

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Jeremiah

Scripture: Jeremiah

Code: MSB24

Title

This book gains its title from the human author, who begins with “the words of Jeremiah...” (1:1). Jeremiah recounts more of his own life than any other prophet, telling of his ministry, the reactions of his audiences, testings, and his personal feelings. His name means “Jehovah throws,” in the sense of laying down a foundation, or “Jehovah establishes, appoints, or sends.”

Seven other Jeremiahs appear in Scripture (2 Kin. 23:31; 1 Chr. 5:24; 1 Chr. 12:4; 1 Chr. 12:10; 1 Chr. 12:13; Neh. 10:2; Neh. 12:1), and Jeremiah the prophet is named at least 9 times outside of his book (cf. 2 Chr. 35:25; 36:12; 36:21,22; Dan. 9:2; Ezra 1:1; Matt. 2:17; 16:14; 27:9). The Old and New Testaments quote Jeremiah at least 7 times: 1) Dan. 9:2 (25:11,12; 29:10); 2) Matt. 2:18 (31:15); 3) Matt. 27:9 (18:2; 19:2,11; 32:6–9); 4) 1 Cor. 1:31 (9:24); 5) 2 Cor. 10:17 (9:24); 6) Heb. 8:8–12 (31:31–34); and 7) Heb. 10:16,17 (31:33,34).

Author and Date

Jeremiah, who served as both a priest and a prophet, was the son of a priest named Hilkiah (not the High-Priest of 2 Kin. 22:8 who discovered the book of the law). He was from the small village of Anathoth (1:1), today called Anata, about 3 mi. NE of Jerusalem in Benjamin’s tribal inheritance. As an object lesson to Judah, Jeremiah remained unmarried (16:1–4). He was assisted in ministry by a scribe, named Baruch, to whom Jeremiah dictated and who copied and had custody over the writings compiled from the prophet’s messages (36:4,32; 45:1). Jeremiah has been known as “the weeping prophet” (cf. 9:1; 13:17; 14:17), living a life of conflict because of his predictions of judgment by the invading Babylonians. He was threatened, tried for his life, put in stocks, forced to flee from Jehoiakim, publicly humiliated by a false prophet, and thrown into a pit.

Jeremiah carried out a ministry directed mostly to his own people in Judah, but which expanded to other nations at times. He appealed to his countrymen to repent and avoid God’s judgment via an invader (chaps. 7,26). Once invasion was certain after Judah refused to repent, he pled with them not to resist the Babylonian conqueror in order to prevent total destruction (chap. 27). He also called on delegates of other nations to heed his counsel and submit to Babylon (chap. 27), and he predicted judgments from God on various nations (25:12–38; chaps. 46–51).

The dates of his ministry, which spanned 5 decades, are from the Judean king Josiah's 13th year, noted in 1:2 (627 B.C.), to beyond the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 586 B.C. (Jer. 39,40,52). After 586 B.C., Jeremiah was forced to go with a fleeing remnant of Judah to Egypt (Jer. 43,44). He was possibly still ministering in 570 B.C. (see note on 44:30). A rabbinic note claims that when Babylon invaded Egypt in 568/67 B.C. Jeremiah was taken captive to Babylon. He could have lived even to pen the book's closing scene ca. 561 B.C. in Babylon, when Judah's king Jehoiachin, captive in Babylon since 597 B.C., was allowed liberties in his last days (52:31–34). Jeremiah, if still alive at that time, was between 85 and 90 years old.

Background and Setting

Background details of Jeremiah's times are portrayed in 2 Kin. 22–25 and 2 Chr. 34–36. Jeremiah's messages paint pictures of: 1) his people's sin; 2) the invader God would send; 3) the rigors of siege; and 4) calamities of destruction. Jeremiah's message of impending judgment for idolatry and other sins was preached over a period of 40 years (ca. 627–586 B.C. and beyond). His prophecy took place during the reigns of Judah's final 5 kings (Josiah 640–609 B.C., Jehoahaz 609 B.C., Jehoiakim 609–598 B.C., Jehoiachin 598–597 B.C., and Zedekiah 597–586 B.C.).

The spiritual condition of Judah was one of flagrant idol worship (cf. chap. 2). King Ahaz, preceding his son Hezekiah long before Jeremiah in Isaiah's day, had set up a system of sacrificing children to the god Molech in the Valley of Hinnom just outside Jerusalem (735–715 B.C.). Hezekiah led in reforms and clean-up (Is. 36:7), but his son Manasseh continued to foster child sacrifice along with gross idolatry, which continued into Jeremiah's time (7:31; 19:5; 32:35). Many also worshiped the "queen of heaven" (7:18; 44:19). Josiah's reforms, reaching their apex in 622 B.C., forced a repressing of the worst practices outwardly, but the deadly cancer of sin was deep and flourished quickly again after a shallow revival. Religious insincerity, dishonesty, adultery, injustice, tyranny against the helpless, and slander prevailed as the norm not the exception.

