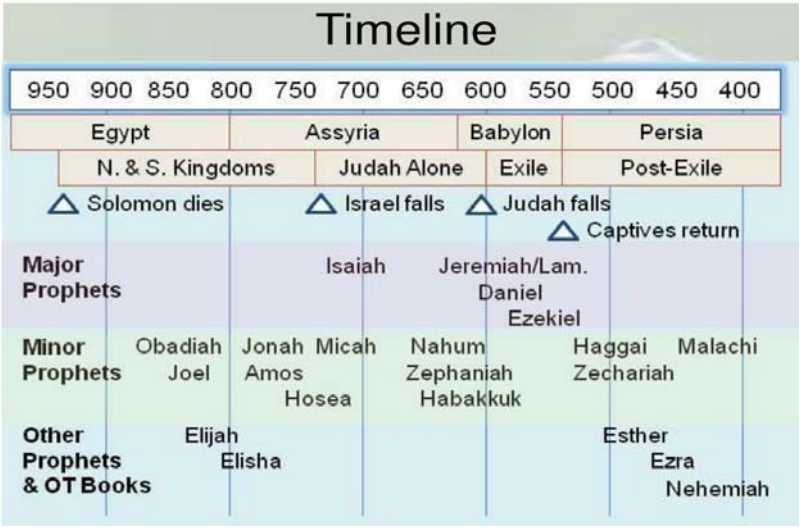
Jesus in the Prophets – Jeremiah

1. Introduction

a. Last time we looked at Isaiah, who prophesied at the time of the Assyrian invasion and warned of the Babylonian invasion. As we saw, despite some valiant attempts to reform by kings such as Hezekiah and Josiah, this process of decline was irreversible and ends with the ultimate destruction of all the visible elements of Israel's covenant relationship with God, such as Jerusalem and the temple.



b. Jeremiah prophesies in the final stages of this terrible period of decline. He declares the coming destruction of all the visible, tangible evidences of God's presence with the people: the land, the city, the temple, the throne of David. *Much of Jeremiah is expressed in bridal language expressing God's broken heart as he sees His Bride abandoning Him and engaging in adultery with other gods.* In common with nearly all the Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah had three main points to his message:

   i God's people (in this case, those in Judah) have sinned grievously against the Lord.

   ii The Lord will judge his people for their sin, in this case through the onslaught of the Babylonians.

   iii Yet God is both unfailingly faithful and bountifully merciful and will bring restoration and salvation.

c. The late Francis Schaeffer once identified Jeremiah as the quintessential prophet for the postmodern age. "Jeremiah," he wrote, "provides us with an extended study of an era like our own, where men have turned away from God, and society has become post-Christian" (Schaeffer: Death in the City).

d. The rabbis called him the "Weeping Prophet," and not without reason. His entire mission was to *express Yahweh's great pain and* herald sorrow, destruction, and hardship for the people of God. As he finally saw the Holy Temple burn to the ground, it surely must have seemed as if his entire ministry had failed.

e. The prophet Jeremiah is generally regarded as one of the three "major" Jewish prophets (the other two being Isaiah and Ezekiel). He lived from about 640-570 BC and began serving as God's prophet during the 13th year of King Josiah's reign. Jeremiah's long ministry would subsequently span the reigns of five different kings of Judah: Josiah (640–609 BC), Jehoahaz (609 BC), Jehoiakim (609-598 BC), Jehoiachin (598-597 BC), and Zedekiah, the last king of Judah (597-586 BC).

f. Over the course of his 40-year ministry, Jeremiah saw the abrupt fall of the Assyrian Empire and the steady rise of Babylonian dominance in the Ancient Near East. He witnessed prince Nebuchadnezzar's rise to power and understood the significance of his military campaign against Egypt at the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC. He foresaw that the political future of Judah would turn on the conflict between Babylon and Egypt.

2. Jeremiah foreshadows Jesus the suffering servant

a. We should not be put off by Jeremiah's reputation as the gloomy or "weeping" prophet. He has much encouragement to offer the faithful. To be sure, he is remarkable for the way he reveals his feelings and the torment of his soul. This is not surprising given the nature of his message and the constant opposition by most of his fellow Israelites.

b. Yet, even his experience of this sadness and his suffering are a foreshadowing of the anguish of Jesus as he faces even more harrowing torments, again from fellow Israelites, that lead to his death on the cross. Redemption comes through pain, not through avoiding it.

c. The gospel is foreshadowed by Jeremiah's message and his personal involvement in it. By his words and suffering he points to the sovereign grace of God in his control over world history and his faithfulness to his covenant that will be fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

3. The Lord our Righteousness - Yahweh Tsidkenu

a. However, although much of Jeremiah is a message of destruction and loss there is also a message of hope. As with Isaiah, there is a future promise of restoration and salvation.

