THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

The King Who Writes on Hearts

Jeremiah, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Writes on Hearts: The Book of Jeremiah, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

Copyright © 2026 Bill McLeod. All rights reserved.

Published by Papa Bill Books.

Scripture quotations are from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, which is in the public domain.

All Scripture quotations in this book are from the WEB. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Here's a fact most people don't know: Jeremiah was probably a teenager when God called him. He said so himself. When God told him he would be a prophet to the nations, his first answer was basically, I can't. I'm just a kid.

God's answer to that kid is one of the best things in the Bible. And what followed was one of the hardest, bravest lives in Scripture. Jeremiah spent about forty years telling his nation the truth when nobody wanted to hear it. He was mocked, beaten, locked up, thrown into a muddy pit, and called a traitor. He cried a lot, which is why people call him the weeping prophet. He argued with God, honestly and loudly. And he never quit.

Jeremiah also wrote some of the most hopeful words in the Bible: a letter to refugees promising a future, a prophecy of a New Covenant written on human hearts, and the story of buying a field while an enemy army surrounded the city. If you've ever felt too young, too scared, too sad, or too alone to matter, Jeremiah is for you.

Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Jeremiah in eight chapters: Jeremiah's call (Jeremiah 1), broken cisterns and the temple sermon (2–10), the weeping prophet's confessions (11–20), the potter's house and fake peace prophets (18–19, 23, 27–28), the letter to the exiles (29), the

New Covenant (30–33), the burned scroll and the fall of Jerusalem (36–45), and the nations and one quiet spark (46–52).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains who Jeremiah was, why his book isn't in strict time order, and who his loyal friend Baruch was. Read it first. It'll save you a lot of confusion.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Jeremiah in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the twenty-fourth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Jeremiah is a powerful book for young readers, because Jeremiah himself was called as a youth. This book highlights God's words to him, Don't say, I am a child, and explains why the book isn't arranged in strict chronological order and how Baruch the scribe helped preserve it.

Jeremiah is also honest about despair. His confessions include cursing the day he was born. A compassionate Real Talk box on Jeremiah 20:14–18 encourages any reader who feels hopeless to talk to a trusted adult or counselor and lists 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Other boxes address peer pressure, fake religion, lucky-charm faith, discerning truth from lies, being a good presence wherever you live, and how to read Jeremiah 29:11 in its original context, a promise made to exiles facing seventy years in Babylon.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how Jesus named Jeremiah's New Covenant at the Last Supper and wept over Jerusalem as Jeremiah did, while respecting that Jewish readers

treasure Jeremiah in their own rich ways. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every young reader will hear what God told young Jeremiah: Don't be afraid, for I am with you.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

Called as a Teenager

Jeremiah was the son of a priest named Hilkiah, from the small town of Anathoth, a few miles north of Jerusalem. God called him in the thirteenth year of King Josiah, around 627 BC. When God called him, Jeremiah said he was only a child, using a Hebrew word, na'ar, that can describe anyone from a young boy to a young man. Most scholars think he was somewhere in his teens or early twenties. He went on to serve for about forty years, through the reigns of five kings, until after Jerusalem fell to Babylon in 586 BC. God also told him not to marry or have children, as a sign of the hard times coming, which made his life even lonelier.

A Nation on the Edge

Jeremiah grew up during a hopeful time. King Josiah, who became king at eight years old, led a great reform, tearing down idols and restoring the temple. But after Josiah died in battle in 609 BC, his sons reversed most of it. Meanwhile, the world was changing fast. Assyria collapsed, and Babylon, under King Nebuchadnezzar, became the new superpower. Judah's leaders kept trying to play Babylon and Egypt against each other. Jeremiah's message was unpopular: Babylon is God's instrument of judgment, so surrender and live. To many people, that sounded like treason.

Why Isn't It in Order?

If you try to read Jeremiah like a novel, you'll get confused fast. A chapter set under King Zedekiah might be followed by one set years earlier under King Jehoiakim. That's because Jeremiah isn't arranged mainly by time. It's arranged more like a collection, grouping messages by theme and type: poetic sermons, stories about Jeremiah's life, prophecies of hope, and messages to the nations. Some scrolls were also rewritten and expanded over time, as chapter 36 describes. The ancient Greek translation of Jeremiah is about one-eighth shorter than the Hebrew and places the messages to the nations in the middle of the book, and fragments of both versions were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which suggests the book circulated in more than one edition. Christians hold that God guided the whole process. The trick to reading it is to watch for the king's name at the start of each section. That tells you when you are.

Meet Baruch

Jeremiah didn't work alone. His friend Baruch son of Neriah was a professional scribe who wrote down Jeremiah's messages, read them aloud in the temple when Jeremiah was banned from going, hid from an angry king, rewrote a burned scroll, and went with Jeremiah into Egypt at the end. Jeremiah 45 is a short, personal message from God to Baruch, who was discouraged. In 1975, a clay seal impression, called a bulla, surfaced on the antiquities market bearing the words belonging to Berekyahu son of Neriyahu the scribe, which many scholars think belonged to Baruch himself, though others have questioned whether it's authentic. Either way, Baruch reminds us that behind every bold voice there are faithful friends doing quiet, essential work.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Jeremiah 1): Don't say, I am a child.

Chapter 2 (Jeremiah 2–10): Broken cisterns and the temple sermon.

Chapter 3 (Jeremiah 11–20): The weeping prophet's confessions.

Chapter 4 (Jeremiah 18–19, 23, 27–28): The potter's house and fake peace prophets.

Chapter 5 (Jeremiah 29): Letter to the exiles.

Chapter 6 (Jeremiah 30–33): The New Covenant.

Chapter 7 (Jeremiah 36–45): The burned scroll, the muddy cistern, and 586 BC.

Chapter 8 (Jeremiah 46–52): Nations and one quiet spark.

Contents

Setting the Scene .....

1 Don’t Say, I Am a Child *1* .....

2 Broken Cisterns and the Temple Sermon *2–10* .....

3 The Weeping Prophet’s Confessions *11–20* .....

4 The Potter’s House and Fake Peace Prophets *18–19, 23, 27–28* .....

5 Letter to the Exiles *29* .....

6 The New Covenant *30–33* .....

7 The Burned Scroll, the Muddy Cistern, and 586 BC *36–45* .....

8 Nations and One Quiet Spark *46–52* .....

Where This Points .....

CHAPTER 1

Don’t Say, I Am a Child

Jeremiah 1

The book of Jeremiah begins with a family tree and a timeline. Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, a priest from the little town of Anathoth. God’s word came to him in the thirteenth year of King Josiah, and kept coming for about forty years, until Jerusalem was carried away into exile.

Then God speaks, and His first words to Jeremiah are about who Jeremiah is, not what he does. “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I sanctified you. I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

Before Jeremiah did anything, before he took his first breath, God knew him. Sanctified means set apart for a special purpose. Jeremiah’s calling didn’t start when he felt ready. It started before he was born.

> REAL TALK **Known Before You Were Born**
>
> Jeremiah 1:5 is about Jeremiah’s specific calling as a prophet. But the Bible teaches the same deep truth about every person: God forms each of us, knows us, and has purposes for us. Psalm 139 says God knit you together in your mother’s womb. That means you’re not an accident. Your life isn’t random. Even if you’ve been told you were a mistake, or you feel like nobody planned for you, God did. He knew your name before anyone else did.

Then comes Jeremiah's answer. "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I don't know how to speak; for I am a child."

Jeremiah wasn't being humble in a fake way. He was scared. He was young, probably a teenager. He wasn't a trained speaker. And he was being asked to deliver hard messages to kings, priests, and the whole nation. He probably thought, Who's going to listen to me?

God's answer is gentle but firm. "Don't say, 'I am a child;' for you must go to whomever I send you, and you must say whatever I command you. Don't be afraid because of them, for I am with you to rescue you."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Na'ar**
>
> The Hebrew word Jeremiah uses for child is na'ar. It can mean a baby, a boy, a teenager, or a young man not yet established in adult life. Samuel was called a na'ar when he served in the tabernacle as a boy. David was called a na'ar when he faced Goliath. Joseph was a na'ar at seventeen. So Jeremiah may not have been a little kid, but he was young, inexperienced, and without the status that would make older people listen to him. Jewish tradition and many scholars place him in his late teens.

Jeremiah's excuse also had two parts. I don't know how to speak, and I'm too young. One was about ability, and one was about age. Lots of people use the same two excuses today. I'm not good enough, and I'm not old enough. God answered both. To the first, He said, I'll put My words in your mouth. To the second, He said, Don't say you're a child. God doesn't need your ability or your age. He needs your yes.

Notice what God doesn't say. He doesn't say, You're not a child. He doesn't say, You're actually a great speaker. He says, Don't let your youth be your excuse. And then He gives Jeremiah the real reason he can do it: I am with you.

REAL TALK **Too Young?**

Have you ever felt too young to matter? Maybe adults don't take you seriously. Maybe you think you need to wait until you're older to do anything important for God. Jeremiah's story says otherwise. Samuel heard God as a boy. David faced a giant as a teenager. Josiah became king at eight and started seeking God at sixteen. Mary was probably a teenager when she said yes to God. Paul told young Timothy, "Let no man despise your youth; but be an example to those who believe, in word, in your way of life, in love, in spirit, in faith, and in purity." You don't have to wait to be faithful. You can start today, right where you are.

Then God did something physical. "Then the LORD stretched out his hand and touched my mouth. Then the LORD said to me, Behold, I have put my words in your mouth." Jeremiah worried he didn't know how to speak. God's answer was, You don't have to come up with the words. I'll give them to you.

