would enable His called ones to fulfill their commissions despite their feelings of personal inadequacy. The source of strength for the ministry would be the Lord Himself.

In addition to narrating the prophet's call, the opening chapter also provides a **summary overview** of the message of the book of Jeremiah as a whole. The Lord had appointed Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations (*7th. vision*; Genesis, 1:10). Jeremiah not only announced judgement against Judah but also announced how God would use Babylon to judge all nations and then would also in turn judge Babylon (Jer 25:1-2; Jer 27:1). The Lord called Jeremiah as a prophet of both judgement and salvation.

Archaeology and the Book of Jeremiah

The archaeological evidence for the historical accuracy of Jeremiah is astounding. Several discoveries verify the people and events mentioned in this book. The most prominent discoveries include the **Lachish** and **Arad Ostraca** (ink-inscribed pottery shards) that date from the years just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. The Lachish letters are from one of the last cities in Judah still standing as the Babylonians were attacking. They refer to requesting reinforcements from Egypt and a warning from a prophet. The name is illegible but ends in *yahu* and may refer to Jeremiah (*Yirme' yahu*) himself. The Arad letters (200 ostraca) written in Hebrew and Aramaic mention the names Pashur (Jer 20:1) and refer to the temple as "the house of Yahweh."

Additional **personal names** from the book of Jeremiah have been confirmed as well. Two seal impressions have been found bearing the name of Jeremiah's scribe Baruch: "Berekyahu, son of Neriyahu, the scribe." One contains the fingerprint of Baruch himself. Another clay seal reads: "Belonging to Gemariah (son of) Shaphan" (Jer 36:12). Another *bullia* (seal) was found at Lachish referring to Gedaliah "overseer of the royal house" (Jer 36:12). Yet another seal reads: "Belonging to Seriah son of Neriah," Baruch's brother (Jer 51:59). And still another seal reads: "Belonging to Jehucal, son of Shelamiah" (Jer 37:3) one of the court officials serving King Zedekiah. A jar handle was found at Ramat Rahel between Jerusalem and Bethlehem which reads: "Belonging to Etakim, steward of Jehoiachin" (Jer 22:24).

A clay prism dated c. 570 BC found in Babylon during the excavations of Nebuchadnezzar's palace refers to Nebuzaradan as "the chancellor," an appointment received after his military career (Jer 39:9). The account of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem refers to their military commanders sitting in the **Middle Gate** of Jerusalem. The remains of this gate were excavated by Nahman Avigad and can be seen today in Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter. Even the most critical scholars have admitted the historical accuracy of the details of Jeremiah's account of the last days of Judah.

The verbs "to uproot," "tear down," "destroy," "overthrow," and "build up" appear as summary statements of the dual nature of the prophet's message throughout the book (1:10; 24:6; 31:4-5; 42:10; 45:5).

The visions of the **almond branch** (1:11-12) and the **boiling pot** from the north (1:13-16) symbolized Jeremiah's message of judgment against Judah. The "almond branch" (*shofarot*) visualized how the Lord was "watching over" (*shofarot*) Judah to bring judgment against His sinful people, and the boiling pot represented the invading army from the north that would conquer Judah. The Lord charged Jeremiah not to be afraid of his enemies and promised that He would deliver him from all dangers. This assurance anticipated the various forms of opposition, persecution, and threat Jeremiah would encounter during his ministry.

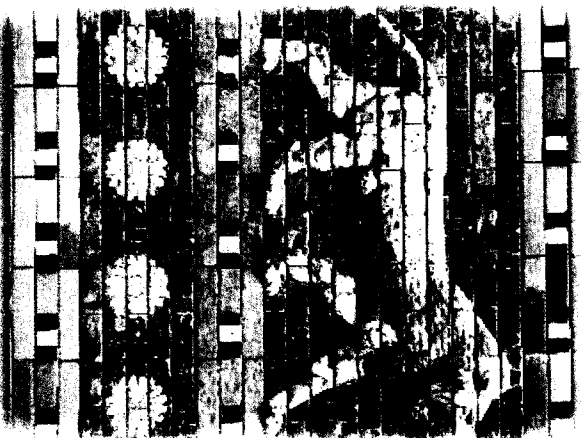
II. Concern of the Prophet: Doom of Judah (Jeremiah 2–25)

This first major section of the book focuses on Jeremiah's message of judgment against Judah. The Lord would judge His people for their failure to turn from their sinful ways. Along with Jeremiah's poetic oracles, and laments a series of **prose sermons** provides order and arrangement for this section by serving as reflective summaries on the prophet's message of judgment. These prose sermons particularly focus on Judah's defective understanding of their covenant with the Lord. They believed the Lord would protect them as His covenant people, regardless of their behavior. So the purpose of these sermons was to undermine the people's false confidence in their status as the Lord's chosen people and their misplaced trust in the temple.

A. Judah's Unfaithfulness (Jeremiah 2–6)

The indictment in Jeremiah 2 takes the form of a **covenant lawsuit** or legal dispute. Like a prosecuting attorney Jeremiah presented the Lord's case against His unfaithful people. Though a devoted bride in her early days, Israel had become like an unfaithful wife, prostituting herself by following other gods. The people traded their relationship with the living God for gods who did not exist and would never satisfy their deepest longings. Judah also prostituted itself by making foreign alliances with Egypt and Assyria, so the Lord warned that they would be disappointed by these alliances. Their decision to trust in man rather than God was doomed to failure. Continuing with the marriage metaphor, Jeremiah called for the people "to turn/return" (*shuv*: 3:1-7; 10:12; 14:22; 4:1) to the Lord and to repent of their sinful ways (2:1–4:4). Thus he supported Josiah's reform movement (3:6). Jeremiah referenced the divorce law in Deut 24:1–4 in order to demonstrate the Lord's grace in giving His people the opportunity to return to Him in spite of their repeated infidelity.