Jer.23:5-6 *"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.* ***6*** *In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Saviour.*

b. Here, again, we see the promise of this one who would be a descendent of David (the promised seed) and Jeremiah identifies him as a righteous Branch who will be our Righteous Saviour or, in other translations, our righteousness. Clearly this is Jesus. He is the ultimate hope for Israel's rebellion and sin.

c. So what is righteousness? Righteousness is the perfect holiness of Christ. It is an essential attribute to the character of God; quite literally meaning "One who is right". It is the polar opposite of sin. To commit sin is to go against God's design for our lives, therefore righteousness is the only living standard that is acceptable for us to stand before the Father. The wages of sin is death, but ..

Prov.12:28 *In the path of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death.*

d. Many think righteous living is about behavioural modification. They think that if they try to stop swearing as much and stop watching the wrong movies, then that means they are living righteously. They focus on the outward appearance of holiness rather than a Spirit-filled change.

e. While the Bible does show those outward changes as good and righteous works, to believe that this is righteousness is the reverse of what the Bible teaches. Righteousness actually produces those works, not the other way around. All of us are born into complete bondage to sin, unable to produce any sort of righteousness on our own.

Romans 3:9-12 *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,* ***10*** *as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one;* ***11*** *no one understands; no one seeks for God.* ***12*** *All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."*

f. As a matter of fact, Isaiah says that our attempts to produce righteousness on our own are disgusting in the eyes of God.

Isaiah 64:6 *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*

g. Even when our good deeds seem to be performed from the purest of motives, unless that motivation is to glorify the name of Jesus, those deeds are completely self-righteous and sinful.

h. The Bible clearly defines righteousness as something His people should pursue (2 Tim 2:22), yet we are unable to produce it. So where do we get it? Our righteousness is imputed from Jesus through the atoning work that He accomplished on the cross (Philippians 1:11) We couldn't produce it, Christ produced it for us.

2 Corinthians 5:21 *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

i. Only the perfection of Christ could have accomplished this work. Only Jesus could have lived a perfect, obedient, and sinless life. Only Jesus could have atoned for the sins of His people. Only the righteous in Christ will enter His Kingdom (Matt.5:20)

j. When God sees His people, He doesn't see our sin. Instead, He sees us clothed in the righteousness of Christ. He sees us instantly and completely justified through that righteousness.

Isaiah 61:10 *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

k. This was the purpose of the cross. Out of love and mercy, Christ came to fulfil the law for us. He fulfilled the story of the Torah for His people. We were unable to obey the law and live in righteousness, so Christ came and lived in perfection in our place. He took our disobedience, nailed it to the cross, and gave us His righteousness.

1 Peter 2:24 *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*

l. This is the good news of the Gospel of Jesus. We don't have to work and try and produce our own righteousness, Christ has robed us in His. His entire Earthly mission was to reconcile the church, making her in righteous standing with God. He is <u>our Righteousness</u> if we turn to Him and allow His righteousness to transform us into his likeness.

Titus 3:4-7 *But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared,* ***5*** *he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,* ***6*** *whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour,* ***7*** *so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life*

m. We can rest in the fact that God sovereignly works everything for the good of His people, including restoring us through the righteousness of His Son. Our righteousness began in Christ and is completed in Christ. All we need to do is follow Him and pursue it daily.

Psalm 23:3 *He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

4. A new covenant

a. Probably one of the most well-known verses from Jeremiah is the promise of a new covenant in chapter 31.

Jer.31:31-33 *"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make* ***a new covenant*** *with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,* ***32*** *not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord.* ***33*** *But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord:* ***I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts****. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

b. However, Jeremiah isn't actually the first person to promise a new covenant. Moses, through whom God established the Old Covenant, also anticipated the New Covenant. In one of his final addresses to the nation of Israel, Moses looks forward to a time when Israel would be given "a heart to understand" and he prophesies that Israel would fail in keeping the Old Covenant but he then sees a time of restoration when the Lord will "circumcise their hearts.

Deut.30:6 *And the Lord your God will* ***circumcise your heart*** *and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.*

a. The New Covenant is also mentioned in Ezekiel 36 where Ezekiel lists several aspects of the New Covenant: a new heart, a new spirit, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and true holiness. The Mosaic Law could provide none of these things (Rom. 3:20).

Ez.36:26-27 *And I will give you a* ***new heart****, and a* ***new spirit*** *I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.* ***27*** *And I will put my Spirit within you, and* ***cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules****.*

b. The New Covenant involves a total change of heart so that God's people are naturally pleasing to Him. Jesus came to fulfil the Law of Moses (Matthew 5:17) and to establish the New Covenant between God and His people. The Old Covenant was written in stone, but the New Covenant is written on hearts.

c. The Old Covenant required blood sacrifices, but it could not provide a final sacrifice for sin. The Old Covenant required repeated, daily sacrifices of animals as a reminder of the people's sin. But, as Scripture says, "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4).

d. Under the Old Covenant, the same inadequate sacrifices were constantly repeated. For every sin, the process was replicated, day after day, month after month, year after year. The Old Covenant never provided a full, complete sacrifice for sin.