God then described Jeremiah's job in six verbs: to uproot and to tear down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. Four of the six are about tearing down. Jeremiah's ministry would be mostly hard news. But notice the last two. Build and plant. God's goal was never just destruction. He tears down what is rotten so He can build something new.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Almond Branch**

God showed Jeremiah two visions. First, a branch of an almond tree. Then God said, You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it. That's a wordplay in Hebrew. The word for almond is shaqed, and the word for watching is shoqed. The almond tree is one of the first trees to bloom in Israel, waking up while winter is still ending, so it was nicknamed the watching tree. God was saying, I'm awake. I'm watching. What I've said will happen. The second vision was a boiling pot tipping from the north, a

warning that disaster would come from the north, which is the direction Babylon's armies would come from.

God also warned Jeremiah that this wouldn't be easy. Kings, officials, priests, and ordinary people would all oppose him. But God would make him strong, like a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls. "They will fight against you, but they will not prevail against you; for I am with you, says the LORD, to rescue you."

Notice that God didn't promise Jeremiah an easy life. He promised His presence. Jeremiah would be attacked many times over the next forty years. He'd be beaten, imprisoned, and nearly killed. But he would not be destroyed. God kept His word.

REAL TALK **Fortified City, Iron Pillar**

God told Jeremiah He would make him like a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls. Those images are about strength that comes from God, not from personality. Jeremiah wasn't naturally tough. He was sensitive and often cried. But God made him strong in the ways that mattered: steady, unshakable in truth, and impossible to silence. You don't have to be loud or naturally confident to stand firm. Some of the strongest people are quiet, gentle, and deeply rooted in God.

REAL TALK **When You Feel Alone in Your Faith**

Jeremiah was going to stand against almost everyone around him. Maybe you know a little of what that's like. You might be the only Christian on your team, or the only one in your friend group who won't join in when everyone mocks someone, or the only one in your family who goes to church. That can feel lonely and scary. God's promise to Jeremiah is the same promise He gives you: I am with you. You don't need to be loud or perfect. You just need to stay faithful, one day at a time. And look for others who share your faith. Even Jeremiah had friends like Baruch.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Priest's Son**

Jeremiah came from a family of priests in Anathoth. Many scholars think his family may have descended from Abiathar, a priest who served King David but was banished to Anathoth by Solomon for supporting a rival to the throne. If so, Jeremiah's family had been on the outside of Jerusalem's power for centuries. Jeremiah grew up hearing the stories of Israel's faith but not part of the religious elite. Maybe that's one reason he could see the temple establishment so clearly, and why it disliked him so much.

Jeremiah's call reminds us that God doesn't look for impressive people. He looks for willing people and then makes them strong. If you feel unqualified, you're in exactly the right place for God to work.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Josiah and Jeremiah**

Jeremiah and King Josiah were close in age, and both started serving God young. Josiah became king at eight, began seeking God at sixteen, and started tearing down idols at twenty. Jeremiah was called a year after that. A few years later, workers repairing the temple found a forgotten scroll of the law, and Josiah led a national revival. Jeremiah must have been encouraged to see a young king who loved God. When Josiah was killed in battle in 609 BC, Second Chronicles says Jeremiah wrote laments for him. After that, Jeremiah would serve under kings who mostly opposed him.

It's worth noticing that God didn't wait for Jeremiah to stop being afraid. He called him while he was still scared, and kept reassuring him for forty years. Courage isn't the absence of fear. It's choosing to obey while you're afraid, because you trust the One who is with you. Jeremiah would feel fear, grief, anger, and loneliness many times. But he would keep going, because God kept saying, I am with you.

Notice also that God told Jeremiah he would be a prophet to the nations, not just to Judah. That's a huge calling for a young man

from a small town. God often gives big callings to small people. He loves to show that the power comes from Him, not from us. Your life might feel small right now, but in God's hands, it can matter far more than you imagine.

> **REAL TALK** **God Gives the Words**
>
> Maybe you've wanted to share your faith or stand up for something, but you froze because you didn't know what to say. Jeremiah felt the same way. God promised to put His words in his mouth. Jesus made a similar promise to His followers, telling them not to worry about what to say when they were put on trial, because the Spirit would give them the words. You don't need a perfect speech. You can start with something simple and honest, like, Jesus has really helped me, or, I don't think that's right. God can use simple words.

KEY VERSE

But the LORD said to me, "Don't say, 'I am a child;' for you must go to whomever I send you, and you must say whatever I command you. Don't be afraid because of them, for I am with you to rescue you," says the LORD.

Jeremiah 1:7–8 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What excuses do you sometimes give for not doing what God wants?
2. How does it feel to know that God knew you before you were born?
3. Why do you think God answered Jeremiah's fear with I am with you, instead of telling him how talented he was?
4. Who are some young people in the Bible or in history who did brave things for God?

TRY THIS *Write down one thing you think you're too young to do for God. Then write Jeremiah 1:7-8 underneath it, and take one small step toward it this week.*

CHAPTER 2

Broken Cisterns and the Temple Sermon

Jeremiah 2–10

Jeremiah's first sermons sound like a heartbroken husband talking about a wife who left. God remembers the early days of His relationship with Israel, when she followed Him through the wilderness like a devoted bride. And then He asks, What did your ancestors find wrong with Me, that they went so far away?

Then God makes a stunning comparison. "For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the spring of living waters, and cut out cisterns for themselves: broken cisterns that can't hold water."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Springs and Cisterns**

In ancient Israel, water was life, and there were two main ways to get it. The best was a spring, called living water because it flowed fresh and clean from the ground, never running dry. The other was a cistern, a pit dug into rock and plastered to catch rainwater. Cisterns were hard work to dig, the water was stale and still, and if the plaster cracked, all the water would leak out. Imagine having a fresh, flowing spring in your backyard and choosing instead to spend all your energy digging a leaky hole in the ground. That's what God says His people did.

The two evils go together. First, they left God, the spring. Second, they tried to replace Him with things they made themselves. Idols, alliances with Egypt and Assyria, wealth, and power. And none of it could hold water.

> **REAL TALK** **Your Broken Cisterns**
>
> What do you go to when you're thirsty for love, worth, comfort, or meaning? Maybe it's a relationship. Popularity. Achievement. Your phone. Gaming. Food. Shopping. A particular friend group. Some of those things are good in their place. But when you dig them out as your main source of life, they crack. They leak. They leave you thirstier than before. Jesus said that whoever drinks the water He gives will never thirst again. The question isn't whether you'll be thirsty. Everyone is. The question is where you'll go to drink.

Jeremiah's early sermons are full of vivid pictures. Israel is like a wild donkey sniffing the wind, chasing after anything. Like a thief caught in the act. Like a bride who has forgotten her wedding dress. "Can a virgin forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number."

God sends Jeremiah through Jerusalem's streets to look for even one person who does justice and seeks truth. If he can find one, God says, He'll pardon the city. Jeremiah looks among the poor and among the rich. He can't find anyone.

And the religious leaders weren't helping. "They have healed also the hurt of my people superficially, saying, 'Peace, peace!' when there is no peace." It's like a doctor putting a bandage on a serious infection and saying, You're fine. The prophets and priests told people what they wanted to hear, and the wound got worse.

> **REAL TALK** **Peace, Peace**
>
> It's tempting to want people who will only tell you what you want to hear. Friends who say everything you do is great. Influencers who say you deserve

whatever you want. Voices that say, Don't worry about it, it's fine. But real love tells the truth, even when it's hard. A friend who warns you that you're heading toward trouble is a better friend than one who cheers you all the way off a cliff. Be grateful for people who love you enough to be honest. And try to be that kind of friend.

Then, in chapter 7, God sends Jeremiah to the gate of the temple to preach one of the boldest sermons in the Bible. People were streaming in to worship. And Jeremiah stood at the entrance and said, "Don't trust in lying words, saying, 'The LORD's temple, the LORD's temple, the LORD's temple, are these.'"

The people believed that as long as the temple stood in Jerusalem, God would never let the city fall. The temple was like a lucky charm. They could live however they wanted, as long as they showed up for services. Jeremiah exposed that lie.

He asked them, Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, lie, and worship idols, "then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered,' that you may do all these abominations?" God asks, "Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?"

BACKGROUND CHECK **Shiloh and the Den of Robbers**

In the same sermon, Jeremiah told the people to go look at Shiloh, the town where the tabernacle had stood centuries earlier, in the days of Eli and Samuel. Shiloh had been destroyed, and the Ark had been captured. The point was clear: a holy building is no guarantee of safety if the people's hearts are far from God. Six hundred years later, Jesus quoted this very sermon when He cleared the temple, saying, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers!" A den of robbers is where thieves hide out after committing crimes. The temple had become a hideout where people felt safe from the consequences of their sins.

REAL TALK **Lucky-Charm Faith**

Lucky-charm faith treats God like a good-luck bracelet. Maybe it's going to church, praying before a test, wearing a cross necklace, or saying grace before meals, while living however you want the rest of the time. Those things aren't bad. Church, prayer, and Christian symbols can be beautiful. But they're not magic. They can't protect a heart that is running away from God. What God wanted from Judah wasn't more temple visits. He said, "Listen to my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people." God wants a real relationship with you, not a ritual.

The sermon nearly got Jeremiah killed. Chapter 26 tells what happened next. The priests and prophets grabbed him and said he deserved to die. But some officials and elders defended him, remembering that the prophet Micah had preached a similar message a century earlier and had not been killed. A man named Ahikam protected Jeremiah. Even in the most dangerous moments, God provided people to stand with him.

REAL TALK **Standing Up When It's Risky**

Jeremiah preached the temple sermon knowing it might get him killed. Ahikam and others stood up to protect him. Courage often comes in both forms: speaking the truth, and standing with someone who speaks the truth. You might not face a mob, but you might face a group chat that turns on someone, or a friend group that mocks a classmate's faith. You can be the one who says, That's not okay. And if you see someone else being brave, you can stand with them. One voice of support can change everything.