If the nation did not repent, judgment would take the form of a **military invasion** by a powerful enemy from the north. More than giving an imlexible prediction of future events, Jeremiah was attempting to move the people to repentance by graphically portraying the horrific judgment they were facing, if they changed their ways, they still had the opportunity to avoid the coming disaster (4:1–5). Visual images of the



Relief figure of a lion from the Ishar Gate in Babylon.

approaching army dominate this part of Jeremiah's message (4:5–9; 13–17; 5:6; 14–17; 6:1–8; 22–24). This army would be like a ravaging predator, and the Lord Himself would be the warrior leading these troops against Judah. Jeremiah mourned over the destruction the Lord was prepared to bring against His people (4:19–21) and called for the people to take seriously the warnings of judgment (6:24–26).

B. Judah's False Hope (Jeremiah 7–10)

Jeremiah's **temple sermon** (7:1–15) was one of the defining and critical moments in his ministry. This sermon was delivered "early in the reign of Jehoiakim" (c. 609 BC) at a time when Judah could avoid the disaster of the Babylonian invasion if its leaders and people would turn from their sinful ways (7:3–7; cf. 26:3–6). Jeremiah courageously announced that the Lord was prepared to destroy Jerusalem and His temple because the people substituted empty ritual for true obedience. The miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem by the Lord from the Assyrians earlier in 701 BC (Isaiah 37) led to the mistaken belief that the city was inviolable to enemy attack. To remove this mistaken idea, Jeremiah reminded them that God allowed the destruction of the sanctuary at Shiloh during the time of the judges. The Lord did not protect His people then and would not in the future if they did not repent.

Judah would be destroyed because the people chose to believe in the empty promises of the **false prophets** instead of Jeremiah's warnings of coming judgment (8:1–9:26). The people's trust in the prophets' false assurances of "peace, peace" (8:11) allowed them to continue in their sinful behavior, but they would be greatly disappointed when the expected deliverance did not arrive (8:15). The people would wail and mourn over the devastation brought by the invading army. Expressing the Lord's own grief over the destruction of Judah, Jeremiah wished that his head were a fountain of tears so he could weep continuously over the horrible fate awaiting his people (8:18–9:2).

C. Judah's Impending Disaster (Jeremiah 11–20)

The broken covenant demonstrated the fragmented relationship between the Lord and His people. From the time the Lord had formed the covenant with Israel at Sinai after bringing them out of Egypt, the people had failed to keep the covenant commandments (Jeremiah 11). Even though the Lord inflicted the covenant curses, they persisted in their disobedience so the Lord decided to bring upon them the ultimate curse of **expulsion** from the land (cf. Deut. 28:58–68). The people's rejection of Jeremiah as the Lord's spokesman reflected their rejection of the Lord. The people plotted to put Jeremiah to death for speaking God's word to them, but the Lord warned that they and their children would die as a fitting punishment for how they treated the prophet (11:18–25).

In these chapters Jeremiah expresses a series of laments, complaints, and confessions (12:1–6; 15:10–21; 18:19–23; 20:7–18) that are reflections of some of the laments in Psalms. They provide an **anthropological insight** into the soul of the prophet and remind us that preaching is a difficult business. The prophet was hated

by kings, priests, and people alike for his strong preaching. But time revealed that Jeremiah was right and they were wrong.

Jeremiah's two visits to the potter in chaps. 18–19 were prophetic sign acts that visualized how the covenantal relationship between the Lord and His people had reached a breaking point. In his first visit Jeremiah observed the potter reshaping a ruined piece of wet clay, representing how the Lord was offering His people the opportunity to repent and be spared from judgment. But, when the prophet called the people to turn from their sinful ways, they stubbornly refused in open defiance of the Lord (18:12–13). In light of this response, there was nothing left but for the Lord to bring destruction upon Judah, which was dramatically portrayed by Jeremiah's smashing a clay jar in front of the people. The two visits to the potter demonstrated Judah's missed opportunity to repent and avoid disaster.

D. Judah's Unfaithful Leaders (Jeremiah 21–25)

The Lord's judgment would especially target Judah's kings and prophets because their failed leadership was largely responsible for Judah's spiritual corruption. The Lord chose David and his sons to rule over Israel and to be the earthly representatives of His heavenly rule, but the covenant between the Lord and the house of David required each king to obey the Lord and to administer justice in order to be blessed (22:2–5; cf. 17:24–27). After Josiah's godly rule and religious reforms, the final four kings of Judah were evil and did not follow the Lord. Jeremiah announced the judgment of these four kings and also the end of the Davidic dynasty.

Jehoiachaz (609 BC) would die in Egyptian exile (22:10–12). Jehoiakim (609–597 BC) refurbished his palace and ignored the needs of the poor during a time of national crisis, so he would die and not even be given the honor of a proper burial (22:15–19). Jehoiachin (597 BC) would never return from his exile in Babylon, and none of his sons would rule on the throne (22:24–30). As the final King of Judah, Zedekiah (597–586 BC) requested that Jeremiah pray for a miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from the Babylonians, but the prophet refused his request and warned instead that the city would fall. Zedekiah would be taken away in exile to Babylon as the Lord himself fought on the side of the Babylonians (22:31–37; 34:1–7).



Illustration of King Zedekiah in the book of Jeremiah.

When Jeremiah announced to King Jehoiachin that the Lord was casting him off as his **signet ring** or symbol of authority, it meant the temporary rejection of the house of David and the end of the Davidic dynasty (22:24). But the Lord also promised He would not abandon His covenant with David or His promise that David's dynasty would endure forever. At a future time the Lord would raise up a Davidic king as a **righteous Branch** who would do what was just and right (23:5–6; 33:15–16), in contrast to the final Davidic king Zedekiah (“the Lord is my righteousness”), who miserably failed to live up to his name. Many years later when the people returned to the land, the Lord announced through the prophet Haggai the reversal of this prophecy and affirmed that He would restore the Davidic dynasty and make the Davidic ruler His “signet ring” once again (Hag 2:20–23).

