



# Part 9: The Empires Strike Back

Word ALIVE



Jeremiah



## Background Notes -

**PURPOSE:** To present the major prophet Jeremiah's prophesies to Judah when under Assyria's control. The messages were of doom at the hands of the Babylonians and of hope in the form of a new exodus back to the promised land reuniting Judah and Israel.

**AUTHOR:** The book of Jeremiah is a complete rewrite of his teachings by his scribe, Baruch, after King Jehoiakim had the first scroll burned in opposition to Jeremiah's prophesies. The Book of Law found by King Josiah is part of the book of Deuteronomy, and deuteronomic editing can be seen in Baruch's writings.

**DATE:** Judah is exiled in 587 BC.

**STYLE:** Like Isaiah, Jeremiah cannot hold back God's words. Through direct address from God in a passionate, poetic style, his messages are filled with vivid analogies and emphasize a new covenant with three main characteristics: God's forgiveness of sins, individual retribution, and the transformation of a formalistic religion into a religion of the heart.



## Opening Quotes -

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.” Jer 1:5

“As you abandon me to serve foreign gods in your own country, so must you serve strangers in a country not your own.” Jer 5:19

“They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.” Jer 6:14

“This evil people shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing.” Jer 13:10

“I say to myself, I will not mention him, but then it becomes like fire burning in my heart. I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it.” Jer 20:9

“I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Jer 31:33

“Blessed are we, O Israel; for what pleases God is known to us!” Bar 4:4

“Up, Jerusalem! Stand upon the heights; see your children gathered from the east and the west. God will bring them back to you borne aloft as on royal thrones.” Bar 5:5

“Seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” Jer 29:7

“Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel... I am a potter shaping evil against you.” Jer 18:6

the BIG PICTURE		⚡ : LAW, History, Writings, Prophets		⚡ : key covenants in our Father's plan
12 Periods ▼	Plot ▼	Other books related to period ▼		📖 stories in each period ▼
BC	🌀 THE BEGINNINGS	GN 1-11	Ps 8, 104	Creation, Adam & Eve, Cain & Abel, Noah's ark, Tower of Babel
1850	👤 THE PATRIARCHS	GN 12-50		Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Joseph, Melchizedek
1250	⚠️ EXODUS FROM EGYPT	EX		Moses, the burning bush, the plagues, passover, exodus
1200	♣️ JOURNEY TO CANAAN	NM, Jos	LV, DT	Sinai desert, 10 commandments, Levites, Law, Joshua
1100	👤 THE JUDGE CYCLE	Jg	Ruth	12 tribes, Gideon, Samson, Ruth, Samuel
1030	🌟 KINGS & PROPHETS	1 & 2 S	1 Ch, Ps, Prov	Saul, David, Solomon, Jerusalem, the Temple
1000	🏰 THE DIVIDED KINGDOM	1 Kg	2 Ch, Prov, Ecc, Songs	Israel (N), Judah (S), Elijah & Elisha, Isaiah, Assyrian exile
721 587	🌀 BABYLONIAN EXILE	2 Kg	2 Ch, Tob, Hos, Am, Hab, Is, Jer, Lam, Jl, Mic, Zp, Jon, Nah, Ob, Ez, Dan, Bar	Babylonians, "major" prophets, Isaiah (to Israel), Jeremiah (to Jerusalem), Ezekiel (to Exiles)
538	⚙️ THE RESTORATION	Ezr, Neh	Est, Judith, Hag, Zech, Mal, Job	Cyrus, 2 <sup>nd</sup> temple, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Law, "minor" prophets, new writings
163 63	🕯️ THE REPURIFICATION	1 Mac	Dn, 2Mac, Sirach, Wisdom	Greeks, Maccabean revolt, Hasmonean Dynasty, Romans, Jewish sects (Pharisees, Saducees, Zealots, Essenes)
AD	👤 JESUS CHRIST	LK	MT, MK, JN	Incarnation, Good News, New Law, Cross & Resurrection
33 70	🕯️ APOSTOLIC CHURCH	Acts	Rm, 1&2Co, Ga, Ep, Phil, Col, 1&2Th, 1&2 Tm, Ti, Phm, Hb, Ja, 1P, 2P, 1,2&3J, Jd, Rv	Pentecost, council, journeys, epistles, Body/Bride of Christ



## The Story of Part 9: The Empires Strike Back



The destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel by Assyria took place about a century after Isaiah prophesied it. The prophet **Jeremiah** would be the one to prophesy similar doom to the southern kingdom of Judah. Like Isaiah, his messages of doom made him public enemy number one.