Chapters 8 through 10 are full of Jeremiah's grief. "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" Gilead was famous for a healing ointment, but nothing could heal his people because they refused to turn back. And then Jeremiah cries, "Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a spring of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"

That's why he's called the weeping prophet. Jeremiah didn't enjoy delivering bad news. It broke his heart.

These chapters also contain a reminder of what matters most. "Don't let the wise man glory in his wisdom. Don't let the mighty man glory in his might. Don't let the rich man glory in his riches. But let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows me." The greatest thing you can boast about isn't your brains, strength, or money. It's knowing God.

> **REAL TALK** **Is There No Balm?**
>
> Jeremiah's question, Is there no balm in Gilead? is a cry for healing. An old African American spiritual answers it: There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole. That song was born out of the suffering of enslaved people who found hope in Jesus as the healer of broken hearts. If you feel wounded, by sin, by others, or by life, Jeremiah's question is a good one to bring to God. And the gospel's answer is yes. There is healing in Christ, though it may come slowly, and often through the help of people who love you.

Chapter 10 ends this section by mocking idols, much like Isaiah did. People cut down a tree, decorate it with silver and gold, and nail it down so it won't fall over. Idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field. They can't speak. They have to be carried. "But the LORD is the true God. He is the living God, and an everlasting King."

> **REAL TALK** **Boasting**
>
> Jeremiah 9:23-24 says the wise shouldn't boast in their wisdom, the strong in their strength, or the rich in their riches. Today, boasting often happens online. Highlight reels, flexing, showing off grades, followers, or stuff. It's fine to celebrate good things. But God says the thing most worth being proud of is that you know Him, the God who delights in kindness, justice, and righteousness. If those are the things God delights in, they're worth delighting in too.

Jeremiah's early sermons also show God's heart. He isn't an angry judge looking for an excuse to punish. He's like a heartbroken husband and a grieving parent. Over and over He says, Return to Me. I'm merciful. I won't stay angry forever. Just admit what you've done. The warnings were real, but they were warnings from love. God would rather His people come home than be destroyed.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Queen of Heaven**
>
> Jeremiah 7 describes whole families joining in idol worship: children gathering wood, fathers lighting the fire, and mothers kneading dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven. This was probably a goddess like Ishtar or Astarte, worshiped across the ancient Near East as a goddess of love, fertility, and war. Jeremiah would confront the same worship again years later, in Egypt. It's a sad picture of a whole family teaching each other to turn away from God.

Jeremiah 2 through 10 can be hard to read, because it's mostly warnings. But read slowly and you'll hear the sound of a broken heart, both God's and Jeremiah's. God isn't just angry. He's hurt. He remembers when His people loved Him like a young bride. He calls them back again and again. And Jeremiah weeps because he loves the very people who are rejecting him. That's what real love looks like when people you care about are heading toward disaster. It tells the truth, and it weeps.

KEY VERSE

For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the spring of living waters, and cut out cisterns for themselves: broken cisterns that can't hold water.

Jeremiah 2:13 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What broken cisterns are people your age most tempted to dig?
2. Why do you think people prefer to hear peace, peace, even when it isn't true?
3. What does lucky-charm faith look like today?
4. What would it look like to boast in knowing God rather than in your achievements?

TRY THIS *Draw two pictures: a flowing spring and a cracked cistern. Under the cistern, write the things you sometimes run to for life. Under the spring, write one way you can drink from God this week.*

CHAPTER 3

The Weeping Prophet's Confessions

Jeremiah 11–20

Chapters 11 through 20 let us see inside Jeremiah's heart. Scattered through these chapters are several passages often called Jeremiah's confessions. They aren't confessions of sin. They're raw, honest prayers where Jeremiah pours out his pain, anger, and confusion to God. They're some of the most emotional words in the Bible.

The first shock came from home. Jeremiah discovered that the men of his own hometown, Anathoth, were plotting to kill him. Some may even have been relatives. "But I was like a gentle lamb that is led to the slaughter. I didn't know that they had devised plans against me." They told him to stop prophesying in the LORD's name, or else.

> **REAL TALK** **When Home Isn't Safe**
>
> It's painful when the people who should support you the most are the ones who hurt you. Jeremiah's own neighbors and family turned against him. Jesus experienced something similar when people in His hometown of Nazareth tried to throw Him off a cliff. If people close to you are mocking your faith, that's hard, and it's okay to grieve it. But if anyone at home is threatening you, hurting you, or making you feel unsafe, that's serious. Please talk to a trusted adult, like a teacher, school counselor, or pastor. You can

also call or text Childhelp at 1-800-422-4453 any time, or call 911 if you're in danger.

Jeremiah brought his complaint straight to God. "You are righteous, LORD, when I contend with you; yet I would like to plead a case with you. Why does the way of the wicked prosper?"

That's a question people still ask today. Why do bad people seem to win? God's answer to Jeremiah is surprising. He doesn't explain. Instead, He says, "If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses?" In other words, Jeremiah, this is just the beginning. Things are going to get harder. I'm preparing you for more.

That might sound harsh, but it's also a kind of respect. God was treating Jeremiah like a trusted athlete in training, someone strong enough to hear the truth.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Jeremiah's Object Lessons**

God often had Jeremiah act out his messages. In chapter 13, Jeremiah bought a linen belt, wore it, and then hid it in a rock crevice by a river. Much later, he dug it up, and it was ruined. God said His people, who were meant to cling to Him like a belt clings to a person, had become just as useless. In chapter 16, God told Jeremiah not to marry, have children, attend funerals, or go to parties, as a living sign of the disaster coming. Jeremiah's whole life became a message.

REAL TALK **Running With Horses**

God's answer to Jeremiah, If you've raced with people on foot and they've worn you out, how will you compete with horses? might sound tough. But it's also a vote of confidence. God was saying, I'm growing you for something bigger. Hard things now can build strength for harder things later. Athletes know that training is uncomfortable, but it makes them ready for the big game. If you're going through something difficult, God may be strengthening

you in ways you can't see yet. That doesn't make the hard thing good, but it means it isn't wasted.

Jeremiah's confessions get darker. In chapter 15, he cries, "Woe is me, my mother, that you have borne me, a man of strife, and a man of contention to the whole earth!" Everyone curses him. And yet, in the same chapter, he remembers how much he loved God's word. "Your words were found, and I ate them. Your words were to me a joy and the rejoicing of my heart."

But then he asks God a terrible question. "Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuses to be healed? Will you indeed be to me as a deceitful brook, like waters that fail?" Remember chapter 2, where God called Himself a spring of living waters? Now Jeremiah is asking whether God is actually more like a desert stream that dries up when you need it most.

That's an honest, painful question, and God didn't strike him down for asking it. Instead, God called him back. If you return, I'll restore you. I'll make you like a bronze wall again. I'm with you.

REAL TALK **Honest Prayers**

Jeremiah's confessions show that you can be completely honest with God. You can tell Him you're angry, confused, hurt, or disappointed with Him. You can ask hard questions. That's not a lack of faith. It's a kind of faith, because you're still talking to Him. The Psalms are full of prayers like this too. God would rather have your honest heart than your polite pretending.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Can the Leopard Change Its Spots?**

In Jeremiah 13, God asks, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" The point isn't about skin color or animals. It's that people who have gotten used to doing evil can't change themselves on their own, any more than a leopard can change its spots. Habits of sin become part of who we are. That sounds hopeless, but it sets up Jeremiah's great promise in

chapter 31. People can't change their own hearts, but God can, by writing His law on them. The bad news of chapter 13 makes the good news of chapter 31 even better.

Chapter 17 contains two well-known passages. One describes a person who trusts in the LORD as a tree planted by water, with roots reaching down to the stream. When heat comes and drought lasts, its leaves stay green and it keeps bearing fruit. The other says something hard about human nature. "The heart is deceitful above all things and it is exceedingly corrupt. Who can know it?" Our hearts can fool us. That's why we need God's word and His Spirit.

REAL TALK **Don't Trust Your Heart?**

Jeremiah 17:9 says the heart is deceitful above all things. That's very different from what many movies and songs say: Follow your heart. Your heart isn't always wrong, and God gave you emotions for good reasons. But feelings can mislead you. You can feel sure something is right and be completely wrong. You can feel worthless when you're deeply loved. That's why it's wise to check your heart against God's word, to pray, and to listen to wise people who love you. Don't ignore your heart. But don't let it be your only guide.

Then, in chapter 20, things get physical. A priest named Pashhur, who was in charge of the temple, heard Jeremiah's prophecies and had him beaten and locked in the stocks at one of the temple gates. The stocks were a wooden frame that held a person's feet, hands, or neck in a painful position, often on public display. Jeremiah spent the night there, humiliated in front of everyone.

When he was released the next day, he gave Pashhur a new name, Terror on Every Side. But inside, Jeremiah was falling apart.

He prayed one of the most famous confessions. "LORD, you have persuaded me, and I was persuaded. You are stronger than I, and have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day. Everyone

mocks me." He felt like God had tricked him into this job. He was mocked all day long for speaking God's word.

So he tried to quit. He decided he wouldn't speak God's word anymore. But he couldn't. "If I say that I will not make mention of him, or speak any more in his name, then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones. I am weary with holding it in. I can't."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Fire in My Bones**
>
> Jeremiah's words describe something many people have felt: a truth or calling so deep inside that you can't keep it in. Jeremiah wanted to stop. He was tired, hurt, and mocked. But God's word burned inside him like a fire that had to get out. Later, God said through Jeremiah, Isn't my word like fire, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? Many people since have described their calling this way. It doesn't mean they always felt excited. Often they felt exhausted. But they couldn't walk away.

Then, in the same breath, Jeremiah sings praise. "But the LORD is with me as an awesome mighty one." He remembers God's promise from chapter 1. And then, just a few verses later, he crashes again.

"Cursed is the day in which I was born. Don't let the day in which my mother bore me be blessed." He wishes he had never been born. He asks, "Why did I come out of the womb to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?"

