

# Route 66

## *Jeremiah: The End Is Here*

Part 24 – November 22, 2009



The message of *Isaiah* the prophet was, “The end is near”. The prophet *Jeremiah’s* message was, “The end is *here*”! Jeremiah’s ministry spans about 40 years, and the last five kings of Judah. He’s the only recorded prophet to be present for (and to ride out) the invasion, the exile, the final destruction, and the aftermath.

The “blue” kings are the righteous ones, and the numbers are their years of rule. The grey dots represent Isaiah’s ministry. Jeremiah shows up about 90 years after Isaiah’s ministry ends. Josiah was the last *righteous* king of Judah. And Josiah was only eight years old when he became king. The book begins:



Anathoth (a.k.a. Anata)

The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiyah [*hil-KIGH-uh*], one of the priests at Anathoth [*3 miles north of the temple in Jerusalem*] in the territory of Benjamin. The word of the Lord came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah [*when he would’ve been 21 years old*] ... - *Jeremiah 1:1-2 NIV*

Jeremiah was a young, most likely in training to become a priest like his father, Hilkiyah. And he begins his book by telling us he tried to talk God out of appointing him as a prophet.

“Ah, Sovereign Lord,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.” - *Jeremiah 1:6 NIV*

In one statement, Jeremiah employs the three classic excuses for not speaking to others about our faith when God prompts us. I’m too young; and when I’m no longer too young, I’m too ignorant; and when I’m no longer too ignorant, I’m too inarticulate.

But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” ... - *Jeremiah 1:7-8 NIV*

The books of Moses had been long lost and forgotten. Idol worship was rampant. And there were pagan altars *in* the temple courts. The hills were dotted with poles designating orgy sites intended to “stimulate” fertility gods like Asherah [*uh-SHEE-ruh*]. King Manasseh even placed an Asherah pole *in* the temple! (*2 Kings 21:5-7*)

So, Jeremiah takes an unwelcome message to an unfaithful people!

And almost immediately the men of Anathoth conspire to kill him. But, he learns of the plot and escapes to Jerusalem. This is the first, but certainly not the last time God will rescue Jeremiah! Prophecy was a thankless job - bringing messages like this:

The bodies of my people will be food for the vultures and wild animals ... I will put an end to the happy singing and laughter in the streets of Jerusalem. ... The land will lie in complete desolation. - *Jeremiah 7:33-34 NLT*

Yeah, nobody likes to hear that. And the rulers especially hate it because it makes it sound like they're doing a lousy job. But King Josiah is different. Five years into Jeremiah's ministry, Josiah (now 26) begins a temple restoration project. And while they're preparing the temple, a priest named Hilkiah (possibly Jeremiah's father!) discovers the lost books of Moses.

Then Shaphan [SHAY-fan] the secretary informed the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it ... When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. - *2 Kings 22:10-11 NIV*

Josiah launches an unprecedented campaign to stamp out idolatry, reinstate the covenant, and restore temple worship. And for 13 years, Jeremiah's prophecies undergird the king's noble endeavor. It was a valiant effort. But they couldn't stem the momentum of evil that was surging under the surface obedience of the people.

Our tendency is to self-destruct before we submit. We are just *that* bent on serving our own will above His. This is why willful submission requires daily maintenance!

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? - *Jeremiah 17:9 NIV*

So, 13 years later (Josiah is 39), Babylon attacks Assyria. This is good because Assyria had wiped out Israel 100 years earlier, had destroyed much of Judah, and had threatened Jerusalem. Pharaoh Neco [NEE-koh] leads the EgyptianS north to help Assyria. Josiah tries to stop Neco and dies in battle. (*2 Chronicles 35:20-24*)



Babylonian Chronicle

Josiah's son, Jehoahaz rules for three months before Neco deposes him to Egypt and replaces him with his older brother, Jehoiakim, who submits and sends heavy taxes to Neco. (*2 Kings 23:31-35*) Four years later, Egypt is conquered. This Babylonian Chronicle from 605<sup>BC</sup> describes Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of Pharaoh Neco at Carchemish [KAHR-kem-ish]. When Jeremiah speaks against the surrounding nations (46-51) his message to Egypt contains a great example of harmony between God's Word and secular history.

Concerning Egypt: This is the message against the army of Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt, which was defeated at Carchemish on the Euphrates River by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon in the fourth year of Jehoiakim ... - *Jeremiah 46:2 NIV*

Jehoiakim switches his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar who compels some of the royalty, nobility, and well-educated (including Daniel) to come to Babylon to serve in his palace. (*Daniel 1:1-2*) Jehoiakim was *nothing* like his father, Josiah; he was proud, selfish, covetous, and vindictive.

And the nation fell back into the worst form of idolatry.

- A. Jeremiah wasn't allowed to marry or to have any children, to make the point that families were doomed. (*16:1-4*)
- B. He wasn't allowed to attend funerals, to show that God had withdrawn His pity. And a day was coming when no one would be there to bury the dead or to comfort the grieving. (*16:5-7*)
- C. The Lord had him bury a linen belt until it had rotted, to demonstrate how God would rot away the pride of Judah, even though He had once bound them to Himself. (*13:1-11*)
- D. He bought a potter's jar and shattered it in front of the elders and the priests, and declared that in a like manner the Lord was going to smash the nation beyond repair. (*19:11*)



He wore a yoke on his neck, shaved his head, and used wineskins, a boiling caldron, a lump of clay, a basket of figs, and a sunken scroll to warn of imminent judgment if his people didn't repent. He was *big* into object lessons.