Chapter 25 concludes Jeremiah's oracles of judgment by providing a **theological explanation** of the Babylonian exile and how the Lord would use Babylon as His instrument of judgment. The Lord would send His people into captivity for 70 years as punishment for their persistent disobedience and idolatry. In carrying out this judgment, Nebuchadnezzar would serve as the Lord's “servant” (25:9); but this favored status would last for only a short time. After the Lord had used Babylon to judge Judah, the Lord would destroy Babylon as punishment for its own sins. Babylon would cause all nations, including Judah, to drink the wine of God's wrath so they would stagger like drunken men, but Babylon itself would also drink that cup as final retribution for its crimes.

III. Rejection of the Prophet: Personal Illustrations (Jeremiah 26–45)

Jeremiah 26–45 is a narrative story of Jeremiah's ministry, documenting Judah's rejection of the prophet's message and recounting the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. The judgment of exile was due to the fact that the leaders and people of Judah did not “listen to/obey” the word of the Lord (see 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 34:14,17; 35:14–15,17; 37:14; 40:3; 42:13,21; 43:7; 44:16,23). Jeremiah encountered various forms of persecution and opposition because he preached an unpopular message. Even after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, the people persisted in their disobedience, and Jeremiah was eventually kidnapped and taken away to Egypt. However, judgment was not God's final word for His people. The Lord promised to bring the exiles back to the land after 70 years (29:10). Chapters 30–33 contain Jeremiah's **Book of Consolation** that promises the ultimate restoration of Israel. At that time the Lord will establish a new covenant with His people so they will obey Him and consequently enjoy His blessings forever.

With the exception of chaps. 37–44, the narratives and messages of Jeremiah in this section are not arranged chronologically. (Chapters 26–45 are framed by four passages (chaps. 25; 35; 36; 45) dated from the time of Jehoiakim. These stories and messages from the reign of Jehoiakim (609–597 BC) highlight this king's rejection of Jeremiah's message as a decisive time in Judah's history. This frame also divides chaps. 26–45 into two smaller blocks of material (26–35 and 36–45), which both demonstrate how Judah missed one final opportunity to repent and avoid judgment. Both sections begin with a call for the people to turn from their “evil” *tratti* so that the

Lord might relent from sending “disaster” (*ra'ah*) against them (26:3; 36:3), but both sections end with the people persisting in their disobedience and bringing judgment upon themselves.

Jeremiah 26–35 and 36–45 both contain a promise of personal salvation to certain individuals that contrasts with the national judgment the Lord would bring against Judah. In Jeremiah 35, the promise to preserve the Rechabite clan for their faithfulness to their godly family traditions contrasts with God’s plan to judge Judah for its unfaithfulness. In Jeremiah 45, the promise of deliverance to Jeremiah’s faithful scribe Baruch contrasts with God’s plans to judge the unfaithful Jews who fled to Egypt in chapter 44.

CONCLUSION OF JEREMIAH 26–35

National Judgment

The Lord will judge Zedekiah and the people of Judah.
(Jeremiah 34)

Personal Salvation

The Lord will preserve the faithful Rechabites.
(Jeremiah 35)

CONCLUSION OF JEREMIAH 36–45

National Judgment

The Lord will judge the Jews in Egypt.
(Jeremiah 44)

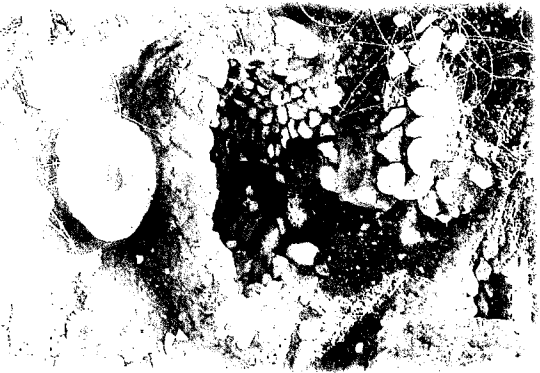
Personal Salvation

The Lord will preserve the faithful scribe Baruch.
(Jeremiah 45)

This structure reflects that the Lord’s salvation was reserved for those who were faithful and obedient to Him, whereas the nation had forfeited the Lord’s blessing because of their disobedience.

A. Problem with Jeremiah’s Message (Jeremiah 26–29)

Jeremiah primarily experiences religious opposition to his message in this section. After warning of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in his temple sermon (see 7:1–15), the priests, prophets, and people called for him to be put to death (26:1–15). Any prophet who dared to speak against the temple was viewed as a false prophet deserving of execution (cf. Deut 18:20). In his own defense, Jeremiah warned that they would be guilty of innocent blood if they put him to death for speaking the Lord’s message to them. Jeremiah was spared when some of the elders received the repentant



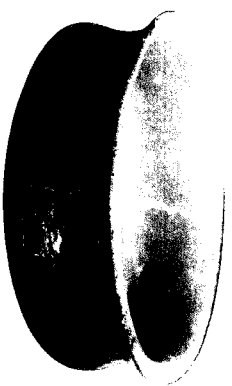
response of Hezekiah when Micah warned of the destruction of Jerusalem a century before (26:17–19; cf. Mic 3:9–12). While Jeremiah was not put to death, the appended account of King Jehoiakim’s execution of the prophet Uriah (26:20–24) demonstrates how unpopular Jeremiah’s message of judgment really was and how much it cost to be a true spokesman for the Lord.

