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Introduction

You will be My witnesses . . ." (Acts 1:8). With those words, Jesus declared that the way of salvation would be known to people throughout the world.

The New Testament records the beginnings of Christianity, from Peter's speech at Pentecost to John's vision on Patmos. After the apostles went to be with the Lord in heaven, a group of individuals proclaimed and protected the Christian faith from the constant winds of heresy. They are commonly known as the early church fathers.

Each church father faced a unique challenge in his respective ministry. Some were made to assume positions of church authority against their will. Others were assailed by leaders of heretical sects. All faced the constant danger of persecutions and death for confessing their faith in Jesus. But through their guidance, the church extended its roots into Europe, Asia Minor, and Northern Africa.

For centuries, Christians have been impacted and challenged by the teachings of the early church fathers. Names such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley benefited from the words of Augustine, Chrysostom, and other heroes of the church.

Now it's your turn.

The devotional readings in this book have been carefully selected from the 38-volume series *The Early Church Fathers*, first published in 1885. Each volume in the series was carefully studied in an attempt to gather selections which were both varied and powerful. After the selection process was finished, each devotion was edited in a procedure that updated the language yet preserved the original meaning the church father intended.

Since many church fathers would start on a topic and finish after introducing another topic, ellipses (. . .) have been used for purposes of clarity. In addition, the scripture selections in each devotion may not match many of today's translations. This is due to each church father's own translation of the Greek or Hebrew manuscripts.

In the back of the book, biographies of each of the thirty-nine church fathers are featured, along with the dates where their selections are found.

It is our prayer that as you read what the fathers have to say, God would minister to you and challenge you to become more like His Son Jesus.

J. Alan Sharrer, Christopher D. Hudson, and Lindsay Vanker
July 1999

§1 *The Superscription (Jer. 1:1–3)*

1:1–3 / Most prophetic books (Isa. 1:1; Hos. 1:1; Joel 1:1; Nah. 1:1) as well as some wisdom books (Prov. 1:1; Eccl. 1:1; Song Sol. 1:1) begin with a superscription that serves a similar function to a title page on a modern book. The superscription was likely added by an editor or later tradent, and in the case of Jeremiah identifies the genre, author, the author's priestly status, and the time period in which he ministered. The genre assigned by the superscription is quite general. The books contain **words**, and indeed the bulk of the book is a collection of sermons. These words are further specified to be those of **Jeremiah** who is identified as the son of **Hilkiah** from **Anathoth**, a priestly village in **Benjamin**. Anathoth (near modern 'Anata, which preserves the name) is just a few miles northeast of Jerusalem. This village was assigned to the Levites according to Joshua 21:18. It was the village where Solomon sent Abiathar after he was deposed from the priesthood (1 Kgs. 2:26), and there is some speculation that perhaps Jeremiah was a descendent of Abiathar. Hilkiah was the name of the high priest who discovered the lost book of the law in the temple during the reign of Josiah (2 Kgs. 22:4, 8–14). It is not impossible that this high priest was Jeremiah's father, but if this Hilkiah were meant, it is likely that would have been specified. In addition, that Jeremiah was from Anathoth and not Jerusalem also militates against the identification of the Jeremiah's father with the high priest. That Jeremiah was from a priestly family makes his later criticism of the ritual of Judah even more powerful.

The next two verses set the historical context for the oracles of Jeremiah. It begins by mentioning that his prophetic ministry began in the **thirteenth year of Josiah**. That Jeremiah's ministry began during Josiah's reign is supported by 3:6; 25:3; 36:3. The superscription thus places the beginning of his work in the fateful year of 627/26. According to the Chronicler, Josiah started ruling when he was eight years old and in his eighth year he turned to the Lord. Then in his twelfth year, he started a religious reform by destroying all the idolatrous sites in Judah (see 2 Chr. 34). It was

not until his eighteenth year according to both 2 Kings (22:3–20) and 2 Chronicles (34:8–11) that he discovered the book of the Law and began in earnest to centralize the cult in Jerusalem. It is interesting that the beginning of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry roughly coincides with the beginning of this important religious reform. Nonetheless, some questions have plagued scholars' understanding of the relationship between Jeremiah and Josiah. Our conclusion is that Jeremiah's ministry did coincide with Josiah's reign, and he indeed did support Josiah's reform. Another event of significance in 627/26 was the initiation of Babylonian hostilities toward Assyria. For more about these international events, see Introduction: Historical Context. Indeed, verse three indicates that Jeremiah's oracles continued through the reign of **Jehoiakim** and down to the eleventh year of **Zedekiah**, which was 587/86, the year in which Nabopolassar's son, Nebuchadnezzar defeated the city of Jerusalem, devastated it, and exiled its leading citizens. Interestingly, two short-lived kings of this era are not mentioned, Jehoahaz, who briefly succeeded his father Josiah until a meddling pharaoh Neco replaced him with his pro-Egyptian brother Jehoiakim, and also Jehoiachin, the latter's son who succeeded his father on the throne after Jehoiakim's sudden and unexplained death after he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. Jehoiachin was captured and deported to Babylon and replaced by his uncle Zedekiah. Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah are mentioned since they are the most significant kings of Judah of the time of Jeremiah's active ministry (627/26–587/86).

Additional Notes §1

1:1 / The most recent suggestion for the location of biblical **Anathoth** is the modern Arabic village of 'Anata (Y. Nadelman, "The Identification of Anathoth and the Soundings at Khirbet Der es-Sidd," *Israel Exploration Journal* 44 [1994]) though other suggestions include nearby Ras el-kharrubeh and Deir es-Sud.

1:2 / Some understand the **thirteenth year** of Josiah to be the date of Jeremiah's birth rather than the beginning of his formal ministry. The conclusion is reached because there are few oracles able to be dated to Josiah's reign and there is no clear affirmation or distancing from Josiah's reforms. An appeal to 1:5 supports the idea that the prophet felt he was called to his prophetic office in the womb. However, in spite of 1:5, which seems to be hyperbole, it is more natural to take the reference in the superscription to his actual call narrated in 1:6–10.