Not only do they not repent, they accuse him of blasphemy.

Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and all the people, "This man should be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against this city." - *Jeremiah 26:11 NIV*



He survives the death threats, but he's banned from the temple. So, he calls his trusted friend, a professional scribe named, Baruch [BAY-rook].

[*This is a Statue of an ancient Egyptian scribe, circa 2500<sup>BC</sup>*]

So Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah [nih-RIGH-uh], and while Jeremiah dictated all the words the Lord had spoken to him, Baruch wrote them on the scroll. - *Jeremiah 36:4 NIV*

Jeremiah dictates 23 years worth of prophecy (*36:1-2*). They spend months completing it. This is the book of Jeremiah! Then, this fearless friend takes it to the temple and reads it.

The officials immediately send for a servant of the king's court named Jehudi [jih-HYOO-digh], who hurries to King Jehoiakim, who is warming himself in his winter palace.

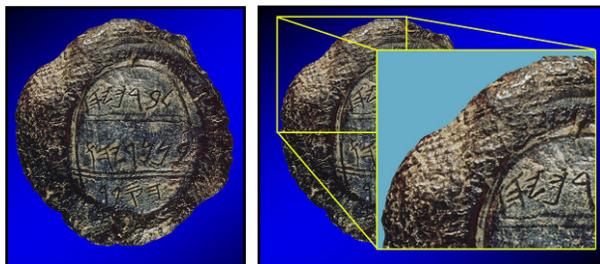
Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns of the scroll, the king cut them off with a scribe's knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire. - *Jeremiah 36:23 NIV*

There was no copy! King Jehoiakim tried to have Jeremiah and Baruch arrested, but they were in hiding ... and rewriting!

After the king had burned the scroll on which Baruch had written Jeremiah's words, the Lord gave Jeremiah another message. He said, "Get another scroll, and write everything again ... - *Jeremiah 36:27-28a NLT*

And *this* is the book we have today. We know it was written under extreme conditions because much is out of chronological order.

In his day job, Baruch had a professional stamp for sealing his documents.



In 1975 a collection of 250 clay seals were discovered about 44 miles southwest of Jerusalem. This late 7th century BC seal was among them. It reads: "Belonging to Baruch, son of Neriah, the scribe". And *this* is likely the fingerprint of the man who helped write the Bible!

In his 11th year, Jehoiakim decided to stop sending the tribute money to Babylon. Big mistake. Nebuchadnezzar responded by sending a force against Jerusalem and exiling 10,000 Jews. Jehoiakim was led to Babylon in shackles. His son, Johoiachin had command for three months before Nebuchadnezzar decided to cart him off to Babylon for good measure. (*2 Chronicles 36:5-10*)

The temple was ransacked and Johoiachin's 21-year-old uncle Zedekiah was placed on the throne as Nebuchadnezzar's vassal.

During Zedekiah's 11 year reign, Jeremiah writes to the exiles in Babylon and says God wants them to settle down, build houses, and to pray for the peace and prosperity of Babylon. (*29:4-7*) And when Zedekiah pulls the same stunt on Babylon that Jehoiakim did, Jeremiah tells his countrymen to get ready to surrender.

And when Nebuchadnezzar arrives and begins an 18 month siege of the city, Jeremiah is branded a traitor by the king's officials who intimidate the Zedekiah into letting them kill Jeremiah.

So they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah [mal-KIGH-juh], the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud. - *Jeremiah 38:6 NIV*

But the cowardly King secretly respects Jeremiah. So, he sends some men to sneak him back out of the well, and then he begs Jeremiah to tell him what he should do.

Jeremiah assures Zedekiah that the Lord will protect him if he surrenders to Nebuchadnezzar. But, Zedekiah is too afraid. So, under the cover of night he abandons his people and flees. The Babylonians catch up with him at Jericho. They make him watch as they kill his sons; and then they gouge his eyes out.

Nebuchadnezzar's men dismantle the city, stone by stone, and they exile most of the 832 survivors. However, some of the poorest are left behind to tend the fields and the vineyards.

And because he urged the king to surrender, Nebuchadnezzar shows great kindness to Jeremiah and allows him and Baruch to remain in his homeland, along with a governor that had been appointed.

But just a few years later, some Jews who escaped the Babylonians assassinate the governor and force those who remained (including Jeremiah, now about 70, and Baruch) to flee with them to Egypt. And that's the last we hear of Jeremiah.

In the end it was the Jews themselves who fulfilled the Word of God through Jeremiah, to leave the land in "complete desolation".

But, Jeremiah wasn't all doom and gloom. He had much to say about mercy and restoration triumphing over judgment and wrath. He told of the city and the temple coming back to life after 70 years of captivity, and the people being ultimately redeemed through the work of the Good Shepherd, their Messiah.

And in his last great object lesson, in the midst and at the height of the final siege of the city he says ...

... I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel [HAN-uh-mehl] and weighed out for him seventeen shekels of silver. I signed and sealed the deed, had it witnessed, and weighed out the silver on the scales. ... For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land." - *Jeremiah 32:9-10;15 NIV*

The message is both simple and profound: No matter how you have sinned, or how far you have drifted from the Lord, He still believes that you are worth the investment!