The false prophets offered empty promises of peace and opposed Jeremiah’s message, which called for submission to Babylon and warned of an extended exile (chaps. 27–28). When the leaders of various nations gathered in Jerusalem for a meeting with Zedekiah to discuss an alliance against Babylon (c. 593 BC), Jeremiah wore an animal yoke to picture the impending subjugation of these nations to Babylon. The false prophet Hananiah directly countered Jeremiah’s message by declaring that the exile would be over in two years, so he broke Jeremiah’s wooden yoke to visualize this promise of impending freedom from Babylonian domination (28:1–11). The people were caught in the conundrum of trying to determine which prophet was telling the truth. The Lord announced that He would replace the wooden yoke Hananiah broke with an iron yoke that could not be broken. In addition, Hananiah would die for his presumption in speaking for the Lord when the Lord had not sent him. As fitting punishment for his promise that the exile would last for only two years, Hananiah died within two months of uttering his false prophecy.

Jeremiah also encountered opposition from false prophets among the exiles in Babylon (chap. 29). Jeremiah wrote a letter to the exiles in Babylon encouraging them to submit to the Babylonians and to build houses and raise their families in Babylon. They were to pray for the peace and prosperity of Babylon because they would be there for 70 years. Though this judgment would bring the nation of Judah to an end, the Lord promised to restore them when they returned to Him and sought Him with all their hearts (29:12–14; cf. Deut 30:1–10). Thus, God’s promise in this section was: “For I know the plans I have for you . . . to give you a future and a hope” (29:11).

B. Promise of Restoration (Jeremiah 30–33)

Jeremiah’s message of hope concerning Israel’s future restoration is known as the **Book of Consolation**. Jeremiah’s message of hope for Israel’s future contrasted with the empty promises of the false prophets. Even in his message of judgment, a message of hope and restoration for Israel stands at a prominent position in the center of the book. Salvation and blessing, not doom and destruction, would be the Lord’s final word for Israel. Despite Israel’s unfaithfulness to the Lord and His covenant people, the Lord would remain faithful to His people and would establish a new covenant guaranteeing their future blessing.



The recurring promise in Jeremiah's message of hope is that the Lord would "restore the fortunes" (*shuv shevat*) of His people (30:1,18; 32:44; 33:11,26). The reversal of the present conditions of defeat and exile is the prominent theme in the poetic oracles of salvation in chaps. 30–31. The nation was now in a time of trouble, but later the Lord would deliver His people and break their yoke of bondage. A **new David**, rather than a foreign king, would reign over Israel (30:8–9). Even though Judah had an incurable wound (the destruction of the nation) that would not heal, the Lord's inexplicable grace would one day heal them and restore Israel to health (30:15–16). The exiles would return to rebuild their ruined cities after the Lord had exhausted His anger against them.



The tel of ancient Lachish.

The Lord would restore Israel because He loved His people with an eternal love (31:2–6). The return from exile would be like a second exodus as the Lord redeemed His people from bondage in a foreign land. The weeping and mourning of the Lord's unfaithful wife and daughter would be transformed into the rejoicing of a young woman anticipating her marriage. The second exodus will surpass the first because the Lord will establish a **new covenant** that will be better than the one enacted at Mount Sinai (31:31–34). The New Testament reveals that believers today currently enjoy the blessings of the new covenant through the death of Jesus and the giving of the Spirit (Matt 11:28; 1 Cor 11:25; Heb 8:7–10; 10:15–18), but the complete fulfillment of this new covenant was made originally with the house of Israel, and Judah awaits the future time of restoration when "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26–27).

The Lord encouraged the prophet to trust Him even as Jeremiah remained **imprisoned** in the final days before the fall of Jerusalem (33:1–5). The Lord again continued to Jeremiah four key promises concerning the future restoration: (1) the rebuilding of Israel's cities (33:7, 12); the forgiveness of sins (33:8); (3) the renewal of joy (33:9–11); and (4) the repopulation of the land and cities (33:12–13). The promise of restoration was recast in the Lord's covenantal promises to Israel. Even without a king on the throne, the **Levites**, the women, elders, and the Lord would eventually raise up a

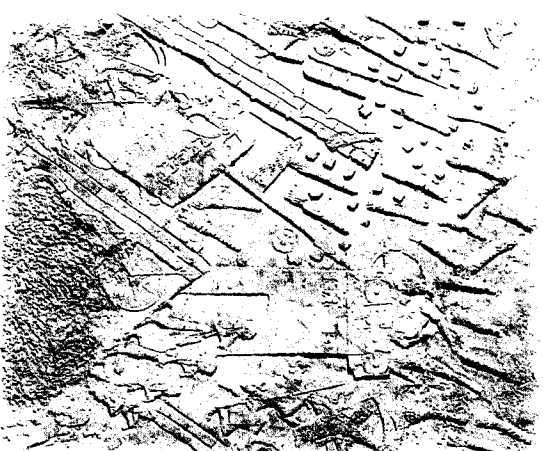
Davidic king who would rule over the people in righteousness and peace (33:15). The Lord would also fulfill His promises concerning an enduring priesthood for the Levites. The roles of enduring king and priest would find their ultimate fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

C. Problem of Judah's Response (Jeremiah 34–45)

Judah moved from possible repentance in the reign of Jehoiakim to irrevocable judgment resulting in the fall of Jerusalem. In 605 BC, the scribe Baruch recorded and read a **scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies** warning of the coming judgment. A group of scribes and officials took these warnings seriously and arranged to have the scroll read to Jehoiakim. The king showed his disregard for the prophetic word (just as he had done with the execution of Uriah the prophet in 26:20–24) by cutting up the scroll and throwing it into the fire as it was read to him. The Lord commissioned Jeremiah and Baruch to compose another scroll with additional warnings of judgment and announced that Jehoiakim would die and that, as punishment for his destruction of the scroll, none of his descendants would sit on the throne.