> **REAL TALK** **When You Wish You'd Never Been Born**
>
> Jeremiah 20:14-18 is one of the darkest passages in the Bible. A faithful prophet wished he had never been born. If you've ever felt that way, please know you're not alone, and you're not a bad person or a bad Christian. Jeremiah loved God deeply, and he still felt this. Job felt it too. The Bible includes these words because God knows people feel this way, and He wants us to bring those feelings to Him. But please don't carry them by yourself.

> Talk to a trusted adult today, like a parent, school counselor, pastor, coach, or doctor. A counselor or therapist can help you work through despair, depression, or grief, and getting help is a sign of strength, not weakness. If you're having thoughts of hurting yourself or ending your life, call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, any time, day or night. If you're in immediate danger, call 911. Notice that Jeremiah's story didn't end in chapter 20. God still had decades of purpose for him, and some of the most hopeful words in the Bible were still to come. Your story isn't over either.

Jeremiah's experience also shows that following God faithfully doesn't guarantee that people will like you. Jesus told His followers that the world would hate them as it hated Him, and that they would be blessed when people insulted them for His sake, because the prophets before them were treated the same way. Jeremiah is one of those prophets. Being mocked for doing right isn't a sign that you're doing something wrong. Sometimes it's a sign you're doing something right.

It's important to notice the order of chapter 20. Pain, then honesty, then fire, then praise, then despair. Jeremiah's emotions swing wildly. That's what real grief and pressure can feel like. Faith doesn't mean you'll always feel steady. It means you keep bringing your swinging heart back to God.

> **REAL TALK** **Tree by the Water**
>
> Jeremiah 17 compares a person who trusts in the LORD to a tree planted by water. When heat comes, the tree doesn't panic, because its roots reach the stream. That's a picture of what faith can do in hard times. It doesn't stop the heat or the drought. But it gives you a deep source of strength. You grow roots by spending time with God: reading His word, praying, worshiping with others, and obeying in small things. Roots grow slowly, and you can't see them. But when the drought comes, you'll be glad they're there.

Jeremiah's confessions are a gift to anyone who has ever felt like faith is hard. They show that being faithful doesn't mean always feeling happy, confident, or strong. Jeremiah was faithful while feeling lonely, mocked, exhausted, and angry. He kept talking to God even when he was furious with Him. And God kept answering, kept restoring him, and kept using him. If your faith feels messy right now, you're in good company.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Jeremiah and Jesus**

Jeremiah's life has striking parallels to Jesus' life. Both were rejected by their hometowns. Both preached against the temple becoming a den of robbers. Both wept over Jerusalem. Both were accused of being traitors, beaten, and put on trial. Jeremiah described himself as a gentle lamb led to the slaughter, and Isaiah used the same image for the Servant. When Jesus asked His disciples who people said He was, some said Jeremiah. Jeremiah's suffering foreshadowed the suffering of the One who would bring the New Covenant.

KEY VERSE

If I say that I will not make mention of him, or speak any more in his name, then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones. I am weary with holding it in. I can't.

Jeremiah 20:9 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God let Jeremiah's raw, angry prayers be included in the Bible?
2. Have you ever asked God why the wicked prosper? What did you do with that question?
3. What do you think it means to have God's word like a fire in your bones?
4. If a friend told you they wished they had never been born, what would you do?

TRY THIS *Write an honest prayer to God about something that is hard right now. Don't clean it up. Then end it with one thing you know is true about God.*

CHAPTER 4

The Potter's House and Fake Peace Prophets

Jeremiah 18–19, 23, 27–28

One day, God told Jeremiah to go to a potter's workshop. "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear my words."

Jeremiah went and watched the potter working at his wheel, shaping a lump of wet clay. But something went wrong. "When the vessel that he made of the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it."

The potter didn't throw the clay away. He squashed it back into a lump and started over, shaping it into something new.

Then God spoke. "House of Israel, can't I do with you as this potter?" says the LORD. "Behold, as the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, house of Israel."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Potter's Wheel**
>
> Ancient potters worked at a wheel made of two stone discs. The potter spun the lower one with his feet, and the upper one turned as he shaped the clay with his hands. Wet clay is soft and responsive. If a pot developed a flaw while it was still wet, the potter could reshape it. But once a pot was fired in the

kiln, it was hard. If it was flawed then, it couldn't be reshaped. It could only be broken. That difference is the key to understanding Jeremiah 18 and 19.

In chapter 18, God explains that His announcements of judgment aren't fixed fate. If a nation He has warned turns from evil, He will relent. And if a nation He has promised to bless turns to evil, He'll reconsider the good He planned. While the clay is soft, there's still hope. God was inviting Judah to turn back and be reshaped.

But the people answered, It's no use. We'll follow our own plans. Each of us will act according to the stubbornness of our evil hearts.

REAL TALK **Soft Clay**

The potter's house is a hopeful picture. God can take a life that's been marred, by mistakes, sin, or hurt, and reshape it into something beautiful. It's never too late while your heart is soft. But it's also a warning. The longer we resist God, the harder our hearts can become, like clay drying out. If you feel God tugging at your heart about something, don't wait. Stay soft in His hands. Let Him shape you.

So in chapter 19, God gave Jeremiah another object lesson. This time, he bought a finished clay jar, one that had already been fired. He took some elders and priests out to the Valley of Ben Hinnom, a place where terrible idol worship had happened, including child sacrifice. There, in front of everyone, Jeremiah smashed the jar on the ground. And he said that God would break the people and the city just like that jar, which could never be repaired.

Soft clay can be reshaped. A hardened jar can only be shattered. Judah had hardened its heart, and judgment was coming.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Valley of Ben Hinnom**

The Valley of Ben Hinnom, just outside Jerusalem's walls, was where some of Judah's kings had sacrificed children to the gods Molech and Baal, one of the most horrifying practices in the ancient world. King Josiah later desecrated

the site so it couldn't be used for worship. In later Jewish writings, the valley's name, Gehinnom, became a word for the place of final judgment. In the New Testament, Jesus uses the Greek form, Gehenna, when He warns about hell.

It's also worth noticing the difference between what God did with the soft clay and the hardened jar. God is patient. He gave Judah decades of warnings, through Jeremiah and many other prophets. He kept saying, Turn back. Even the shattered jar was meant to shake people awake. God's judgment is never His first move. It comes after long patience, when every invitation has been refused.

Jeremiah's biggest opponents weren't atheists or foreign kings. They were other prophets, men who claimed to speak for God but told people only what they wanted to hear. Chapter 23 is God's message about them. "Don't listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They teach you vanity. They speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD."

These prophets kept saying, You'll have peace. No harm will come to you. But God says He never sent them. They were making it up.

In the same chapter, God makes a beautiful promise. Although the kings of Judah had failed as shepherds, God would raise up "a righteous Branch" from David's family, a King who would reign wisely and do what is just and right. His name would be "The LORD our righteousness."

REAL TALK **How to Spot a False Prophet**

How can you tell if someone is speaking God's truth? Jeremiah gives some clues. False prophets often say exactly what people want to hear. They promise success and comfort without calling for change. They don't line up with what God has already said in His word. Their own lives don't show faithfulness. And they often get rich or famous from what they say. Today, you'll hear lots of voices online claiming to speak for God, or telling you what

God wants. Test them. Does what they say match the Bible? Do they point to Jesus or to themselves? Do they call people to love God and others, or just to feel good? Ask a pastor or mature Christian if you're not sure.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Righteous Branch**

Jeremiah 23:5-6 promises a righteous Branch from David's family whose name will be The LORD our righteousness. Isaiah had used similar language, calling the coming King a shoot from Jesse's stump. Ironically, the last king of Judah was named Zedekiah, which means the LORD is righteous, but he was a weak and unfaithful king. Jeremiah seems to promise a true King who would actually live up to that name. Christians see this promise fulfilled in Jesus, who is called the Son of David, and who gives His righteousness to all who trust Him.

Then comes a dramatic showdown. In chapter 27, God told Jeremiah to make a wooden yoke, the kind used to harness oxen together for plowing, and wear it on his neck. It was a sign that Judah and the surrounding nations should submit to Babylon. Babylon's rule was God's judgment, and resisting it would only make things worse.

Imagine walking around the city every day with an ox yoke on your shoulders. People must have stared and laughed. But Jeremiah did it.

Then, in chapter 28, a prophet named Hananiah confronted Jeremiah in the temple in front of the priests and all the people. Hananiah announced that God had broken Babylon's yoke, and that within two years, everything Babylon had taken would be returned. Then he did something dramatic. "Then Hananiah the prophet took the bar from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck, and broke it." He said that God would break Babylon's yoke the same way.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Jeremiah's Response**

Jeremiah's first response to Hananiah is surprising. He said, Amen! May the LORD do it! Jeremiah didn't want disaster. He would have loved for Hananiah to be right. But he reminded Hananiah that prophets who promise peace prove they're true only when their words come to pass. Then Jeremiah simply walked away. He didn't argue, fight, or try to win the crowd. He waited for God.

Later, God sent Jeremiah back with a message. Hananiah had broken a wooden yoke, but God would replace it with a yoke of iron. Then Jeremiah said, "Listen, Hananiah! The LORD has not sent you, but you make this people trust in a lie." Jeremiah said that Hananiah would die that year for speaking rebellion against God. "So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month."

REAL TALK **When the Crowd Believes a Lie**

Hananiah's message was far more popular than Jeremiah's. People wanted to believe that everything would be fine in two years. Jeremiah's message, that they'd have to endure a long hard season, was not what anyone wanted to hear. Sometimes the truth is unpopular. You might be the only one in your friend group willing to say that something is wrong, or the only one who won't believe a rumor. Jeremiah shows a wise way to handle it: say what's true, don't get into a shouting match, and trust God with the outcome. You don't have to win every argument. You just have to stay faithful.