Jeremiah grew up in a priestly family in Jerusalem. King Josiah of Judah led great reform during his reign, centralizing worship in Jerusalem around the temple, and Jeremiah was one of the champions of this reform. But since it implied suppressing worship at popular shrines, he became antagonized by his fellow townspeople. His subsequent messages of punishing doom when their practices grew lax didn't make him any more likeable either. His prophesies were filled with vivid analogies: Israel and Judah were like jugs filled with wine that Yahweh would smash; God's people were like a flock of lambs about to be scattered. History proved him right when the Babylonians deported the Judaeans. Influenced by Egypt more than by God (as usual), Judah fought back in 587 BC, prompting Babylonia to attack even harder. This time they burned down the Temple and deporting many of the remaining Judaeans. Jerusalem lay in ruins, and Judah was no more.

Judah was punished for following false gods, like Baal, whom Jeremiah called the "Useless Ones". The kingdoms of Israel and Judah had been whores, unfaithful to their husband, Yahweh. But despite forthcoming punishment, Jeremiah spoke of a remnant of Israel and Judah who would return to Jerusalem, where Yahweh would set up his throne.

Jeremiah then said something that was as radical as Isaiah's allusions to the dead rising, changing forever the way we see religion. Up to this point in the Bible, God's relationship with man was strictly a relationship between Him and the nation as a whole. The physical sign of this relationship, or covenant, was circumcision. But Jeremiah spoke of a new, *personal* relationship with God, in which each person was to "circumcise" his heart. Yahweh would search the heart and the motives behind people's actions, giving to *each* what they deserved.


And right now what they deserved was: doom! Jeremiah blasted false prophets who were promising peace (like the people wanted to hear) since he knew disaster was just around the corner. Everyone from the commoner, to the priest, to the false prophets, had grown greedy. When Yahweh led Israel out of Egypt He demanded not so much the rituals and sacrifices, but that his people would listen to him, and he would be their God. And the people had no excuse, since God had sent them prophets since the days in the desert. And now it was not as if the people were sinning and then coming back to Yahweh. Now they were sinning, and they just kept on sinning! Their unfaithful ways were so consistent that the people felt no remorse. And so from

the north came God's reply: Babylonia! Jeremiah visualized their future captivity by walking around in public carrying a wooden yoke on his shoulders.

Jeremiah's prophesies were as relentless as his own call. He felt the word of Yahweh burning in his heart. He didn't even want to be a prophet, cursing the day he was born, for God had called him even before he was born, and now he could not contain the power of Yahweh's words in his mouth. Jeremiah spoke frankly with God. "Why is it that the wicked prosper, and the innocent suffer?" he would ask. God's answer for the time being was only that his suffering was about to get even worse, for people were about to persecute him for delivering God's message!

The main message, of course, was the unavoidable doom at the hands of Babylon. When Judah's King Zedekiah consulted Jeremiah about how to defend themselves against the Babylonians, the prophet only replied that Yahweh would gather Jerusalem's weapons and fight Judah Himself! Yahweh was offering to his people a choice between to anyone who actually *surrendered* to Babylon, and death to anyone who stayed in Jerusalem! King Zedekiah's men threw Jeremiah into a muddy well, and King Zedekiah and his sons chose to defend Jerusalem. The Babylonians would kill the king's son in front of him, take his eyes out, and deport him to Babylon.

In light of the exploitation of the poor and the weak that had been taking place, Jeremiah told the people to go ahead and cry over Jerusalem's defeat, for they had brought it onto themselves. However, the Babylonians thought a little too much of their victory, not recognizing that they were the instruments of Yahweh. Accordingly, Jeremiah prophesied that Babylon would in turn be destroyed by another nation.