While Jehoiakim's unbelief took the form of violent hostility, King Zedekiah demonstrated his unbelief by being fearful and unwilling to follow Jeremiah's counsel (chaps. 37–38). Jeremiah warned that Judah would not be able to resist the Babylonians (37:6–10) and that submission to Babylon was the only way Jerusalem would be spared from destruction (38:2–3; 17–18,20–23). But Zedekiah refused to listen because he feared the royal and military officials who wished to continue their resistance against Babylon. Jeremiah was kept in prison and was even thrown into a muddy cistern and left to die. Only the intervention of a foreign court official, a **Cushite named Ebed-*melech***, convinced the king to rescue Jeremiah from the cistern and save the prophet's life (38:1–13). Zedekiah protected Jeremiah, hoping for a favorable oracle of deliverance, but such a promise was not forthcoming.

The Baby Ionians captured Jerusalem in 586 BC, after a siege lasting for a year and a half. In fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecies of judgment, Zedekiah attempted to



Detail of the siege of Lachish recorded on the walls of the palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh. Assyrian battering rams attack the desperate defenders of the Judean city who attempt to counteract the assault by hurling flaming torches toward the battering rams. At the right, captives stream out of the abandoned city (courtesy of the British Museum).

Ebed-melech the Cushite

One of the most touching stories in the narrative section is that of Jeremiah's rescue by an African court official named Ebed-melech ("servant of the king"). Under pressure from his own court officials, King Zedekiah permitted them to imprison Jeremiah in a cistern in the guard's courtyard (38:1–6). Sinking into the mud and his own refuse, Jeremiah was left to die. But a "court official" of African descent, a Cushite from Ethiopia, came to the prophets' rescue. Ebed-melech risked his own life, insisting that Jeremiah be released and treated more humanely (38:7–10).

In this story the Ethiopian came to the prophet's rescue and was later himself saved by the prophet's intervention (39:13–18). In a contrasting story in Acts 8:26–39, the prophet/evangelist Philip comes to the aid of the Ethiopian official on the road to Gaza. Philip heard him reading from the text of Isaiah 53 and pointed him to faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Hee but was captured by the Babylonian army near Jericho. Nebuchadnezzar executed Zedekiah's sons and then blinded the king before taking him away as a prisoner to Babylon (39:1–7). Because of his refusal to listen to the prophet, the last thing the king saw with his eyes was the death of his sons. The walls of Jerusalem were torn down, and the king and most of the people in the land were taken away as exiles to Babylon. In the meantime **Jeremiah was set free** from prison by the Babylonians.

Jeremiah chose to remain in the land and minister to the poor people left there by the Babylonians (39:11–14; 40:1–6). Gedaliah was the Jewish governor the Babylonians had appointed over the land (40:9–10).

The Lord offered the remnant remaining in the land the opportunity to experience peace and blessing if they would follow Jeremiah's counsel of submitting to Babylon. Instead the Jews remaining in the land committed two specific acts of disobedience. The first was that Ishmael, from the family of David, assassinated Gedaliah. He did this in an attempt to restore the Davidic monarchy (41:1). An Ishmaelite servant, however, a group



One of the "archaic cuneiform" tablets in the ruins of the city of Assur, which were found in the excavations. The tablet contains a list of names of the gods of the Assyrians, which is a list of the gods of the Assyrians.

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Hebrew Highlight

Declare. Hebrew **nx**; (*ne' um*). This term appears 376 times in the Hebrew Bible of which 176 appear in Jeremiah. It is translated "declaration" or "oracle," and is almost always associated with prophetic declarations from the Lord Himself. It occurs only 19 times outside the Prophets. It is also translated "says," as in: "This is what the Lord says." As such, *ne'um* opens and closes divine messages in which the prophet claims to be speaking the words of God.

of 80 pilgrims who had come to worship at Jerusalem and then took Jewish hostages at Mizpah. A military commander named Johanan rescued the hostages, but Ishmael was able to flee to the land of Ammon. Second, Johanan and his military contingent took **Jeremiah hostage** and fled to Egypt (42:1–43:7) in a reversal of the exodus.

After he was taken away to Egypt, Jeremiah announced that the Lord would destroy the Jewish refugees in Egypt because they persisted in the sinful ways of their fathers and refused to turn from their idolatry (chap. 44). They worshipped the gods of Egypt and made offerings to the "Queen of Heaven" (the fertility goddess Ishtar). They defiantly stated they would not listen to Jeremiah's message (44:16). Their covenantal perspective was so warped that they believed Josiah's reforms, which purged Judah's worship of pagan rituals, were the cause of the fall of Jerusalem (44:17–18). In response to their vow that they would carry on with their pagan rites, the Lord swore that He would destroy the remnant in Egypt and that only a few of them would survive. Nebuchadnezzar's army attacked Egypt, and the rebels fell under God's judgment.

The promise of salvation at the conclusion to this section is extended to two lone individuals, the Cushite Ebed-melech (39:15–18) and Jeremiah's scribe **Baruch** (45:1–5). Baruch had courageously and faithfully served the Lord and Jeremiah. He read the scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies at the temple when it was not safe for Jeremiah to be there (36:8–10), and Baruch was even blamed as the source of Jeremiah's message calling for submission to Babylon (43:3). Baruch shared in Jeremiah's persecution and was taken away with the prophet to Egypt (43:6–7). Because of his faithfulness, the Lord promised that He would protect and preserve Baruch wherever he was taken. The promise to Baruch parallels the earlier promise to Ebed-melech, who had acted to save Jeremiah's life when he was thrown into the cistern (cf. 39:15–18). Obedience to the Lord was a matter of life and death, and only those who followed the Lord would enjoy the blessings of His salvation.