Jeremiah 23 also contains one of the Bible's strongest pictures of God's word. "Isn't my word like fire?" says the LORD; "and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" False prophets offered dreams and comfortable words. God's word is different. It burns away what's false, and it breaks through hard hearts. That's why Jeremiah couldn't hold it in. That's also why it's worth reading, even when it's uncomfortable.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Submitting to Babylon**

Jeremiah's message to submit to Babylon sounds strange. Wasn't Babylon wicked? Yes, and Jeremiah later prophesied that Babylon would be judged. But God was using Babylon as His instrument to discipline Judah for years of idolatry and injustice. Resisting Babylon meant resisting God's discipline, which would lead to far worse destruction. Jeremiah urged surrender not because he loved Babylon, but because he loved his people and wanted them to live. His advice was ignored, and the result was the destruction of Jerusalem.

REAL TALK **Testing What You See Online**

Today, anyone can post a video claiming to have a word from God, a secret prophecy, or a shortcut to blessing. Some promise that if you give money, God will make you rich. Others predict the date of the end of the world. Jeremiah's experience gives some simple tests. Does the message match the Bible? Does it point to Jesus or to the speaker? Does it call people to holiness and love, or just to comfort and success? Does the speaker's life show integrity? Is the speaker accountable to a church? And did their past predictions come true? Hananiah's two-year prediction failed. Be wise, and talk to trusted Christians before believing something just because it sounds spiritual.

The potter's house also reminds us who's in charge. Clay doesn't tell the potter what to make. That can feel uncomfortable, because we like being in control. But it's also a relief. You don't have to shape your whole life on your own. You can trust the One whose hands are skilled and loving, who knows exactly what He's making.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Yokes in the Ancient World**

A yoke was a wooden bar fitted over the necks of two oxen so they could pull a plow or cart together. Leather straps or wooden pegs held it in place. In the Bible, a yoke often stands for submission or servitude to someone else. When Jeremiah wore a yoke, he was acting out Judah's coming servitude to Babylon. Centuries later, Jesus used the same image in a beautiful way,

inviting people to take His yoke upon them, because His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

KEY VERSE

"House of Israel, can't I do with you as this potter?" says the LORD. "Behold, as the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, house of Israel."

Jeremiah 18:6 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What does it mean to stay soft clay in God's hands?
2. How is a potter reshaping clay different from breaking a fired jar?
3. What voices today tell people peace, peace when there is no peace?
4. How can you test whether a message really comes from God?

TRY THIS *Get a lump of clay or play dough and shape something from it. Then squash it and reshape it. As you do, pray, asking God to reshape any part of your life that has been marred.*

CHAPTER 5

Letter to the Exiles

Jeremiah 29

In 597 BC, about ten years before Jerusalem was destroyed, the Babylonians attacked the city and carried away thousands of people, including the young king Jehoiachin, the royal family, officials, craftsmen, and skilled workers. They were taken hundreds of miles away to Babylon. Daniel and his friends had been taken a few years before that, and the prophet Ezekiel was among this group.

Imagine being one of them. Your home was gone. Your friends and family were scattered. You were living in a giant foreign city full of strange gods, strange food, and a strange language. And the false prophets were telling you, Don't unpack. This will all be over in two years. You'll be home soon.

Then a letter arrived from Jeremiah. It's in chapter 29, and its message was the opposite of what everyone hoped to hear.

"Build houses and dwell in them. Plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and father sons and daughters." Jeremiah told them to settle down. Get married. Have kids. Grow gardens. They were going to be there a long time.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Seventy Years**
>
> Jeremiah had already prophesied that the nations would serve the king of Babylon for seventy years. In the letter, God says, "After seventy years are

accomplished for Babylon, I will visit you and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." Scholars count the seventy years in slightly different ways, for example from Babylon's first conquests around 605 BC to the first return of exiles around 538 BC, or from the temple's destruction in 586 BC to its rebuilding in 516 BC. Either way, the number meant a lifetime. Most of the adults who received this letter would die in Babylon. Daniel later read Jeremiah's prophecy and began praying as the seventy years neared their end.

Then Jeremiah told them something even more surprising. "Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace."

Babylon was the enemy. Babylon had destroyed their homes and killed their families. And God told them to pray for it. To work for its good. To be a blessing to the city where they now lived.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Shalom**

The Hebrew word translated peace here is shalom. It means much more than the absence of conflict. Shalom means wholeness, flourishing, well-being, and things being as they should be. God told the exiles to seek the shalom of Babylon, to help it flourish, because their own flourishing was bound up with it. That's a radical idea. It means God's people are meant to be a blessing wherever they live, even among people who don't share their faith.

REAL TALK **Seek the Peace of Your City**

You might feel like you're living in exile sometimes, like your school, your town, or your culture doesn't share your values. It's tempting to either hide from it or fight against it. Jeremiah's letter offers a third way: be a blessing. Pray for your school, your teachers, your town, and your leaders, even the ones you disagree with. Work for the good of the people around you. Volunteer. Be kind to your neighbors. Do excellent work. Be the kind of

person who makes any place better because you're in it. Christians living this way have changed cities throughout history.

REAL TALK **Bloom Where You're Planted**

Jeremiah told the exiles to build, plant, marry, and multiply right where they were, even though it wasn't where they wanted to be. Maybe you're in a place that doesn't feel like home: a new school, a blended family, a town you didn't choose, or a season that feels like waiting. It's easy to put your life on hold, telling yourself that real life will start later. Jeremiah's advice is to start living faithfully now. Make friends. Join something. Do good work. Serve. Your life isn't on pause. God is with you in this place too.

Jeremiah also warned the exiles not to listen to the false prophets among them who were telling them it would be over soon. God hadn't sent them.

And then comes one of the most famous verses in the Bible. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you," says the LORD, "thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you hope and a future."

You've probably seen that verse on graduation cards, posters, mugs, and social media posts. It's often used to mean something like: God has a great plan for your life, so everything's going to work out the way you want. But when you know the context, the verse becomes something deeper and even stronger.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Jeremiah 29:11 in Context**

Jeremiah 29:11 was written to a whole community of refugees, not just to one person, and the you is plural in Hebrew, like saying y'all. It was written to people who had lost almost everything and were being told they would spend seventy years in exile. Many of them would never see home again. God wasn't promising them that their lives would be easy or that their dreams would come true soon. He was promising that, even in exile, even through decades of hardship, He hadn't forgotten them. His thoughts toward them were for

their peace, their shalom, and He would give them a future and a hope, even if that future would come to their children and grandchildren. So is it wrong to apply the verse to your own life? Not at all. God's character doesn't change, and His thoughts toward His people are still thoughts of peace. But the context makes the promise stronger, not weaker. It isn't a promise that you'll get into your dream school or that nothing bad will happen. It's a promise that God is with you in the hard places, that He's working for your good over the long haul, and that your story ends in hope.

REAL TALK **Hope in Your Exile**

Maybe you're in a hard season right now. Your parents divorced. You moved and don't know anyone. Someone you love died. You're dealing with an illness, anxiety, or a family situation that won't change. It might last a long time. Jeremiah 29:11 is for you, not as a quick-fix slogan, but as a promise that God's thoughts toward you are good, even when your circumstances aren't. You can build, plant, and live faithfully right where you are, trusting that He has a future and a hope for you. And if your hard season feels unbearable, please talk to a trusted adult or counselor, or call or text 988.

REAL TALK **Using Verses Well**

Jeremiah 29:11 isn't the only verse that gets pulled out of context. Philippians 4:13, I can do all things through Christ, is often printed on sports gear as if it means God guarantees you'll win the game. But Paul wrote it from prison, talking about being content whether he had a lot or a little. Learning the context of a verse doesn't take away its power. It gives it roots. A good habit is to read the whole chapter around any verse you love. Ask who it was written to, what was going on, and what it meant to them. Then ask how it applies to you.

The very next verses are just as important. "You shall call on me, and you shall go and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You shall seek me and find me, when you search for me with all your heart."

The hope God promises isn't just better circumstances. It's Himself. The future He promises includes a restored relationship with Him. He wants to be found by His people.

There's a dramatic footnote to the letter. A false prophet in Babylon named Shemaiah wrote back to Jerusalem demanding that Jeremiah be locked up for telling people to settle down. Jeremiah responded with another message from God: Shemaiah had made the people trust in a lie, and his family would not live to see the good God would do.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Daniel Reads Jeremiah**

Decades after Jeremiah's letter, Daniel was an old man in Babylon. Daniel 9 says he was reading the books and realized from Jeremiah's prophecy that the seventy years of desolation were nearly complete. So Daniel prayed, confessing the sins of his people and asking God to keep His promise. Around that time, Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon and soon allowed the exiles to go home. Jeremiah's letter had been kept, copied, and treasured for all those years, and it gave Daniel hope.

Jeremiah's letter is a great example of what it means to be faithful in a long, hard season. Don't give up. Don't pretend everything is fine. Settle in. Live well. Seek the good of those around you. Pray. And trust that God has not forgotten you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Exiles Who Listened**

Many of the exiles did follow Jeremiah's advice. Archaeologists have found Babylonian business records, called the Murashu archive, from a later period, showing Jewish families living in the region, running businesses, and taking part in local life. A town called Al-Yahudu, meaning the city of Judah, appears in clay tablets from this time, showing exiles living, working, marrying, and raising families. Many stayed even after they were allowed to return, and Babylon remained an important center of Jewish life for centuries. Daniel

served in Babylon's government, and the book of Esther tells of Jews living throughout the Persian Empire.

Jeremiah's letter also challenges the idea that faith means escaping the world. Some of the exiles probably wanted to keep to themselves, avoid Babylonians, and wait for rescue. God told them to engage. Build. Plant. Pray for the city. Jesus later prayed for His followers, not that God would take them out of the world, but that He would keep them from evil while they lived in it. You're called to be in your world, loving people and seeking their good, while staying faithful to God.

