



# DIGGING DEEPER INTRODUCTORY ARTICLE

## *Where Does Jeremiah Fit in the Biblical Timeline?*

To best understand the message of Jeremiah, let's use broad strokes to review some basic Bible history.<sup>1</sup> The first five books of the Bible are referred to as the Pentateuch. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy tell the story of Creation, the Fall, the Flood, the giving of the Law, and the captivity of the Jews in Egypt. These are the stories of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel) and others such as Noah, Joseph, and Moses. The Pentateuch ends with Moses' death and the people at the end of their forty years of wilderness wandering.

After Moses died, Joshua led the Israelites to conquer and inhabit the Promised Land of Canaan. There the people fell into a cycle of disobedience that inevitably led to punishment. These reprimands brought them back to God in repentance, but soon after the Jewish people would repeat the pattern of sin, punishment, and obedience. This was the time of the judges. The books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth tell of these times.

The next time period is that of the kings and prophets. Samuel anointed the first king of Israel (Saul) because the Israelites begged for a king so that they could be like other nations. The books of First and Second Samuel record the stories of Saul, David, and Solomon as kings of the united nation of Israel. In First and Second Kings and First and Second Chronicles we read the stories of the Divided Kingdom. In 930 B.C. Solomon's son, Rehoboam, ruled the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Jeroboam revolted against Solomon and Rehoboam and ruled the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Southern Kingdom consisted of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The Northern Kingdom was made up of the ten other tribes of Israel.

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During the Divided Kingdom, Israel had nineteen evil kings. God sent many prophets to warn the Israelites of their sin (Elijah, Elisha, and Hosea, for example), but they were conquered by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. because of their disobedience. Judah had twenty kings of which some were good kings (for example, Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah) and others were evil rulers (for example, Athaliah, Ahaz, and Manasseh). God sent prophets to proclaim His Word to try to draw them back to Him (for example, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Jeremiah).

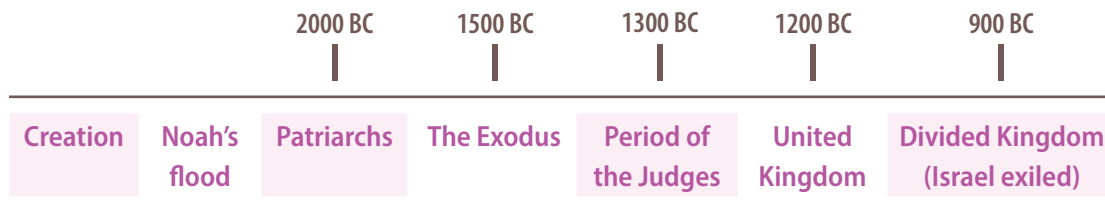
Jeremiah, known as the “weeping prophet,” came on the scene during the reign of King Josiah in the Southern Kingdom of Judah to warn the people of their idolatry, apathy, and disobedience. He delivered God’s messages telling them to surrender to the king of Babylon. His ministry lasted some forty-plus years, as he proclaimed unpopular truths during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. The first group of Jewish exiles was taken to Babylon in 597 B.C. Then in 586 B.C. the Southern Kingdom came to an end when Babylon conquered Judah and carried many more Jews into captivity. Jeremiah remained behind in Judah but was later taken to Egypt against his will, where he continued his prophetic ministry and probably spent the remainder of his life (Jeremiah 43-44).

Jeremiah foretold the return of God’s people to Jerusalem from their exile in Babylon. This began in 538 B.C. with Zerubbabel, appointed as governor by the Persians, who had conquered Babylon. The temple reconstruction was completed in 515 B.C. The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther describe this time period of the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

I hope this gives you some background and context as we delve into the Book of Jeremiah.

## Chronology Timeline

*(the timeline dates are approximate)*



1. The dates in this article are from the *Life Application Study Bible*, New Living Translation (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1996).

