

Sunday Message Notes – Better Bible Reading in 2026

Jeremiah: The Hot Takes

I. The Big View Behind Biblical Writings: CRISIS LITERATURE

A. Biblical writings were preserved, composed, and reshaped by communities attempting to make theological sense of political, social, and religious upheaval and collapse.

1. Assyrian crisis — 8th c. BCE (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah)

a. Assyrian expansion, destruction of the northern kingdom (722 BCE), and threat to Judah.

2. Babylonian crisis — 7th–6th c. BCE; Jerusalem destroyed in 586 BCE

(Deuteronomistic History (Joshua–Kings), Jeremiah, Ezekiel, parts of Isaiah)

a. Exile and Temple destruction prompt questions about covenant, sin, judgment, kingship, and restoration.

3. Persian period / restoration — 6th–4th c. BCE (Torah or Gen-Deut, Ezra–Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi).

a. Focus shifts toward rebuilding, Torah, identity, Temple, community, and life under imperial rule.

4. Hellenistic period — 4th–1st c. BCE (Prov, Job, Eccl. Daniel).

a. Greek cultural/political domination creates new questions about foreign rule, Jewish identity, suffering, divine justice, and the end of history.

5. Roman domination — 1st c. BCE–1st c. CE (Gospels and other early Christian writings).

a. Roman imperial power, Jewish hopes for restoration, and the question of Jesus as Messiah/Lord become central.

6. Post-Jesus crisis / Second Temple destruction — 1st c. CE (Gospels, Epistles, Revelation and other apocalyptic literature).

a. The **70 CE destruction of the Temple**, persecution/conflict, and the apparent delay of Jesus' return (Delay of Parousia) become important theological problems.

B. Crisis → theological questions → reinterpretation of tradition

1. The Bible is what faith sounds like after the world falls apart — and after communities refuse to let collapse have the final word.

II. Fun Facts:

A. Jeremiah is the longest book in the Bible (counting words, not chapters). But, the Greek version (LXX) of Jeremiah is significantly shorter than Hebrew version (approx. 2,700 words or 1/8 shorter). The LXX also contains about 100 words not represented in the Hebrew text. Scholars posit that multiple textual forms of Jeremiah existed and circulated before the book realized final form ("stabilized"). Why? **Perhaps scribes were wrestling with what the crisis meant?** This doesn't have to challenge Jer.'s integrity. It could mean the Bible is a living thing – shaped in, and responding to, history.

B. Jeremiah is known as the "Weeping Prophet." **9:1:** "Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears..." **13:17:** Jeremiah speaks of weeping because of the people's pride. The book of **Lamentations** has also traditionally been attributed to Jeremiah

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and mourns the destruction of Jerusalem, reinforcing his reputation as the "Weeping Prophet."

- C. Authorship and Dating are complex.** Jeremiah dictates to Baruch - spans 40 years (from 13th year of the reign of King Josiah to the destruction of Jerusalem, roughly 627-586 BCE). However, the dates of Jeremiah's prophetic activity aren't necessarily the date when the book was finalized. Remember **the Deuteronomistic History** (the theological narrative laid out in Deut. reflected in Jos., Jud., Sam. and Kings) - that interprets Israel's successes, blessings, disasters, and exiles by their faithfulness or unfaithfulness to God? Large portions of Jeremiah reflect this type of Deuteronomistic language. This leads to a **critical inquiry**: the historical Jeremiah delivered prophetic warnings before the fall of Jerusalem, **then later** scribes from Deuteronomistic circles preserved his message and expanded it in ways that interpreted the fall.
- D. Critical scholarship: Jer. 36:32** *"Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to the secretary Baruch...and many similar words were added to them."* This complicates a strict view of verbal inerrancy because it explicitly describes "additional words" being added to the prophetic text, suggesting that the biblical text could undergo **human editorial development** while still being regarded as authoritative Scripture.
- E. Jeremiah says the exile will last 70 years (it actually lasted 47).** However, in biblical pattern, there was about 70 years from the time of deportation until the building of the temple, which symbolized being in the land.

