

Introduction to JEREMIAH

Introduction:

“Jeremiah was the premier prophet of Judah during the dark days leading to her destruction... *He was a weeping prophet to a wayward people.*” [Charles Dyer, Bible Knowledge Commentary, p. 1123]

“The Book of Jeremiah is the prophesy of a man divinely called in his youth from the priest-city of Anathoth. *A heartbroken prophet with a heart-breaking message...* His broken heart causes him to write a broken book, which is difficult to arrange chronologically or topically. But through his sermons and signs he faithfully declares that surrender to God’s will is the only way to escape calamity.” [Talk Thru the Bible, p. 198]

Authorship & Date:

“Jeremiah was a contemporary of Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel and Ezekiel. His ministry stretched from 627 to about 580 BC. Josiah, Judah’s last good king [640-609 BC] instituted spiritual reforms when the Book of the Law was discovered in 622 BC. Jeremiah was on good terms with Josiah and lamented when he was killed in 609 BC by Pharaoh Necho of Egypt. By this time, Babylon had already overthrown Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria [612 BC]. Jehoahaz replaced Josiah as king of Judah, but reigned only three months before he was deposed and taken to Egypt by Necho. Jehoiakim [609-597 BC] was Judah’s next king, but he reigned as an Egyptian vassal until 605 BC., when Egypt was defeated by Babylon at Carchemish. Nebuchadnezzar took Palestine and deported key people like Daniel to Babylon. Judah’s King Jehoiakim was now a Babylonian vassal, but he rejected Jeremiah’s warnings in 601 BC and rebelled against Babylon. Jehoiachin became Judah’s next king in 597 BC., but was replaced by Zedekiah three months later when Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and deported Jehoiachin to Babylon. Zedekiah was the last king of Judah; his attempted alliance with Egypt led to Nebuchadnezzar’s occupation and overthrow of Jerusalem in 586 BC”. [Talk Thru the Bible, p. 199]

Once Nebuchadnezzar removed Judah’s last king Zedekiah, this began what is known as “the times of the Gentiles” [Lk. 21:24; Rom. 9:25]. The nation of Israel being under Gentile rulers until the coming of Israel’s final and greatest king, Jesus Christ. The Lord will use this exile not only to chasten His people Israel but to reach His other people, Gentiles.

“Jeremiah’s name is disputed. Suggested meanings include “Yahweh establishes,” “Yahweh exalts,” and “Yahweh hurls down”. Jeremiah’s father, Hilkiah, was a member of the Levitical priesthood and lived in Anathoth, a small village about 3 miles northeast of Jerusalem... This city was one of those given to the descendants of Aaron the priest by Joshua [Josh. 21:15-19]. Probably this Hilkiah is not the same as his contemporary by the same name who discovered the Law in the temple during the reign of Josiah [2 Kings 22:3-14]... Jeremiah was from the priestly line.

Jeremiah's ministry extended from the 13th year of the reign of Josiah [Jer. 1:2] until the Exile of the Jerusalemites [1:3]. This he prophesied from about 627 BC till at least 586 BC... Jeremiah's messages were given during times of stress, upheaval, and need. Chapters 1-6 and 11-12 correspond roughly to the time of King Josiah's reforms. The next major burst of prophetic activity [chaps. 7-10; 14-20; 22:1-19; 26] came when Nebuchadnezzar rose to power. The rest of Jeremiah's prophecies came at the time of the first deportation to Babylon, the second deportation to Babylon, the secret plot to rebel against Babylon, and the final siege and deportation to Babylon. Chapter 52 was written at a later date". [Bible Knowledge Commentary]

Historical Background:

"Jeremiah's ministry spanned the final five decades of Judah's history. His call to service came in 627 BC in the 13th year of King Josiah, Judah's last good king":

King Josiah was the 4th and final reformer in the history of the southern kingdom. He is the final reformer because the gracious forbearance of God over Israel had run its course after 300 years of covenant unfaithfulness to Him... The nation started spiraling down as a consequence of King Solomon's sin of idolatry centuries earlier. After his reign the nation of Israel was split, 10 tribes went north to Samaria and 2 tribes remained south in Judah. The 10 tribes that went north became an apostate nation in their worship, they had forsaken the Lord through a king named Jeroboam. The two tribes, along with a remnant from each of the 10 tribes that remained south had a total of 8 kings out of 20 that were righteous. And out of those 8 kings only 4 sought to bring the people back to whole-hearted devotion to the Lord. And out of those 4 kings, King Josiah was the greatest in bringing the nation back to whole-hearted devotion to the Lord.