Heb. 8:7 *For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second*

5. The power of the blood

a. Jesus came to establish a "better covenant" (Hebrews 7:22), a "new covenant" that Jesus said was in His blood. Jesus shed His blood on the cross to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29) and ratify the new covenant between God and man. Entering the New Covenant is made possible only by faith in Christ, who shed His blood to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). This is a covenant, like all others, sealed by blood, but this blood was not the blood of ox or lambs but the blood of Christ himself shed on the cross.

b. So it is at the Last Supper, that Jesus takes the cup to reveal the coming of this new covenant,

Luke 20:22 *"This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant* ***in my blood****"*

c. By "this cup," Jesus was referring to the contents of the cup, which was the "fruit of the vine" (Mark 14:25) which was representative of Christ's blood. Jesus gave His disciples the cup, infusing it with new meaning, and told them drinking it was to be a memorial of His death: it was to be drunk "in remembrance of me"

d. The New Covenant is based on faith in the shed blood of Christ to take away sin, not on repeated sacrifices or any other kind of work (see Ephesians 2:8–9). Because Jesus is the holy Lamb of God, His one-time sacrifice is sufficient to atone for the sins of all who believe in Him.

e. We "partake" of Jesus by coming to Him in faith (John 1:12), trusting that His shed blood (and broken body) is sufficient to pay for our sins. The elements of bread and wine commemorate His death and the shedding of His blood. When we eat those elements in communion with other believers, we affirm our faith and fellowship in Christ.

6. A new heart and a new spirit

a. God gave Israel His eternal laws that define sin—with the 10 Commandments serving as the core of Israel's responsibility under the Old Covenant (Exodus 34:27-28; Deuteronomy 4:13). However, there was one key problem with this arrangement: Although God's law was, and is, perfect (Psalm 19:7), the people were not.

b. God knew in advance that the Israelites were missing something very important. They did not have the necessary heart to be truly obedient to Him (Deuteronomy 5:23-29). The Israelites agreed to obey God because of external motivation. They were afraid of punishment from God (Exodus 20:18-21), but that type of external motivation does not guarantee right behaviour! Unless a person is internally convicted to do what is right, it can become far too easy to choose to do what is wrong instead.

c. Ancient Israel sadly fell into this trap and repeatedly disobeyed God throughout history, despite the fact that they suffered punishment as a result. Time and time again, the Israelites broke the covenant they made with God, illustrating a key flaw in the covenant. The flaw was not with the laws they agreed to obey, but rather with the people themselves (Hebrews 8:7-8)!

d. The Israelites did not have a heart to truly know God because the time was not yet right for God to give them that heart (Deuteronomy 29:4). But even without a right heart, it was still possible for the Israelites to respond to the correction God gave them when they made wrong choices. Unfortunately, they failed to adjust their behaviour in the long run. However,

their example provides a powerful lesson to us of how easy it is to sin (1 Corinthians 10:11-12).

e. Under the New Covenant, God's people have the opportunity to receive a heart to obey Him. The promise in Jeremiah and Ezekiel is that the time would come when His people would have His laws internalised and written on their hearts

f. When God's Spirit was made widely available on the Day of Pentecost, that goal became possible. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians become able to think like God (1 Corinthians 2:11, 16). God's mind—reflected in His law of love—can now be internalised within His people.

g. The New Covenant makes a personal relationship with God possible. Through the presence of God's Spirit, reconciliation takes place and a believer receives access to God through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:18). New Covenant Christians have the ability to go "boldly to the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16) and pray, request, consult and so on. They can enjoy continual fellowship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. *Out of the love between the Bridegroom and His Bride comes the relationship to know His ways and the motivation to walk in them*

7. The glorious promises in Jeremiah

a. Knowing what the New Covenant entails reveals our God as good, compassionate, loving and merciful. This glorious covenant is the means by which God will give immortality to countless human beings. It's the reason we were all created.

b. To take part in the New Covenant, we were first called by God – he in the initiator.

John 6:44 *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.*

c. Then, through genuine repentance we answered the call. Through repentance and totally abandoning the disobedient way of death *(other lovers)* and desiring to live in righteousness we accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Saviour *(our Bridegroom)* and agreed to the terms and conditions of the New Covenant *(the marriage contract)*

d. At this point Christ's shed blood was applied and we received God's Spirit, which is the down payment of eternal life.

Eph.1:13-14 *In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, **14** who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

e. We receive our righteousness through Christ and are now empowered by the work of the Holy Spirit upon our hearts to walk in obedience and know the saving grace that brings us to salvation.

Titus 2:11-12 *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, **12** training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age*

f. So although Jeremiah is often considered as a miserable and gloomy prophetic book it actually contains the most glorious and incredible promises in the prophets. Out of opposition and persecution comes hope and a future – *a restored relationship with our Bridegroom King.*

1 John 2:1 *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*