We turn now to a hopeful prophecy in which Jeremiah foresaw, as Isaiah did, the future return of the exiles in the form of the scattered flock of sheep being led back to Jerusalem, with Yahweh raising up a branch for David. In fact, Jeremiah was prophesying about the return of Judah's exiles before they were even exiled in the first place! The city of God would be rebuilt, and tears would give way to rejoicing. Jeremiah had been called not only to "uproot and knock down", but also to "build and plant." God's new law would be written in the people's hearts, a new covenant which would be the culmination of a future second exodus back to the promised land! Jeremiah bought a piece of land in Jerusalem before any of this happened and proclaimed that he was buying land that would soon be ravaged, but which would later be redeemed. Needless to say, the people of Judah had no interest in what the prophet was saying, and their false sense of security under Josiah's reign ended with the end of Judah itself. 



## Defending the Faith: The Abortion argument

*"I don't believe in religion. Can you prove that abortion is wrong using legal and scientific arguments, without resorting to religion, which I don't believe in? After all, you can't legislate morality."*

Yes. Here is a legal argument. The question is: Is the fetus a person? There are only four possible answers: (1) It is a person, and we know it; (2) It is a person, and we don't know it; (3) It is not a person, and we don't know it; (4) It is not a person, and we know it. If we were to run over a man-shaped coat lying in the street with our car, here's how these four possibilities would pan out *in a court of law*: (1) It's a man and we knew it: 1<sup>st</sup> degree murder. (2) It's a man but we didn't know it: Manslaughter. (3) It's not a man, but we weren't sure: Criminal negligence (it *could* have been a man). (4) We knew it was not a man: Not guilty. Now let us suppose for argument's sake that we completely forgot that before Roe v. Wade, every science book written defined conception as the beginning of life. Let's assume that we suddenly just don't know anymore. Even then, since we still have no proof that the fetus is *not* a person, according to our legal system, abortion is either murder, manslaughter, or at the very least, criminal negligence. Yet abortion is not a punishable crime. It is a multimillion dollar industry. The law is broken.

Here is a scientific argument. DNA evidence has acquitted many inmates on death row awaiting execution. DNA evidence has also cleared the name of many wrongly executed inmates who did not live at a time when technology could take advantage of DNA. But today we know that DNA is the unique signature of a person. Using this *scientific* evidence, it should be clear that the fetus is simply not the tissue of a mother's body, since it has *it's own unique DNA!* It is, in fact, a human being, as all textbooks attested to before Roe v. Wade.

And the expression "you cannot legislate morality" is absurd. Of course you legislate morality. While some laws do not address moral issues (like traffic laws), other clearly do (like murder and stealing).

There, then, are two solid arguments against abortion – a legal one, and a scientific one.

*"It is a very great poverty to decide that a child must die that you might live as you wish"* – Mother Teresa.



## Expressing the Faith: What Have We Become?

Our society calls for peace and justice at the same time that it calls inconvenient children "mistakes." This song by DC Talk poses the same question the prophets asked Israel and Judah to our own culture of death.

*A preacher shuns his brother  
Cause his bride's a different color  
And this is not acceptable  
His papa taught him so  
It was love that he'd been preaching  
But this was overreaching  
The boundaries stretchin' further  
Than his heart would choose to go  
Like an angel with no wings  
Like a kingdom with no king*

*What have we become?  
A self indulgent people  
What have we become?  
Tell me where are the righteous ones?  
What have we become?  
In a world degenerating  
What have we become?*

*Speak your mind, look out for yourself  
The answer to it all is a life of wealth  
Grab all you can cause you live just once  
You got the right to do whatever you want  
Don't worry about others or where you came from  
It ain't what you were, it's what you have become*

*Mom and Dad are fightin' as Rosie lies there crying  
For once again she's overheard regrets of their mistake  
With Christmas bells ringing, little Rosie'd leave them grieving  
The gift she'd give her family would be the pills she'd take  
An inconvenient child, she wasn't worth their while*

**(Chorus)**

*What about love? What about God? What about holiness?  
What about mercy, compassion and selflessness?  
You know it's true, He is there for me and you  
Doesn't matter what you do*

**(Chorus 1)**

*What have we become? Have we come undone?  
What have we become? Have we come undone?  
What have we become?*

**(Chorus 2)**

*Selfish... With selfish... Selfish people  
When you gonna learn?  
Everyone of us gathered 'round in trust  
What have we become?*

 **Next time: "Feeding the Homeless"** 