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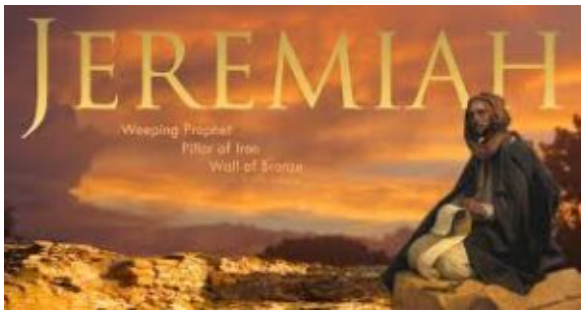
The Introduction to Jeremiah
1: 1-3

The introduction to Jeremiah DIG: Why is it significant that Jeremiah is described as a young man? How might this have affected the manner in which his message was delivered? Received? What does God's decision to use a young man for such a big important task teach us about YHVH? What was Jeremiah's occupation? What does his name mean? What can you conclude about his family? His hometown? When did Josiah rule? What kind of a king was Josiah? Manasseh? When did Zedekiah reign? How long did Jeremiah prophesy? What was the fruit of his ministry? Who were his contemporaries? How did he die?

REFLECT: Jeremiah never married or had any children. What sacrifices have you made for the Lord in your lifetime? Do you think Yirmeyahu ever resented his sacrifices? Have you resented yours? Why or why not? The prophet proclaimed the word of God through one of the worst times in Isra'el's history, but he stuck with it. What keeps you ministering through the tough times? Do you stick with it? Why?



These are the words of Jeremiah (1:1a). In most cases the prophets open their books with the singular, **"the word of ADONAI,"** but in this case **he** uses the plural because in **Yirmeyahu** we will have both prophecy (the destruction of **Jerusalem** by the Babylonians) and history (many of **the Jews** being carried off to Babylon in exile in 586 BC). So the plural **words** indicate that **God** inspired both the prophetic and historical sections. The only other prophet that uses this in the plural

is **Amos (Amos 1:1)**, and like **Jeremiah**, **his** book contains both prophetic and historical sections.

Yirmeyahu was a fairly common name at that time because we know of at least nine other people in the TaNaKh that had the same name. Two of which we find in the book of **Jeremiah** itself, not counting the prophet. The name **Yirmeyahu** comes from a Hebrew root that has several options of meaning: *to hurl, to exalt,* or *to appoint.* **His** name is constructed with several of the letters that make up the name **YHVH**. So his name could mean **YHVH** *hurls*, **YHVH** *exalts*, or **YHVH** *appoints*. And throughout **his** book there will be emphasis placed on each of these aspects.

The only thing we know about **his** family is that **he** was **the son of Hilkiah (1:1b)**, which means **YHVH** *is a portion*. In **Jeremiah's** day the high priest was named Hilkiah, but it wasn't the same man because that man lived in **Yerushalayim**, while **the prophet** lived in **Anathoth.** It is not known for sure, but there is an interesting conjecture when David became king of **Judah**. Abiathar served as high priest until David's death (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click Cv – The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath**). But unfortunately he supported Prince Adonijah over Prince Solomon who had received David's blessing to be king. Therefore, Abiathar was removed from the priesthood (the sole historical instance of the deposition of a high priest) and banished to his home in **Anathoth** by King Solomon **(First Kings 2:26)**. It could be that **Hilkiah**, **Jeremiah's** father, was a descendant of that exiled priest.

One of the priests at Anathoth (1:1c). The fact that **Yirmeyahu's** father was **a priest** tells us that **he** was from the tribe of **Levi**. So **Jeremiah** was both **a prophet** and **a priest**. We also learn from **Chapter 16** that **he** was never married and never had any children (see **Co – You Must Not Marry and Have Sons and Daughters**).

The name of **his** hometown, **Anathoth**, came from the Canaanite goddess **Anath**. As the wife of Baal, **she** was one of the most vicious and violent goddesses that the Canaanites worshiped. **She** supposedly went on a rampage against mankind and no detail was omitted as **she** strode into battle with **her** club and bow. "Under **Anath** flew heads like vultures. Over **her** flew severed hands like locusts. **She** plunged knee-deep in the blood of **her** enemies; neck deep in the gore of the adversary. **Anath** laughed, and **her** heart was filled with joy, for **she** is victorious."