IV. Oracles Against the Nations: Words of the Lord (Jeremiah 46–51)

Israel's restoration would also include the **judgment of its enemies**, so the book of Jeremiah concludes with a series of oracles against nine foreign nations:

- Egypt (46:1–28)
- Pharaoh (47:1–7)

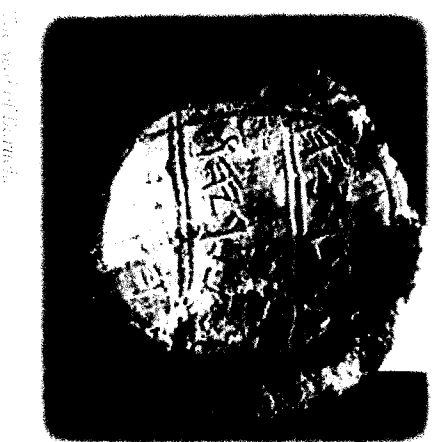
- Moab (48:1–47)
- Ammon (49:1–6)
- Edom (49:7–22)
- Damascus (49:23–27)
- Kedar and Hazor (49:28–33)
- Elam (49:34–39)
- Babylon (50:1–51:64)

In the Septuagint (LXX) version (which may represent an early edition of Jeremiah), these oracles appear immediately after 25:13 and are in a different order. These judgment oracles refer to the historical judgments carried out against these nations, primarily through the military operations of the Babylonian army. These oracles are bookended by the oracles against the superpowers Egypt and Babylon. They were Israel's first and last oppressors, and they also vied for control of Judah during Jeremiah's ministry.

The Lord's judgment would fall on these nations for their pride in their wealth and military might (46:8; 48:7,26;29–30,42; 49:4), their idolatry (46:26; 48:13,35), and their mistreatment of Israel (48:27; 49:1–2). The most remarkable feature of these oracles against the nations is that the Lord promises a restoration for some of these people. Egypt would again be inhabited as in its former days (46:26), and the Lord promised to “restore the fortunes” (*shuv shewat*) of Moab (48:47), Ammon (49:6), and Elam (49:39), the same expression used in Jeremiah to describe the future restoration of Israel.

Jeremiah's primary focus is on the **judgment of Babylon**. The Lord used Babylon as His “hammer” of judgment against Judah and the nations (50:23; 51:20–23), but He would also hold Babylon accountable for its crimes and violence. The Lord would judge the false gods of Babylon (50:2–3), and He would also execute vengeance against Babylon for the violence it inflicted upon Judah (50:11–14,28–35; 51:5,10–11,24,34–37,49–53). The Lord would

reverse the fortunes of Judah and Babylon by restoring His people at the same time. He was bringing an enemy army to destroy Babylon. Jeremiah's earlier oracles of judgment against Judah were reapplied to Babylon. The message concerning the enemy from the north attacking the “Daughter of Babylon” in 50:41–43 duplicates the message against the “Daughter Zion” in 50:2–24. The depiction of Babylon's defeat in 51:27–33 recalls earlier prophecies concerning the fall of Judah and Jerusalem (e.g., 8:16–21; 9:1–8). To



Fragment of a tablet.

represent the evening fall of Babylon, the scribe Seraiah read the scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies against the city and then threw the scroll into a cuneiform river (51:61–64).

Babylon in Scripture is also representative of human opposition to God and His people. Babylon was the site of the rebellion that led to the confusion of human language and the division of the nations (Gen 11:1–9). Revelation 17–18 depicts the destruction of the future empire of Antichrist as the fall of Babylon. This reference to Babylon in Revelation appears symbolic rather than geographic. Just like the Babylon of the past, the future empire of Antichrist would oppose God and persecute God's people in an even greater way. Several parallels are obvious:²

JEREMIAH	PROPHETIC EVENTS	REVELATION
51:7	Cup of God's Wrath	18:3
51:9	Sins Piled Up to Heaven	18:5
51:22	Judgment as a Harvest	14:14–15
51:22	Babylon as a Volcano	18:20
51:48	Heaven and Earth Rejoice	18:20

V. Epilogue: The Fall of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 52)

The final verse of Jeremiah 51 states, “The words of Jeremiah end here,” and the narrative of the fall of Jerusalem in chap. 52 serves as an appendix to the book that was likely added by a later editor. This account closely parallels 2 Kings 25 and serves canonically to connect the book of Jeremiah with the story of the covenant failure of



Jerusalem: The city of Jerusalem, Babylon falls! Judah's mountains toward the new city in Jerusalem.

LAMENTATIONS Jerusalem Is Burning

The book of Lamentations is a series of five separate laments over the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586 BC. The intensely emotional nature of the book indicates that the writer experienced these events firsthand. He is among the survivors of the destruction of Jerusalem who continue to endure grief, deprivation, and humiliation. The wounds and emotional pain over the fall of Jerusalem are still fresh. There is no evidence of a return to the land or the rebuilding of the temple. The book concludes with the complaint that the Lord appears to have forgotten His people and a cry for their restoration (5:19–22).

Lamentations was most likely composed shortly after 586 BC and long before 538 BC when Cyrus decreed that the Jews could return to their homeland. Commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem is attested at an early time in the Old Testament (Jer 41:5; Zech 7:3–5; 8:19), and the reading of Lamentations ultimately became part of the ceremonies marking the fall of Jerusalem on the ninth of Ab. Lamentations is part of five books in the Hebrew canon known as the *Megilloth* (also including Ecclesiastes, Esther, Ruth, and Song of Solomon) that were associated with specific Hebrew festivals.