Structure & Style:

"Three types of literary materials are found in the Book of Jeremiah: poetic discourses, prose discourses, and prose narratives.... As Jeremiah compiled his subsequent collections of his prophecies, he rearranged them in a logical pattern. The arrangement developed his theme of God's judgment. Chapters 2-45 focused on God's judgment on Judah and chapters 46-51 focused on God's judgment on the Gentile nations.... Thus chapters 2-25 contain Jeremiah's 13 messages of judgment on Judah. These were followed by chapters 26-29 which indicated how the people responded to Jeremiah and his message. The Jews' rejection assured this judgment. However, before the judgment began, Jeremiah pointed ahead to Judah's future hope [chaps. 30-31]... Judah's destruction was inevitable because she had rejected the Word of God. Jeremiah sketched the events that occurred before, during, and after the fall of Jerusalem in chapters 37-45. God accomplished His judgment on the nation because of her sin. And yet if God's Chosen People were judged for their sin, how could the rest of the world hope to escape? In chapters 46-51 Jeremiah turned to these other nations and foretold their judgment." [BKC, p. 1128]

Jeremiah's arrangement here is more theological than stylistic because the apostle Peter's affirms the same order of judgment in his first epistle:

Scrip. Ref: 1 Peter 4:17-18 – For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER? – Before God brings judgment upon the world, He first begins a sanctifying judgment upon the household of God (lit. house of God – 2:5). This judgment is not a condemning judgment because “there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1); but a judgment of refining, a judgment that God brings upon the church through sufferings to purify His people. This judgment can be referred to as chastening by the Heavenly Father toward His children (Heb. 12:4-11); or the pruning of the vinedresser, so that the branches may “bear more fruit” (Jn. 15:1-2). “And if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” – Peter reasons from the lesser to the greater. If the sufferings that Christians go through are really intense, how much more intense will the judgment be upon those are rejecting the gospel of God?

Purpose & Theme:

“In Jeremiah, God is seen as patient and holy – He has delayed judgment and appealed to His people to repent before it is too late. As the object lesson at the potter’s house demonstrated, a ruined vessel could be repaired while still wet [18:1-4], but once dried, a marred vessel is fit only for the garbage heap [19:10-11]. God’s warning was clear: Judah’s time for repentance would soon pass. Because they defied God’s words and refused to repent, the Babylonian captivity was inevitable. Jeremiah listed the moral and spiritual causes for their coming catastrophe, but he also proclaimed God’s gracious promise of hope and restoration. There will always be a remnant, and God will establish a new covenant”. [Talk Thru the Bible, p. 199]

Christ in Jeremiah:

“The Messiah is clearly seen in chapter 23, verses 1-8, as the coming Shepherd and the righteous Branch who “shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” [23:5-6]. He will bring in the new covenant [31:31-34], which will fulfill God’s covenants with Abraham [Gen. 12:1-3; 17:1-8], Moses and the people [Deut. 28-30], and David [2 Sam. 7:1-17].

The curse on Jehoiachin [Jeconiah, Coniah] meant that no physical descendant would succeed him to the throne [22:28-30]. Matthew 1:1-17 traces the genealogy of Christ through Solomon and Jeconiah to His legal [but not His physical] father Joseph. But no son of Joseph could sit upon the throne of David, for he would be under the curse of Jehoiachin. Luke 3:23-38 traces Christ’s lineage backward from Mary [His physical parent] through David’s other son Nathan [Luke 3:31], thereby avoiding the curse. The Righteous Branch will indeed reign on the throne of David” [Talk Thru the Bible, p. 200].

Exposition of Jeremiah

Chapters 1-2:

1:5 – “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

“I knew you” [Heb. “yada”] – to know relationally; **Scrip. Ref:** Gal. 1:15-16 – But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother’s womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased [16] to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.

In the NT the word “foreknowledge” in the Greek literally means, “to know beforehand”. There is much controversy regarding the exact meaning of this word. Some say that the word “foreknowledge” relates to God’s ability in eternity past to look down the corridors of time and see who would exercise faith in the gospel message. Once the gospel was heard and believed, He would then choose them to be His own. This could be better defined as foresight. Others say that the word “foreknowledge” is based on God’s sovereign freedom, in accordance with His love, to select out of the race of humanity whomever He wants to save, which is not based on anything in the creature or anything that the creature does, but solely based on God’s sovereign grace to bestow favor on whomever He wants (Rom. 9:15). This understanding of foreknowledge can be understood as “fore approved” or “foreordained”.

The Scriptures are clear that “foreknowledge” means God’s sovereign freedom to select beforehand, those whom He wants to save. The eternal destiny of mankind is not determined ultimately by the decisions of man, but by God who chooses whom He wants to save (Jn. 6:37; 15:16; Acts 13:48; Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13). Arthur Pink writes, “The fact is that foreknowledge is never used in Scripture in connection with events or actions; instead, it always refers to persons. It is to persons God is said to “foreknow,” not to the actions of those persons” (Arthur Pink, *The Nature of God*, p. 30). In other words, it’s not the actual event (the time and place a person received Christ) or action (placing one’s trust in Christ) that God foreknows, but it is the person that God foreknows not what he or she does. He foreknew them unto salvation before they did anything good or bad (Rom. 9:10-13). (Here’s some Scriptures to prove this point – Acts 2:23 (this statement is made by the apostle Peter); Rom. 8:29, 30; 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:20. God the Father is the One in Scripture who is primarily responsible for foreordaining those He wants to save.