In the territory of Benjamin (1:1d). Anathoth is about three miles north of

Tziyon, and from a hill in the town you can actually see **the Holy City**. It was a **Levitical** city for the tribe of **Benjamin (Joshua 21:18; First Chronicles 6:16)**. **The Levites** had no territory of **their** own and there were too many of **them** to all serve at the Temple, so **they** also functioned as the teachers of the TaNaKh for the eleven other tribes of **Isra'el**. After Moshe finished writing his five books, not everyone would possess a personal copy of them. So the tribe of **Levi** was not only responsible for preserving **the Scriptures**, but also for teaching **them**. Therefore, **ADONAI** instructed each tribe to assign specific cities within their boundaries that **the Levites** could live and teach that particular tribe.

Knowing that the fully developed, passionate personality of **Jeremiah** had a complex and intricate background, we prepare to examine it. But we are brought up short. We are told next to nothing: three bare, unadorned background items – **his** father's name, **Hilkiah**; **his** father's vocation, **priest**; **his** place of birth, **Anathoth**. We want to know more.[11]

Something not mentioned in the book is how **Yirmeyahu** died. After the fall of **Jerusalem** in 586 BC, **Jews** who were fleeing the Babylonians took **Jeremiah** forcefully to Egypt. There is an old **Jewish** tradition that says that after the Babylonians conquered Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar took **Jeremiah** back to Babylon where **he** eventually died. There is also a Christian tradition that says that **Jews** in Egypt stoned **him**. But in **1:19 ADONAI** promised that **He** would protect **Yirmeyahu**, so that tradition cannot be accurate. Most likely **the priest from Anathoth** died of old age in Egypt.

The word of ADONAI came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah (627 BC) **son of Amon king of Judah (1:2). The word** (singular) is the normal format for the prophetic setting. **Yirmeyahu** began **his** ministry during **the reign** of good king **Josiah**. **He** was a young man, probably between 25 to 30 years old. That means **he** was born during the reign of one of the most evil kings in the history **of Judah**. The wicked Manasseh fathered Josiah. It was because of Manasseh's reign that **Yirmeyahu** was called to be a prophet to a doomed nation. **ADONAI** had already decreed the destruction of **Tziyon** and **Josiah's** godly reign merely gave the nation a temporary reprieve, but did not cancel its ultimate judgment.

Therefore, **Jeremiah** ministered **through the reign of Jehoiakim, down until the end of Zedekiah's reign in his eleventh year** (586 BC) **when the people of Jerusalem went into exile (1:3). He** prophesied a little past **Zedekiah**,

Judah's last **king**, to at least 585 BC, and perhaps even to 580 BC. **For about 45 years he proclaimed the word of ADONAI, but he failed to get any kind of response among the people of Y'hudah. He was even called a false prophet because 40 years passed before his initial prophesies were fulfilled.**

He prophesied after **Isaiah**, **Hosea** and **Micah**. They had already come and gone when **Jeremiah** was called to ministry. There were, however, other prophets who were **his** contemporaries. During the early days of his ministry **Naham**, **Habakkuk**, **Zephaniah**, were prophets and **Huldah** was a prophetess **(Second Kings 22:14-20; Second Chronicles 34:22-28).** In the latter days of **his** ministry **he** was a contemporary of **Ezeki'el** and **Dani'el**.

The phrase **when the people of Jerusalem went into exile** provides the finishing point of the book. It is an awesome and dreadful formula. It is a clue to the intent of **the word of ADONAI** and a signal to the nature of the book. **The word** is on the move toward **exile**. Nothing more needs to be said. Nothing the kings can do will alter the outcome, and it is as though the die is cast even before **Yirmeyahu** appears.

Therefore, the book of **Jeremiah** is an unwelcomed offer. If we enter, we are invited to accompany the painful, genuinely unthinkable process whereby **the Holy City** is denied its special character and is handed over, by the intent of **YHVH**, to the ruthlessness of Babylon. Kings, of course, never believe history works that way. Kings imagine that their royal decisions shape history. But **Yirmeyahu** asserts otherwise. **God** steers the historical process toward **exile**. That is where disobedient **Judah** finally finds **herself**. No escape is available. In fact, escape is not even hoped for because that would be a hope counter to the sovereign will of **the LORD**. The ending is now willed through **His word**. And when it is spoken, the ending will not go away. We only wait and watch for the ending to materialize. Therefore, the book of **Jeremiah** is a witness to that long and torturous watch.[12]