III. Hot Takes:

- A. Jeremiah 29:11** *"For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope"* – **is a letter sent to exiles in Babylon** (not to college graduates). Jeremiah sends hope, but tells them to build houses because they're not coming home anytime soon.
- B. Jeremiah 1:5 is about Jeremiah's prophetic calling, not about when biological life begins.** When God says, *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,"* the language functions as **prophetic hyperbole**—emphasizing how deeply and completely God knows, calls, and accompanies Jeremiah. Jeremiah is doubting whether he is capable of fulfilling God's difficult calling. Jeremiah is not asking, "When does life begin?" He is asking, in effect, "Who am I to do this? I am too young. I do not know how to speak. I am not capable of carrying this word." God's answer is reassurance: **"This calling did not begin with your confidence. It began with Me."**
- 1. Similarly, Psalm 51:5** (*"I was born guilty when my mother conceived me"*) is best understood as **hyperbole** expressing David's deep shame and guilt, rather than as a literal statement about conception or proof of the **doctrine of original sin**. David is confessing the depth of his sin after what happened with Bathsheba—essentially saying, *"My sin feels like it has been with me from the very beginning."* The verse should therefore be read in the context of David's repentance, not as a biological or theological statement about when sin begins.

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2. The broader biblical picture is also more complex. In **Genesis 2:7**, human beings become living beings when God “*breathes the breath of life*” into the formed body: life is associated with **breath (ruach)**, rather than conception.

C. Jeremiah 7 and 19 - The Valley of Ben-Hinnom began as a real place associated with horrific practices, **NOT** as a description of **hell**. The Valley of Ben-Hinnom (*Geh Ben-Hinnom*) is condemned because of child sacrifice and other atrocities. Over time, the name was shortened in Greek to **Gehenna** and became a symbol of divine judgment and destruction. When Jesus warns that someone who insults their brother or sister is “liable to Gehenna,” it is difficult to make sense of this as **eternal conscious torture**. Reading every reference to Gehenna as a literal place of eternal torture can flatten the historical and biblical development of the term—and can make Jesus' teaching sound irrationally disproportionate to the offense he is addressing.

1. **Ben-Hinnom can be understood as a symbol of what happens when a society collapses morally.** In Jeremiah, the valley represents the devastating consequences of abandoning compassion and justice, especially through the horror of child sacrifice. When Jesus uses the imagery of Gehenna, he can be understood as drawing on that prophetic tradition: **a warning about where violence, and dehumanization lead.** Like Jeremiah, Jesus is calling people back to ethical awareness—to recognize that how we treat one another matters and that moral collapse has destructive consequences.

- a. This Valley of Ben-Hinnom text is where worship becomes violence. “They have filled this place with the blood of the innocent...” **Jeremiah shows that not all sacrifice is holy. Sometimes religion itself becomes the machinery of violence.**

D. The “New Covenant” does not abolish the law; it internalizes it. **Jeremiah 31:31–33** says God will “*write [his] law*” on people’s hearts—not remove it. The goal is no longer merely external, obligatory rule-following, but a transformed moral life in which justice, compassion, and obedience become **part of who we are**. This fits Jesus’ teaching in **Matthew 5**: “*I did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it...not one jot or tittle*” will pass away. The law moves from stone to heart—from external obligation to internalized ethics.

E. Instrument or Apologetic? Shockingly, God uses Babylon as his “**instrument**” of judgment. Jeremiah even calls King Nebuchadnezzar “*my servant*.” This does **not** mean Babylon’s violence or empire is approved by God. Rather, it shows that God’s sovereignty is not limited to Israel—even a foreign empire can become an instrument within God’s purposes. The larger point is that **God can work through unexpected people and nations without endorsing everything they do.**

1. It can also function as an **apologetic for collapse**: rather than seeing Israel’s destruction as evidence that God had failed or abandoned them, Jeremiah interprets Babylon as an instrument of God’s sovereignty—even in judgment and national collapse.

1. **“Fire shut up in my bones” (Jeremiah 20:9):** Jeremiah is exhausted, angry, and even tries to quit, yet God’s message continues to burn within him. His calling brings suffering rather than prosperity, challenging the idea that obedience to God always results in blessing or success.

1. Jeremiah is faithful to God, yet his obedience brings him rejection, suffering, and isolation rather than prosperity. In this sense, Jeremiah can be read as a critique of **Christian triumphalism** (telling religious history as a story of victory and superiority, often minimizing harm done to others) or as resistance to simplistic Deuteronomistic formula that obedience necessarily leads to blessing while disobedience leads to suffering.
2. Sometimes faithfulness does not produce worldly success; **it may lead directly into suffering.**

"What happens to the prophet when the society being confronted is also the society in which the prophet must live?"

1. God is never “done with us.” Jeremiah refuses denial about what’s happening. But, he also refuses despair. The world we have built is occasionally going to fall apart. And, we might be the ones to blame. But, that does not mean God has disappeared.

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