Politically momentous events occurred in Jeremiah's day. Assyria saw its power wane gradually; then Ashurbanipal died in 626 B.C. Assyria grew so feeble that in 612 B.C. her seemingly invincible capital, Nineveh, was destroyed (cf. the book of Nahum). The Neo-Babylonian empire under Nabopolassar (625–605 B.C.) became dominant militarily with victories against Assyria (612 B.C.), Egypt (609–605 B.C.), and Israel in 3 phases (605 B.C., as in Dan. 1; 597 B.C., as in 2 Kin. 24:10–16; and 586 B.C., as in Jer. 39,40,52).

While Joel and Micah had earlier prophesied of Judah's judgment, during Josiah's reign, God's leading prophets were Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. Later, Jeremiah's contemporaries, Ezekiel and Daniel, played prominent prophetic roles.

Historical and Theological Themes

The main theme of Jeremiah is judgment upon Judah (chaps. 1–29) with restoration in the future messianic kingdom (23:3–8; 30–33). Whereas Isaiah devoted many chapters to a future glory for Israel (Is. 40–66), Jeremiah gave far less space to this subject. Since God’s judgment was imminent he concentrated on current problems as he sought to turn the nation back from the point of no return.

A secondary theme is God’s willingness to spare and bless the nation only if the people repent. Though this is a frequent emphasis, it is most graphically portrayed at the potter’s shop (18:1–11). A further focus is God’s plan for Jeremiah’s life, both in his proclamation of God’s message and in his commitment to fulfill all of His will (1:5–19; 15:19–21). Other themes include: 1) God’s longing for Israel to be tender toward Him, as in the days of first love (2:1–3); 2) Jeremiah’s servant tears, as “the weeping prophet” (9:1; 14:17); 3) the close, intimate relationship God had with Israel and that He yearned to keep (13:11); 4) suffering, as in Jeremiah’s trials (11:18–23; 20:1–18) and God’s sufficiency in all trouble (20:11–13); 5) the vital role that God’s Word can play in life (15:16); 6) the place of faith in expecting restoration from the God for whom nothing is too difficult (chap. 32, especially vv. 17,27); and 7) prayer for the coordination of God’s will with God’s action in restoring Israel to its land (33:3,6–18).

Interpretive Challenges

A number of questions arise, such as: 1) How can one explain God’s forbidding prayer for the Jews (7:16) and saying that even Moses’ and Samuel’s advocacy could not avert judgment (15:1)? 2) Did Jeremiah make an actual trek of several hundred miles to the Euphrates River, or did he bury his loin cloth nearby (13:4–7)? 3) How could he utter such severe things about the man who announced his birth (20:14–18)? 4) Does the curse on Jeconiah’s kingly line relate to Christ (22:30)? 5) How is one to interpret the promises of Israel’s return to its ancient land (chaps. 30–33)? and 6) How will God fulfill the New Covenant in relation to Israel and the church (31:31–34)? The answers to these will be included in the study notes at the appropriate passages.

A frequent challenge is to understand the prophet’s messages in their right time setting, since the book of Jeremiah is not always chronological, but loosely arranged, moving back and forth in time for thematic effect. Ezekiel, by contrast, usually places his material in chronological order.

Outline

I. Preparation of Jeremiah (1:1–19)

A. The Context of Jeremiah (1:1–3)

B. The Choice of Jeremiah (1:4–10)

C. The Charge to Jeremiah (1:11–19)

II. Proclamations to Judah (2:1–45:5)

A. Condemnation of Judah (2:1–29:32)

1. First message (2:1–3:5)

2. Second message (3:6–6:30)

3. Third message (7:1–10:25)

4. Fourth message (11:1–13:27)

5. Fifth message (14:1–17:18)

6. Sixth message (17:19–27)

7. Seventh message (18:1–20:18)

8. Eighth message (21:1–14)

9. Ninth message (22:1–23:40)

10. Tenth message (24:1–10)

11. Eleventh message (25:1–38)

12. Twelfth message (26:1–24)

13. Thirteenth message (27:1–28:17)

14. Fourteenth message (29:1–32)

B. Consolation to Judah—New Covenant (30:1–33:26)

1. The forecast of restoration (30:1–31:40)

2. The faith in restoration (32:1–44)

3. The forecast of restoration—Part 2 (33:1–26)

C. Calamity on Judah (34:1–45:5)

1. Before Judah's fall (34:1–38:28)

2. During Judah's fall (39:1–18)

3. After Judah's fall (40:1–45:5)

III. Proclamations of Judgment on the Nations (46:1–51:64)

A. Introduction (46:1; cf. 25:15–26)

B. Against Egypt (46:2–28)

C. Against Philistia (47:1–7)

D. Against Moab (48:1–47)

E. Against Ammon (49:1–6)

F. Against Edom (49:7–22)

G. Against Damascus (49:23–27)

H. Against Kedar and Hazor [Arabia] (49:28–33)

I. Against Elam (49:34–39)

J. Against Babylon (50:1–51:64)

IV. The Fall of Jerusalem (52:1–34)

A. The Destruction of Jerusalem (52:1–23)

B. The Deportation of Jews (52:24–30)

C. The Deliverance of Jehoiachin (52:31–34)

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