REAL TALK **Praying for People You Disagree With**

God told the exiles to pray for Babylon, the city that had conquered them. That's hard. Today, it might mean praying for leaders you didn't vote for, a teacher you find difficult, a classmate who has been unkind, or a neighbor whose values are very different from yours. Praying for them doesn't mean you approve of everything they do. It means you want God's best for them. Jesus took it even further, telling His followers to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. Prayer has a way of softening your own heart too.

KEY VERSE

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you," says the LORD, "thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you hope and a future."

Jeremiah 29:11 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God told the exiles to build houses and plant gardens instead of waiting to go home?
2. What would it look like for you to seek the peace of your school or town?
3. How does knowing the context of Jeremiah 29:11 change how you read it?
4. What does it mean to seek God with all your heart?

TRY THIS *Pick one place you spend a lot of time, like your school, team, or neighborhood. Pray for it every day this week, and do one practical thing to make it better.*

CHAPTER 6

The New Covenant

Jeremiah 30–33

In the middle of a book full of judgment, chapters 30 through 33 burst with hope. Some people call this section the Book of Comfort. God told Jeremiah to write these words in a book, because the day was coming when He would bring His people home.

These chapters are full of tenderness. God says, "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore I have drawn you with loving kindness." He promises that the young women will dance again, the young men and old men will celebrate together, and He will turn their mourning into joy.

But there's also deep grief in these chapters. "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more." Rachel was one of Israel's founding mothers. Jeremiah pictures her weeping from her grave as her descendants are led away into exile. Matthew later quotes this verse when King Herod killed the baby boys of Bethlehem. And right after Rachel's weeping, God says, Stop your crying, for your children will return. There is hope for your future.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Rachel Weeping**

Ramah was a town north of Jerusalem, near where tradition said Rachel was buried. Jeremiah 40 tells us that Ramah was also the place where the Babylonians gathered captives before marching them off to Babylon. So the image is powerful: the mother of the nation weeping over her children at the very spot where they were being led away in chains. But God's answer is hope. The grief is real, but it won't be the end of the story.

Then, in chapter 31, comes one of the most important promises in the entire Old Testament. "Behold, the days come," says the LORD, "that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah."

A covenant is a binding relationship with promises and responsibilities. God had made a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai after bringing them out of Egypt. He gave them the law written on stone tablets. But they broke that covenant again and again, even though God had been like a faithful husband to them.

So God promised something new. "I will put my law in their inward parts, and I will write it in their heart. I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Stone Versus Heart**

Under the old covenant, God's law was written on tablets of stone. It told people what was right, but it couldn't change their hearts. People knew what to do but didn't want to do it. The New Covenant would be different. God would write His law on their hearts, changing them from the inside so that they would want to obey. The prophet Ezekiel describes something similar: God would take out their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh, and put His Spirit within them. Paul later wrote that believers are like letters "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tablets of stone, but in tablets that are hearts of flesh."

God also promised that, under the New Covenant, people wouldn't need to teach each other to know Him, "for they will all know me, from their least to their greatest." Everyone, young and old, rich and poor, would know God personally, not just through priests or prophets.

And the New Covenant would rest on forgiveness. "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

> **REAL TALK** **Remember Their Sin No More**
>
> Do you ever feel like your past mistakes define you? Maybe you replay something embarrassing or shameful over and over. Maybe you worry that God is keeping a list. The New Covenant says that God, who knows everything, chooses not to hold your sins against you. When God remembers your sin no more, it doesn't mean He has a bad memory. It means He will never bring it up against you again. If you belong to Him, your record is clean. You can stop replaying it. You're free.
>
> **REAL TALK** **The Law on Your Heart**
>
> Following God isn't meant to feel like obeying a list of rules you don't care about. The New Covenant means God changes your desires. Over time, you start wanting what He wants. That doesn't happen all at once, and you'll still struggle. But if you've ever found yourself caring about something God cares about, like justice, kindness, honesty, or worship, that's His law being written on your heart. Keep reading His word, praying, and staying close to His people. He's still writing.

Notice that the promise of the New Covenant comes from a prophet who had seen the old covenant fail over and over. Jeremiah watched kings ignore God, priests lie, prophets deceive, and ordinary people worship idols. He knew that rules alone couldn't fix people. That's why his promise is so remarkable. God wasn't going to lower His standards. He was going to change people's hearts so they would want to meet them.

Then chapter 32 tells one of the strangest real estate deals in history. Jerusalem was under siege by the Babylonian army. Jeremiah was locked up in the courtyard of the guard because King Zedekiah didn't like his prophecies. Everyone knew the city was about to fall. And God told Jeremiah to buy a field.

Jeremiah's cousin Hanamel came to the prison and offered to sell him a family field in their hometown of Anathoth, which was already in enemy territory. Under Israel's law, family land was supposed to stay in the family, so a relative had the right and duty to buy it. And Jeremiah bought it. "I bought the field that was in Anathoth of Hanamel my uncle's son, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver."

He signed the deed, had witnesses sign it, sealed one copy, and gave both copies to Baruch, telling him to put them in a clay jar so they would last a long time. Why? Because God said, "Houses and fields and vineyards will yet again be bought in this land."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Deeds in Clay Jars**

In the ancient world, important documents were often written in two copies. One was rolled up and sealed with clay so it couldn't be tampered with, and the other was left open for reference. Storing documents in sealed clay jars helped preserve them for many years. That's exactly how the Dead Sea Scrolls survived for two thousand years, in clay jars in caves. Jeremiah's purchase was a bold act of faith: putting real money on God's promise that, one day, life would return to normal and the land would be inhabited again.

REAL TALK **Buying a Field in a War Zone**

Jeremiah's purchase looked crazy. Who buys land in a war zone? But it was a way of saying, I believe God's promises more than I believe the headlines. Sometimes faith looks like investing in the future when everything around you looks hopeless. It might look like studying for a future you can't see yet, choosing kindness in a family that's struggling, praying for a friend who

seems far from God, or planting seeds of hope when everyone else is giving up. Jeremiah's field is a reminder that God's promises outlast the crisis.

Jeremiah's purchase also teaches that faith isn't just a feeling. It's an action. Jeremiah weighed out real silver, signed real documents, and called real witnesses. Faith often shows up in practical choices: giving when money is tight, forgiving when it's hard, staying honest when lying would be easier, or keeping a commitment when you'd rather quit. Those choices say, I believe God is real and His promises are true.

After buying the field, Jeremiah prayed, and even he seemed a little unsure. He began with faith: "Ah Lord GOD! Behold, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for you." But then he basically said, The city is about to fall, and You told me to buy a field?

God's answer echoed Jeremiah's own words back to him. "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for me?" Yes, the city would fall. But God would bring His people back and give them one heart and one way, to fear Him forever.

In chapter 33, God adds, "Call to me, and I will answer you, and will show you great and difficult things, which you don't know." He promises again that He will raise up a righteous Branch from David's line, and that His covenant with day and night is as unbreakable as His promises to His people.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Anathoth**

Jeremiah's hometown, Anathoth, was where the men had once plotted to kill him. Yet God told him to buy a field there, as a sign of hope. It's a beautiful twist. The place of his deepest betrayal became the place of his boldest faith. Ezra 2 records that 128 men of Anathoth were among the first exiles to return

> home from Babylon. Jeremiah's field was a promise, and the promise came true.

The Book of Comfort also contains a promise about creation itself. God says that if the sun, moon, and stars ever stop doing what He has ordered them to do, then Israel will stop being His people. In other words, His promises are as dependable as sunrise. Every morning when the sun comes up, it's a reminder that God keeps His word.

> **REAL TALK** **Nothing Too Hard**
>
> Jeremiah prayed, There is nothing too hard for you, and then God asked him, Is there anything too hard for me? It's one thing to say it. It's another to believe it when an army is outside the walls. What feels impossible in your life right now? A broken relationship? A habit you can't break? A family situation? A fear? God doesn't promise to fix everything the way you want, on your schedule. But nothing is beyond His power or His care. You can bring the impossible to Him.

When Christians take communion, also called the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist, they remember Jesus' words about the New Covenant. Different churches understand communion in different ways, but all of them connect it to that night when Jesus took the cup and named Jeremiah's promise. Every time you take communion, you're celebrating the fulfillment of a promise God gave to a weeping prophet in a besieged city six hundred years before Jesus was born.

KEY VERSE

"But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," says the LORD: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and I will write it in their heart. I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Jeremiah 31:33 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What's the difference between a law written on stone and a law written on hearts?
2. How does it feel to know that God will remember your sin no more?
3. Why do you think God told Jeremiah to buy a field during a siege?
4. What is something in your life that seems too hard? How does Jeremiah 32:17 speak to it?

TRY THIS *Write down something you've been ashamed of. Then write Jeremiah 31:34 over it, and tear it up or throw it away as a reminder that God remembers your sin no more.*

CHAPTER 7

The Burned Scroll, the Muddy Cistern, and 586 BC

Jeremiah 36–45

Chapter 36 takes us back to the fourth year of King Jehoiakim, around 605 BC, the same year Babylon defeated Egypt and became the world's superpower. God told Jeremiah to write down every message He had given him over the past twenty-three years, since the days of Josiah. Maybe, God said, when the people hear all of it together, they'll turn back, and I'll forgive them.

"Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah; and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the LORD's words, which he had spoken to him, on a scroll of a book." Jeremiah was banned from the temple, so he sent Baruch to read the scroll aloud there on a fast day, when crowds would be present.

