

## **The Old Testament For Grown Ups** **Lesson 75 – Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Lamentations**

### **Introduction**

This lesson begins the section known as the Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel). The term Major Prophets denotes the greater length (183 chapters to 67 chapters collectively) and broadness of these books as opposed to the Minor Prophets (or ‘The Twelve’). The term Major Prophets does not mean these books are any more important or inspired than the others.

### **The Book of Isaiah**

The book of Isaiah is an important book in the Old Testament with much significance for the New Testament. Called ‘the little Bible’, Isaiah contains 66 chapters (which correspond to the 66 books of the English Bible. It can also be divided between the first 39 chapters of judgment and the last 27 chapters of restoration (there are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament). It also contains some of the most famous prophecies concerning the birth of the Messiah in chapters 7:14 and 9:6-7, and the suffering of the Messiah and chapter 53.

### **The Setting and Authorship of Isaiah**

Isaiah lived and proclaimed his message in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, primarily to the southern kingdom of Judah, in Jerusalem, during the Assyrian crisis. Isaiah 1:1 connects his message to the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, all kings of Judah who reigned from 792 until 687 BC.

It is important to know the political climate in Israel and Judah during this time in order to understand Isaiah’s writings. The first narrative about Isaiah records a meeting between him and King Ahaz (7:1–17). The time is 734–733 BC. The king and people face a crisis, because of a threat to the region from the growing power of Assyria. The immediate problem is to know how to respond to an attack on Judah by an alliance of Israel and Syria. The threat from Assyria was always in the background during Isaiah’s ministry.

The first 39 chapters of Isaiah are cast in this geopolitical setting. The second half of Isaiah (40–66), however, appears to be directed to those in the exile (after 586 BC) and under Persian domination (after 539 BC). So the geopolitical setting for the two halves of Isaiah appears to be different, and a shift in the book of Isaiah appears to take place between chapters 39 and 40.

For much of the twentieth century the standard, near-consensus view of Old Testament scholarship was that Isaiah is made up of three separate works produced by three different authors at three different stages of Israel’s history. Isaiah 1–39 was associated with the actual prophet Isaiah, chapters 40–55 were the work of an anonymous prophet in the Babylonian exile, and finally, chapters 56–66 were understood to be postexilic produced by another anonymous prophet. However, Evangelical scholars often countered this view, noting the many unifying themes occurring across this division, themes that pointed to a unity of authorship, with the prophet Isaiah speaking 150 year into the future to a new generation of Israelites.

### **The Message and Themes of Isaiah**

The three-point standard preexilic prophetic message is a good synthesis of Isaiah:

1. You’ve broken the covenant (through idolatry, social injustice, religious ritualism), so repent!
2. No repentance? Then judgment! Judgment will also come on the nations.
3. Yet there is hope beyond the judgment for a glorious future restoration both for Judah/Israel and for the nations.

As mentioned earlier, Isaiah can be broken down into three main parts:

1. Isaiah 1–39 focuses on judgment but also contains glimpses of deliverance.
2. Isaiah 40–55 focuses on deliverance and restoration through the Servant but also contains glimpses of judgment.
3. Isaiah 56–66 focuses on righteous living by Yahweh’s true people/servants in the meantime.

## Outline and Content of Isaiah

### Isaiah 1-6

- **Isaiah 1-3 – The Covenant Lawsuit against Judah and Jerusalem:** The Mountain and Day of the Lord
- **Isaiah 4 – The ‘Branch’ of Yahweh:** A brief look at restoration. Judah will be beautiful again
- **Isaiah 5 – The Vineyard of Yahweh:** Parable and Woe Oracles against Judah
- **Isaiah 6 – The Vision of Yahweh and Call of Isaiah:** Yahweh high and lifted up. ‘Here I am, Send me’

### Isaiah 7-39 (Concerning the time of the Assyrian Crisis)

- **Isaiah 7-12 – The Coming Child:** A ‘virgin’ shall conceive, Immanuel, and the coming Davidic King
- **Isaiah 13-23 – Judgment on the Nations:** Oracles about nations involved in Judah’s political climate
- **Isaiah 24-27 – Yahweh’s Judgment on the World:** Apocalyptic imagery of God over all of the world
- **Isaiah 28-35 – Judgment Followed by Deliverance:** First on Israel and Judah then on the nations
- **Isaiah 36-39 – Hezekiah and the Assyrians:** A narrative parallel to 2 Kngs 18-20 of Assyrian siege

### Isaiah 40-55 (Addressed to those in Exile for hope and restoration)

- **Isaiah 40 – Be Comforted and Soar Like An Eagle:** The punishments have taken place, hope ahead!
- **Isaiah 41-44 – Fear Not, for I am With You:** Yahweh declares he will raise up a leader for victory
- **Isaiah 44-48 – Cyrus:** Isaiah names Cyrus, King of Persia, who’ll defeat Babylon and allow the return
- **Isaiah 49-55 – The Servant and Zion:** Four ‘Servant Songs’ of the Servant of Yahweh (Israel/Messiah)

### Isaiah 56-66

- **Isaiah 56-59 – Israel’s Inability to Live Righteously:** Love and true worship define God’s people
- **Isaiah 60-62 – Future Salvation:** Israel’s future salvation and blessings from Yahweh
- **Isaiah 63-66 – A Call to Ethical Living:** A ‘new heaven and earth’ await, but call to present obedience

## The Book of Jeremiah

The Book of Jeremiah tells the story of the last generation of the kingdom of Judah, from the time when Jeremiah heard the call to be a prophet as a young man, in 626 BC, to the conquest of the kingdom by the forces of Babylon in 587 BC. Jeremiah 1:1 calls Jeremiah “the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin.” Jeremiah was still a young man when the Lord called him to prophesy (Jer. 1:6). Some suggest that he may still have been in his teens when he was called by Yahweh. As he took a stand for the Lord, Jeremiah experienced incredible opposition. We are provided with glimpses into his internal fears and struggles through a series of “laments” or “confessions.” Because of his “lamenting,” scholars have often labeled Jeremiah “the weeping prophet.”