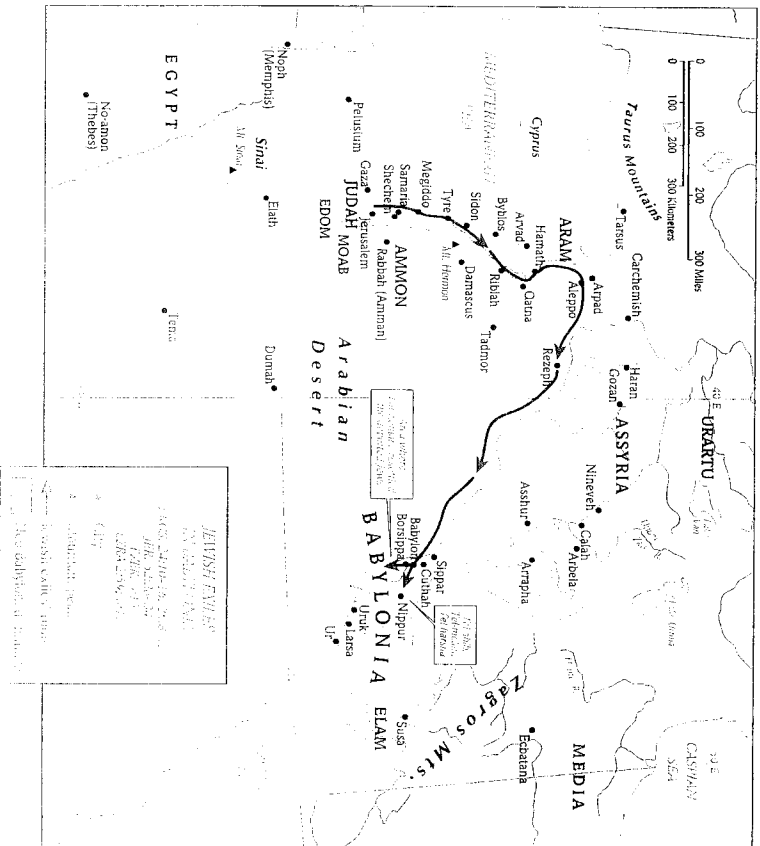
BACKGROUND

The poems in the book most closely resemble the communal laments in the Psalms. These laments expressed the people's sorrow following military defeats (Psalms 44: 60; 74; 79; 80). Lamentations 1, 2, and 4 are introduced by the exclamation "How?" (*ekrekah*) and recall similar terminology used in the funeral dirge of David when he learned of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:19–27). Six laments over the destruction of cities are also found in Mesopotamian literature dating from 2000–1500 BC. Like Lamentations these compositions attribute the destruction of a city to divine abandonment and judgment. However, Lamentations is monotheistic in its perspective and also reflects a clearer understanding of the moral violations on the part of the people that prompted the divine judgment. The God of the Old Testament is not capricious but acts in accordance with the covenant He established with His people. His judgments are the result of their deliberate violations of His covenant with them.

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Chapters 1–4 in Lamentations are **acrostic poems**. The Hebrew poems in chapts. 1 and 2 consist of 22 verses of three lines each, with each new verse beginning with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 4 is the same but with each verse having two lines. The acrostic in chap. 3 is the most elaborate, with 66 verses consisting of 22 stanzas of 3 verses. The poem works through the alphabet with each of the three lines in a stanza beginning with the same letter. Chapter 5 is not an acrostic but has 22 verses corresponding to the number of Hebrew letters in the alphabet. The acrostic form may have aided in memorization, but the use of the entire alphabet is also a literary device to suggest that the lament expresses the full range of human grief and the depth of suffering the people of Judah endured.

Another prominent poetic feature is the use of the **qinah-meter**, in which the second part of each poetic line is shorter than the first. This meter is typically used in Old Testament laments, and these unbalanced lines may suggest the sobbing speech or halting limp of mourners in a funeral procession. The skillful use of metaphor, particularly the personification of Jerusalem as a woman in chap. 1, reflects the literary quality of Lamentations and helps the reader share the painful emotions of those who lived through the fall of Jerusalem. The length and positioning of chap. 3 make this



poem the key chapter in the book. In the midst of this disaster, the writer encourages people to trust in the covenant faithfulness (*chêséd*) of the Lord as their source of hope for the future (3:21–36).

Hebrew Highlight

Faithful Love. Hebrew *ṭp̄n* (*chêséd*). This word appears 249 times in the Hebrew Bible (129 times in the Psalms). It refers to God's faithful and constant covenant love. This love includes kindness (Gen 19:19), loyalty (Job 6:14), and faithfulness (Isa 40:6). *Chêséd* also implies favor (Ezra 2:7) and grace (Ezra 9:9). Its plural form indicates acts of love (Ps 107:43) or good deeds (Neh 13:14). It reminds us that God loves us even when we don't deserve it.

The book of Lamentations is an anonymous composition that appears in the Hebrew Bible in the Writings section of the canon, but early tradition identifies **Jeremiah** as the author of the book. The first verse of Lamentations in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) attributes the book to Jeremiah, and the Septuagint also placed Lamentations after the book of Jeremiah as does the English Bible. The Aramaic Targum, the Syriac Peshitta, the Latin Vulgate, and the Babylonian Talmud also attribute the book to Jeremiah. With its focus on the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, the book fits the time frame of Jeremiah's ministry. Second Chronicles 35:25 states that Jeremiah composed laments at the death of Josiah, and the book of Jeremiah often portrays the prophet as weeping over the destruction of his people (Jer 9:1–2; 14:17–22).

Outline¹

- I. The Grief of Jerusalem: Mourning Widow (Lamentations 1)
- II. The Lord as Warrior: Weeping Daughter (Lamentations 2)
- III. Hope in Suffering: Afflicted Man (Lamentations 3)
- IV. The Ravages of War: Tarnished Gold (Lamentations 4)
- V. Prayer for Restoration: Fatherless Child (Lamentations 5)

MESSAGE

I. The Grief of Jerusalem: Mourning Widow (Lamentations 1)

This poem portrays Jerusalem as a **grieving widow** mourning her destruction. Jerusalem's lovers and friends refer to the nation she depended on through alliances, but abandoned her. In her days of former greatness, Jerusalem was a proud princess, but she trusted in them rather than trusting in the Lord for protection, but suddenly they abandoned her. In her days of former greatness, Jerusalem was a proud princess, but her enemies reduced her to slavery. The recurring refrain that "there was no one to comfort" Jerusalem reflected the city's hopeless condition (1:2, 9, 16–17, 21). Jerusalem acknowledged that her sins were the cause of her misery, but also pleaded for the Lord to see her distress and act on her behalf.