Baruch read it. A young man named Micaiah heard it and ran to tell the royal officials. They called Baruch in and had him read it to them. When they heard it, they were afraid. They told Baruch to go hide, along with Jeremiah, and not to tell anyone where they were. Then they took the scroll to the king.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Scrolls and Scribes**

In Jeremiah's day, books were written on scrolls made from animal skin or papyrus, a paper-like material made from reeds. Scrolls were written in columns and rolled up. Writing a long scroll by hand could take weeks. Scribes like Baruch were trained professionals who could read and write, which many people couldn't. Archaeologists have found clay seal impressions from this period with names of officials mentioned in Jeremiah 36, including Gemariah son of Shaphan, in whose room Baruch read the scroll.

"Now the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month, and there was a fire in the brazier burning before him." It was cold, probably around December. An official named Jehudi read the scroll aloud. And every time he read three or four columns, the king took a small knife, cut off that section, and tossed it into the fire. He kept doing it until the whole scroll was burned.

Some officials begged him not to burn it, but he wouldn't listen. And the Bible notes something chilling. "The king and his servants who heard all these words were not afraid, and didn't tear their garments." Decades earlier, when Jehoiakim's father, Josiah, heard God's word read from a scroll, he tore his clothes in grief and led the nation in repentance. His son cut God's word into pieces and burned it.

REAL TALK **Cutting Out What You Don't Like**

Jehoiakim's knife is a picture of what people still do with God's word. We cut out the parts we don't like and keep the parts we do. We might ignore what the Bible says about forgiveness, generosity, honesty, sexuality, money, or loving enemies, because it's inconvenient. But cutting out God's word doesn't make it go away. It just means we don't get to hear what He's saying. When you read something in the Bible that's hard, don't reach for the knife. Wrestle with it. Ask questions. Talk to someone wise. And ask God to help you obey.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Young Micaiah**

It's easy to miss a young man in Jeremiah 36. When Baruch read the scroll in the temple, Micaiah son of Gemariah heard it and went straight to the royal officials to report it. His grandfather was Shaphan, the royal secretary who had read the rediscovered scroll of the law to King Josiah decades earlier. Micaiah's family had a history of taking God's word seriously. His quick action meant the officials heard the message, and it set off the events of the chapter. Sometimes young people are the first to recognize that God is speaking.

The king ordered Jeremiah and Baruch arrested, but the Bible says, "the LORD hid them." Then God told Jeremiah to do something simple and stubborn: write it again. "Then Jeremiah took another scroll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire; and many similar words were added to them."

You can burn a scroll, but you can't burn God's word. It came back longer.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Baruch's Discouragement**

Chapter 45 is a short, personal message to Baruch from around the same time. Baruch was discouraged, saying that God had added sorrow to his pain and that he was worn out with groaning. God's answer was honest. The nation was about to be torn down. "Do you seek great things for yourself? Don't seek them." But God promised that Baruch's life would be preserved wherever he went. It's a reminder that faithful work often goes unrecognized, and that God sees the people doing quiet, behind-the-scenes work.

Years later, under King Zedekiah, the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem. Jeremiah kept telling people that the city would fall and that surrendering to Babylon was the way to survive. The officials were furious. They beat him and threw him into a dungeon for

many days. Then they went to the king and said Jeremiah should be put to death because he was weakening the soldiers' morale.

Zedekiah, a weak king, said, He's in your hands. So they took Jeremiah and lowered him with ropes into a cistern in the courtyard. "In the dungeon there was no water, but mire; and Jeremiah sank in the mire."

Jeremiah, who had once preached about broken cisterns that can't hold water, was now stuck in one, sinking in mud, left to starve.

Then an unexpected hero appeared. "Now when Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, a eunuch, who was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon…" Ebed-Melech was a foreigner from Cush, a region south of Egypt. He was a palace official, perhaps a servant with little power. But he went straight to the king, in public, at the city gate, and said that these men had done evil and that Jeremiah would die of hunger down there.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Ebed-Melech**
>
> Ebed-Melech's name means servant of the king. He came from Cush, in the region of modern-day Sudan and Ethiopia. As a eunuch and a foreigner, he would have been an outsider in Jerusalem. Yet he was the one person in the palace brave enough to stand up for Jeremiah. Speaking up against powerful officials in a city at war was a huge risk. Ebed-Melech did it anyway. He's one of the Bible's quiet heroes, and his story reminds us that courage and compassion can come from people others overlook.

The king changed his mind and told Ebed-Melech to take thirty men and pull Jeremiah out before he died. And then Ebed-Melech did something tender. He went to a storeroom and grabbed old rags and worn-out clothes, and lowered them down with the ropes. He told Jeremiah to put the rags under his arms so the ropes wouldn't cut

into him. "So they lifted Jeremiah up with the cords, and took him up out of the dungeon."

> **REAL TALK** **Be an Ebed-Melech**
>
> Ebed-Melech didn't just do the right thing. He did it kindly. He thought about the ropes cutting into Jeremiah's arms and brought padding. That's what compassion looks like: noticing the details of someone else's pain. You might know someone who's stuck in a pit right now, like a classmate being bullied, a friend struggling with depression, or a kid no one talks to. You can be the one who speaks up, and you can do it gently. Tell a trusted adult if someone is in danger. Stand up for people being mistreated. And remember the rags: small kindnesses make a big difference.

God sent a message to Ebed-Melech through Jeremiah. When the city fell, God would rescue him. "For I will surely save you. You won't fall by the sword, but you will escape with your life, because you have put your trust in me," says the LORD.

> **REAL TALK** **Weak Leaders**
>
> King Zedekiah is a picture of a weak leader. He secretly asked Jeremiah for God's word several times, but he was too afraid of his officials to obey it. He let them throw Jeremiah into the cistern, then let Ebed-Melech pull him out. He was always trying to please whoever was in front of him. In the end, his fear of people led to disaster. Leadership isn't just about having power. It's about having the courage to do what's right, even when people disapprove. You'll have chances to lead, in class projects, on teams, in your friend group, or in your family. Be the kind of leader who listens to truth and acts on it.

And then the city fell. In 586 BC, after a siege of about eighteen months, with famine inside the walls, the Babylonians broke through. King Zedekiah tried to escape by night but was captured. His sons were killed, and he was blinded and taken in chains to Babylon. The Babylonian commander burned the temple, the

palace, and the houses of Jerusalem, and tore down the city walls. Most of the remaining people were taken into exile.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Lachish Letters**
>
> In the 1930s, archaeologists digging at the ruins of Lachish, a fortress city southwest of Jerusalem, found letters written in ink on pieces of pottery. They seem to date from the final days before Babylon conquered Judah. In one, a military officer writes that they're watching for the signal fires of Lachish, but they can't see the fires of Azekah. Jeremiah 34 mentions that Lachish and Azekah were the last fortified cities left in Judah besides Jerusalem. The letter may capture the moment Azekah fell.

Jeremiah's words had all come true. But the Babylonians treated him well. The commander released him from his chains and let him choose where to live. Jeremiah chose to stay with the poor people left in the land, under a governor named Gedaliah.

But the tragedy wasn't over. Gedaliah was assassinated. The remaining people panicked, fearing Babylon's revenge. They asked Jeremiah to pray and promised to obey whatever God said. God answered: Stay in the land, and I will build you and plant you. Don't go to Egypt. But the people refused. They accused Jeremiah of lying, and they went to Egypt anyway, dragging Jeremiah and Baruch with them.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Gedaliah's Seal**
>
> Gedaliah, the governor Babylon appointed after Jerusalem fell, was the grandson of Shaphan and the son of Ahikam, the man who had protected Jeremiah years before. At Lachish, archaeologists found a clay seal impression reading belonging to Gedaliah, who is over the house, which many think belonged to him. The family of Shaphan appears again and again in Jeremiah's story as faithful friends who protected him and respected God's word.

In Egypt, Jeremiah kept preaching, warning the people against worshiping the queen of heaven, a goddess they credited with their past prosperity. As far as we know, Jeremiah died there, far from home, still faithful.

REAL TALK **When People Won't Listen**

Jeremiah spent forty years warning people, and almost no one listened. Even at the very end, the people who asked him for God's word refused to obey it. That's discouraging. Maybe you've tried to help a friend, warn a sibling, or share your faith, and they ignored you. Jeremiah's story shows that faithfulness isn't measured by how many people listen. God called Jeremiah to speak, not to control the results. Keep speaking the truth in love, keep praying, and trust God with the rest.

Notice too how God provided for Jeremiah during the siege. When he was in the court of the guard, the king ordered that he be given a loaf of bread each day from the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city was gone. In a city starving under siege, God made sure His prophet had daily bread. And when the city fell, the Babylonian commander treated him kindly and let him go free. God kept His promise from chapter 1. They fought against Jeremiah, but they did not prevail.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Dragged to Egypt**

Jeremiah 43 says the people went to Tahpanhes, a city in the eastern Nile Delta. There, God told Jeremiah to bury large stones in the brick pavement at the entrance of Pharaoh's palace, as a sign that Nebuchadnezzar would one day set up his throne there. Archaeologists have identified Tahpanhes with a site called Tell Defenneh, where a large fort from this period was excavated. Babylonian records say Nebuchadnezzar did invade Egypt around 568 BC. Even in Egypt, Jeremiah kept doing what he'd always done: speaking God's word, whether people listened or not.

KEY VERSE

"For I will surely save you. You won't fall by the sword, but you will escape with your life, because you have put your trust in me," says the LORD.

Jeremiah 39:18 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Jehoiakim burned the scroll instead of listening to it?
2. What parts of God's word are you tempted to cut out?
3. What do you admire most about Ebed-Melech?
4. Who do you know who might be stuck in a pit right now? How could you help?

TRY THIS *This week, be an Ebed-Melech. Notice someone who is hurting or left out, and do one specific, thoughtful kindness for them.*

CHAPTER 8

Nations and One Quiet Spark

Jeremiah 46–52

Remember what God said when He called Jeremiah? “I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Chapters 46 through 51 are Jeremiah’s messages to those nations: Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Elam, and finally, at great length, Babylon.