### The Setting of Jeremiah

Jeremiah lived and prophesied in and around Jerusalem during the time of Assyrian expansion and domination, during this time Babylon became the dominant power in the ancient Near East. Ultimately, God would use Babylon to judge Judah. Therefore, much of his ministry takes place during this time of the Babylonian empire. Jeremiah prophesied during Judah’s last forty years (627–586 BC). Perhaps more than any other prophet, Jeremiah repeatedly ties his message firmly into historical events. He begins his ministry during the reign of Josiah (the last good king of Judah), and he prophesies throughout the reigns of Jehohaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah.

Jeremiah experiences the terrible siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586 BC. However, the fall of Judah is not quite the last event recorded in Jeremiah. Rather, we are taken into exile itself. He continues to prophesy to those who remain in Judah under the governor, Gedaliah, after the destruction and exile, but then he is forced to go to Egypt with other Jews who are fleeing Babylonian wrath.

### The Message of Jeremiah

The three-point standard preexilic prophetic message laid out in Isaiah above is an excellent synthesis of Jeremiah. Along with this message, Jeremiah focuses on the three central indictments that underscore how

seriously Judah has broken the covenant. These indictments (sins or infractions against the covenant) are **idolatry, social injustice, and religious ritualism**. These three will surface time and time again in Jeremiah. Along with the three indictments, Jeremiah makes three main points: broken covenant, judgment, and restoration, over and over.

### Outline and Content of Jeremiah

#### Jeremiah 1-10

- **Jeremiah 1 – Yahweh Calls A Reluctant Prophet:** Jeremiah's youth is no problem for Yahweh
- **Jeremiah 2 – The Indictments Against Judah:** The central sins of Judah's forsaking of Yahweh
- **Jeremiah 3-6 – A Call to Repentance and Inevitable Judgment:** Don't be like your sister (Israel)
- **Jeremiah 7-10 – False Religion and Its Punishment:** 'The Temple Sermon'

#### Jeremiah 11-29

- **Jeremiah 11-20 – Broken Covenant and Yahweh's Prophet in Conflict:** The time for listening is over
- **Jeremiah 21-29 – Judgment on Judah's Institutions:** Babylonian Invasion begins, 'The Palace Sermon' against Jehoiakim (ch. 22), 70 years (25:11) and Jeremiah vs. False Prophets (chs. 26-29)

#### Jeremiah 30-33 (The Book of Consolation)

- **Jeremiah 30 – Consolation and Restoration:** 'I Will Restore You to Health and Heal Your Wounds'
- **Jeremiah 31 – The New Covenant:** 'I Will Make A New Covenant with the House of Israel/Judah'
- **Jeremiah 32 – During the Siege, Hope for the Future:** Jeremiah buys land as a symbol of faith
- **Jeremiah 33 – Restoration through the Davidic King:** The promise of sheep and shepherds

#### Jeremiah 34-52

- **Jeremiah 34-36 – Slaves and Scrolls:** Stories in the times of Zedekiah and Jehoiakim
- **Jeremiah 37-45 – The Final Days of Jerusalem:** The people pay no attention to Jeremiah
- **Jeremiah 46-51 – Oracles Against the Nations**
- **Jeremiah 52 – The Fall of Jerusalem Described Again:** Repeat of ch. 39 w/ release of Jehoiachin

### The Book of Lamentations

A lament is a sad, agony-filled song often sung at funerals. The book of Lamentations is a collection of five laments that graphically and poetically express shock and deep pain over the destruction and devastation of Jerusalem after it fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC. In our English Bible, Lamentations is associated with Jeremiah, who is even identified as the author and is placed as part of the Major Prophets.

### The Message and Outline of Lamentations

Lamentations is a tragic, mournful cry, expressing grief over the fall of Jerusalem and the associated rupture of covenant fellowship with Yahweh. Read close on the heels of Jeremiah, it serves as a vindication of Jeremiah's message. Jerusalem ignored the warnings he spoke from Yahweh and now the temple is gone, the monarchy is gone, the city lies in ashes, and the people are scattered. Yet in keeping with the prophetic message, the poet of Lamentations will rise briefly above his agonized cry from the ashes to reaffirm the faithfulness of Yahweh and to pray for restoration.

Each of the five chapters in Lamentations is a separate poem. The opening lines of Lamentations capture the main point of the book: "How deserted lies the city, once so full of people!" (Lam. 1:1). Lamentations 1 describes the mournful weeping over destroyed Jerusalem.

- **Lamentations 1:1–22 First Lament: Zion Laments over Her Destruction**
- **Lamentations 2:1–22 Second Lament: Zion's Lament and Appeal: Calling out to Yahweh**
- **Lam. 3:1–66 Third Lament: Despair and Hope: Hope in Yahweh's Covenant Faithfulness**
- **Lam. 4:1–22 Fourth Lament: Groping in the Streets: Present horrible Conditions in Jerusalem**
- **Lamentations 5:1–22 Fifth Lament: The Remnant of Zion Weeps: A prayer for restoration**