II. The Lord as Warrior: Weeping Daughter (Lamentations 2)

The Hebrews celebrated how the Lord protected Jerusalem and defeated the enemies that attacked her (Pss 46:5–11; 48:3–8; 76:1–12), but this lament faces the harsh reality that the Lord Himself brought about the destruction of the daughter of Jerusalem. As the **Divine Warrior**, the Lord poured out His anger and wrath on the city and even abandoned His own sanctuary. The poet wept over the suffering and death all around him and encouraged the people to give full expression of their grief to the Lord. There was hope that their cries would turn away the Lord's anger.

III. Hope in Suffering: Afflicted Man (Lamentations 3)

In the central section of the book, the poet expresses a first-person lament that describes his **intense suffering** with vivid emotion and metaphor. His experiences are representative of the community. The Lord relentlessly attacked him by ravaging his body, confining him in a dark dungeon, mangling him like a wild animal, and shooting him with arrows. Not relenting from His assault, the Lord gave him bitter food and drink, broke his teeth, and then trampled him underfoot. The piling up of metaphors reflected the intensity of his afflictions. Some commentators believe this beleaguered individual is the personified city of Jerusalem.

Despite the suffering of the present, the Lord's covenant **faithfulness** (*chêséd*) offers hope for the future. The Lord will continue to show mercy and compassion to His people because His love for them is greater than His anger over their disobedience. The writer encourages the people to return to the Lord and confess their sins. While weeping over the disaster that Jerusalem experienced, he prays for the Lord to exact vengeance on Judah's enemies. The poet's faith is such that he speaks as if God has answered His prayer even as he speaks it.

IV. The Ravages of War: Tarnished Gold (Lamentations 4)

This poem contrasts Zion's glorious past with its deplorable present. Jerusalem was "the perfection of beauty" and "the joy of the whole earth" (24:5; Ps 48:2), but the city was ravaged by war because of the Lord's judgment. Jerusalem's fate was worse than that of Sodom. Siege warfare in the ancient Near East was brutal and involved



Beggar at the Damascus gate in Jerusalem.

depriving the besieged city of food and water. The Babylonian siege of Jerusalem lasted for a year and a half (2 Kgs 25:1–3), so some of the residents of Jerusalem were reduced to cannibalism because of the severe famine. This was a fulfillment of the covenant curse announced by Moses (Deut 28:53–57). The judgment of Judah was especially the fault of its corrupt prophets and priests that led the people astray.

V. Prayer for Restoration: Fatherless Child (Lamentations 5)

The poet called for the Lord once more to **remember** the pitiful condition of those that survived the fall of Jerusalem and to intervene on their behalf. Judah forfeited the land given to them as an “inheritance” from the Lord (Exod 32:13; Deut 12:9–10; 15:4). The Lord had blessed them with a bountiful land, but now they suffered from famine and starvation. The defeat of Judah’s army deprived families of fathers and husbands. Babylonian soldiers committed atrocities by raping women and executing Judah’s princes, and their occupation of Judah reduced the population to slavery. The writer confessed that Judah’s humiliation was due to the sins of both previous generations and the present one (5:7,18). The people suffered the residual effects of their fathers’ sins (Exod 34:7; Deut 34:9) but were equally guilty before God for their own disobedience.

The poet concluded with a **petition** for the Lord to restore His people. While acknowledging God’s sovereignty, he also questioned why it appeared that the Lord had forgotten and abandoned His people. Lamentations 3 affirmed that the Lord’s covenant faithfulness guaranteed a future for Israel, but this final complaint is an honest expression of what the life of faith is really like. The people of God would struggle between fear and faith as they waited for the Lord’s deliverance. Restoration would come but only in the distant future after a long period of exile and foreign oppression. The people of God continue to wait for their final deliverance in the distant future.

THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The time of the fall of Jerusalem and Babylonian exile was a national calamity (Psalm 137) and constituted the greatest theological crisis faced by ancient Israel. The temple where the Lord dwelt among His people was in ruins. The Lord appeared to have abandoned His people, or perhaps His covenant promises to them had failed. The survivors of this disaster were left to wonder if the Lord was able or willing to restore them. Lamentations gives voice to the suffering of these survivors and offers theological reflection to help them through this crisis. The writer openly acknowledges that the fall of Jerusalem is due to the sins of the people (1:5,14,18; 3:42; 4:6,22; 5:7,16). The people rather than the Lord are the ones who have failed to keep the covenant. The message of Lamentations is a vivid reminder of the severe **consequences** of sin and a living illustration of the spiritual principle of reaping what one sows (Gal 6:7). Moses warned that military defeat and exile would be the ultimate covenant curses if Israel failed to obey the Lord’s commands (Deut 28:49–57). Thus the Lord inflicted these punishments on Israel and Judah after hundreds of years of disobedience and countless

calls for the people to turn from their sinful ways. God’s dealings with Israel serve as a serious reminder to us today. If God allowed Israel to come under judgment for her sins, we dare not believe that we will escape if we take His warnings lightly.

Lamentations also informs a proper understanding of **prayer**. Prayer is both an individual and a corporate activity. Confession of sin is essential when entering into the presence of a holy God. The prayers in this book remind readers of the privilege believers have to bring their deepest sorrows and hurts to the Lord. The raw emotion and transparent honesty of Lamentations offer a corrective to the shallow and contrived prayers that are too often a part of private and public worship. While recognizing the sovereignty of God, the poet questioned the Lord’s apparent inactivity on behalf of His people and challenged the Lord to act in accordance with His character and promises. Jesus earned these same types of laments when facing the cross and other hardships in His earthly ministry (Matt 27:46; Luke 22:41–42; Heb 5:7). Jesus is also the sympathetic High Priest who responds to the cries of His people because He has shared in their trials (Heb 4:15–16).



Jewish men praying at the Wailing Wall—no point closer to the site of the ancient temple.

For Further Reading

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