These chapters show that God isn’t just the God of one small nation. He’s King over every empire. Egypt, which Judah kept trusting for help, would be defeated. Moab’s pride would be humbled. And even Babylon, the empire God used to judge Judah, would one day fall.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Battle of Carchemish**

Jeremiah 46 describes a famous battle in 605 BC at Carchemish, on the Euphrates River in modern-day Turkey. The Egyptian army, led by Pharaoh Neco, faced the Babylonian army, led by young crown prince Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon won decisively, and from then on, it was the region’s superpower. Babylonian records, called the Babylonian Chronicles, also describe this battle. It was one of the turning points of ancient history, and Jeremiah saw what it meant before most people did.

REAL TALK **Caring About the World**

Jeremiah’s messages to the nations show that God cares about what happens everywhere, not just to His own people. He notices pride, cruelty, and injustice in every nation, and He also offers mercy to every nation. You can

care about the world too, by praying for countries in the news, learning about people who are suffering, supporting those who help refugees and the poor, and remembering that God loves people of every nation. The gospel is for the whole world.

The messages to the nations also contain surprising notes of mercy. God says He will restore the fortunes of Moab, Ammon, and Elam in the latter days. Even nations under judgment aren't beyond His mercy.

The longest message is against Babylon. God says Babylon will be judged for its pride and cruelty. In chapter 51, Jeremiah wrote all the messages against Babylon on a scroll and gave it to an official named Seraiah, Baruch's brother, who was traveling to Babylon. He told Seraiah to read the scroll aloud there, then tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates River, saying, Thus will Babylon sink, and will not rise again.

REAL TALK **No Empire Lasts Forever**

Babylon seemed unstoppable. It was the most powerful nation on earth. But within seventy years, it fell to the Persians in a single night. Every superpower in history, from Assyria to Rome, eventually fell. That's a reminder that no human power, whether a government, a company, a celebrity, or a social media platform, lasts forever. Only God's kingdom is eternal. You don't have to be intimidated by powerful people or systems. And you don't have to put your ultimate trust in them either.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Edom and Moab**

Moab and Edom were neighbors of Israel with long, complicated histories. The Moabites were descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew. Ruth, the great-grandmother of King David, was a Moabite. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother. Both nations often fought with Israel, and Edom especially was remembered for cheering when Jerusalem fell. Jeremiah's messages condemn their pride and cruelty. Yet God's promise to

restore Moab in the latter days echoes the story of Ruth, a Moabite welcomed into God's family.

Chapter 51 ends with the words, "Thus far are the words of Jeremiah." Then chapter 52 adds a historical appendix, written by someone else, describing the fall of Jerusalem again, almost exactly as 2 Kings 25 tells it. It describes the burning of the temple, the bronze pillars broken into pieces, the temple treasures carried off, and the leaders executed.

It would be easy to end there, in the ashes. But the book of Jeremiah ends with a strange, quiet scene.

Thirty-seven years after King Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon as a young man, a new Babylonian king named Evil-Merodach came to the throne. And he did something unexpected. He released Jehoiachin from prison. "He spoke kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings who were with him in Babylon, and changed his prison garments. Jehoiachin ate bread before him continually all the days of his life."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Jehoiachin's Rations**

Archaeologists excavating Babylon found clay tablets listing food rations given to prisoners and foreigners living in the royal court. Several tablets, dated to the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, mention Ya'ukin, king of the land of Yahud, along with his five sons, receiving rations of oil. Ya'ukin is the Babylonian form of Jehoiachin, and Yahud is Judah. It's a fascinating real-world glimpse of the king whose release ends the book of Jeremiah.

Why end the book this way? Because it's a spark of hope. Jehoiachin was a descendant of King David. God had promised David that his family would rule forever. When Jerusalem fell, it looked like that promise was dead. But here, at the very end, David's heir is alive, out of prison, wearing new clothes, and eating at the king's table.

It's a small thing. But it's a sign that God hasn't forgotten His promise.

> **REAL TALK** **Small Signs of Hope**
>
> Sometimes hope doesn't arrive as a big, dramatic rescue. Sometimes it's a small sign: a kind word, a door opening a crack, a friend showing up, a good day after many bad ones. Jeremiah ends with that kind of hope. The exile wasn't over. The temple was still in ruins. But a prisoner had been given a seat at the table. If you're in a hard season, look for those small signs. They're often God's way of saying, I'm still here, and I'm not done.

> **REAL TALK** **God's Timing**
>
> Jehoiachin waited thirty-seven years in prison. The exiles waited seventy years. God's people waited six centuries for the New Covenant to arrive. God's timing often feels slow. But it's never late. If you're waiting for something, an answered prayer, a change in your family, a healing, or a hope, Jeremiah's story is a reminder that God keeps His promises in His time. Keep trusting. Keep praying. Keep living faithfully while you wait.

Jeremiah's life seemed like a failure in many ways. Hardly anyone listened. He was rejected, imprisoned, and dragged to Egypt. He never saw the exiles return. But his words were preserved, copied, and read for thousands of years. Daniel read them in Babylon and prayed. The exiles held on to them. And six hundred years later, Jesus took a cup at a table and quoted Jeremiah's greatest promise. Faithfulness is never wasted, even when you can't see the results.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Book of Lamentations**
>
> Right after Jeremiah in most Bibles comes Lamentations, five sad poems about the destruction of Jerusalem. Jewish and Christian tradition have long linked them to Jeremiah, though the book itself doesn't name its author. Lamentations is raw with grief, but in its center is one of the most hopeful passages in Scripture, saying that God's loving kindness never ceases and His

> mercies are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness. Even in the ashes of Jerusalem, hope survived.

The end of Jeremiah connects with the end of 2 Kings, which closes with the very same scene. Both books leave the story unfinished, with David's heir eating at a foreign king's table, waiting. The next part of the story would come with the return from exile, told in Ezra and Nehemiah. And the final chapter would come centuries later, when a descendant of David, born in Bethlehem, would invite people to eat at His own table and say, This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

> **REAL TALK** **A Seat at the Table**
>
> Jehoiachin had been a prisoner for thirty-seven years. Then, suddenly, he was given new clothes and a seat at the king's table for the rest of his life. That's a picture of grace. He didn't earn it. It was given. The gospel offers something even better. Jesus invites sinners, outsiders, and people who feel like prisoners of their past to sit at His table, to be clothed in His righteousness, and to belong. You don't have to earn your seat. It's been prepared for you.

Jeremiah's story also shows that God keeps working even when His people fail. The kings failed. The priests failed. The prophets failed. The people failed. Even the remnant that survived the fall of Jerusalem disobeyed. And yet God kept His promises. He preserved a remnant. He brought exiles home. He kept David's line alive. And eventually, He sent the Branch, the King who would never fail. God's faithfulness doesn't depend on ours.

> **REAL TALK** **Faithfulness Without Applause**
>
> Jeremiah never had a big success story in his lifetime. No revival broke out because of his preaching. No king repented. Most people ignored him. Yet today he's one of the most respected figures in the Bible. Faithfulness often goes unseen. The friend who keeps showing up, the student who keeps doing

the right thing, the young person who keeps praying for their family, none of them may get applause. But God sees. And like Jeremiah, your faithfulness may matter far more than you'll ever know in this life.

KEY VERSE

He spoke kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings who were with him in Babylon, and changed his prison garments. Jehoiachin ate bread before him continually all the days of his life.

Jeremiah 52:32–33 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the book of Jeremiah includes so many messages to other nations?
2. What powerful people or systems are you tempted to fear or trust too much?
3. Why is Jehoiachin's release such a meaningful ending to Jeremiah?
4. What small signs of hope have you seen in a hard season?

TRY THIS *Keep a hope journal this week. Each day, write down one small sign of God's faithfulness, even if it seems tiny.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Jeremiah spent his life watching his people break their covenant with God, and he wept over his city as it fell. But in the middle of the ruins, God gave him a promise: a New Covenant. Not written on stone tablets this time, but on human hearts. A covenant where everyone, from the least to the greatest, would know God personally. A covenant where God says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Jewish readers treasure Jeremiah as the faithful prophet who suffered with his people and pointed to God's unbreakable love. About six hundred years later, Jesus sat at a table with His disciples on the night before He died. He took a cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." Every one of His disciples was Jewish, and they would have known exactly what promise He was naming. The letter to the Hebrews quotes Jeremiah 31 in full and says Jesus is "the mediator of a better covenant." And like Jeremiah, Jesus wept over Jerusalem. Luke writes, "When he came near, he saw the city and wept over it." Some people even thought Jesus was Jeremiah come back. But Jesus did what Jeremiah never could. Jeremiah could warn people and weep for them. Jesus died for them, rose again, and sent His Spirit to write God's law on their hearts.

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. Before He formed you in the womb, He knew you.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Jeremiah says the human heart is deceitful above all things. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus made the New Covenant.

Jesus poured out His blood to make the New Covenant Jeremiah promised. He died for our sins and rose again, so God remembers our sin no more.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

The New Covenant is God's promise, not our achievement. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Seek Him with all your heart.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. God told the exiles, You will seek me and find me, when you search for me with all your heart. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

God, You knew me before I was born. I've tried to fill my life with broken cisterns, and I've sinned against You. I can't fix that myself. Thank You that Jesus poured out His blood to make a New Covenant, and that He rose again. Forgive me, and remember my sin no more. Write Your ways on my heart, and help me know You for real. When I feel too young or too afraid, remind me that You are with me. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Jeremiah 1 and 31, then Luke 22 and Hebrews 8, and see the New Covenant from both sides.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized, and when you take communion, remember the New Covenant.

Find your Baruch. Ask God for one faithful friend who will stand with you, and be that kind of friend for someone else.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Jeremiah argued with God for years. Keep asking questions. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Jeremiah is right, God has thoughts of peace toward you, and He wants to write His love on your heart.

Ah Lord GOD! Behold, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for you.

Jeremiah 32:17 (WEB)