

Book of Jeremiah

Lesson 1: Background, Call of Jeremiah, and the First Speech

Reading: Jeremiah 1:1-3:5

Background

Jeremiah ("Jehovah exalts") came from a family of priests (the son of Hilkiah) and lived in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. He was called by God to prophesy to the southern kingdom of Judah during its final hours. The northern kingdom of Israel had already been taken captive by Assyria in 722 BC. Judah continued to exist for approximately another century before its wickedness and rebellion against God resulted in its captivity by Babylon (586 BC). Jeremiah prophesied for approximately 40 years (627-586 BC).

Jeremiah's powerful message chronicled the sins of the people that would eventually result in its destruction:

- He speaks of their need for true repentance and warns them of a powerful enemy from the north (Babylon) who will destroy the city of Jerusalem and foretells of 70 years of Babylonian captivity.
- He points out the ingratitude of the people toward God who had given them so many blessings.
- He shows how the people had forgotten God and exchanged His glory for empty, worthless idols and "things that do not profit" (2:8,11).
- He charged the people with trusting in treaties with pagan nations (Egypt, Assyria) instead of trusting God with their safety and well-being.
- At the same time, Jeremiah had to deal with false prophets who contradicted his message and preached a message of peace.
- In addition to preaching the justice of God, Jeremiah also spoke of the mercy of God in encouraging a faithful remnant to persevere in spite of hardships and endure when Judah fell.

His message caused Jeremiah to fall out of favor with kings, priests, prophets, friends and neighbors, his own family, and the general public. He was viewed as a traitor to his own nation and had propaganda spread against him. He was scourged, put into prison, and thrown into a dungeon pit. It is no wonder that Jeremiah is commonly referred to as "the weeping prophet":

- He was a compassionate patriot who loved his nation and wanted to see Judah flourish and prosper.
- He felt sorrow over the people's rejection of God and their wickedness.
- His heart was broken because he knew the people's apostasy would result in them suffering at the hands of her enemies.
- Likewise, he was deeply grieved over the personal burden he had to bear in serving as God's messenger.

Such a description as "the weeping prophet" should not cause us to view Jeremiah as pathetic or weak. On the contrary, he was a man of extraordinary courage who was called by God to do a nearly impossible task – attempt to save a nation whose apostasy had reached the point of beyond saving. Likewise, we can most relate to Jeremiah as we consider the society we live in today in light of its view and treatment of God's Word. One of the greatest benefits of the book is to help us realize that our times are not unique; in those moments of discouragement, and disappointment, we can take comfort in the example of Jeremiah who remained faithful in the face of even greater challenges.

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Jeremiah conducted his work during the time of the following kings of Judah:

- Josiah (641/640-609 BC) – II Kings 22:1-23:30; II Chronicles 34-35
 - Referenced in chapters 1-20
 - The last good king of Judah
 - Enacts reforms after the high priest finds the Book of the Law in the temple during restoration work
 - Dies in battle with Pharaoh Neco
- Jehoahaz (609 BC) – II Kings 23:31-33; II Chronicles 36:1-4
 - Referenced in 22:11 (as Shallum)
 - Son of Josiah
 - Pharaoh Neco puts Jehoahaz in prison in Riblah (modern day Syria) and later takes him to Egypt where he dies
 - Pharaoh Neco installs Eliakim as king and changes his name to Jehoiakim
- Jehoiakim (609-598 BC) – II Kings 23:34-24:7; II Chronicles 36:5-8
 - Referenced in 1:3 and covered in chapters 25-26, 35-36, and 45
 - Son of Josiah
 - Nebuchadnezzar comes against Jehoiakim and makes him his servant; after the third year, Jehoiakim rebels
 - Nebuchadnezzar bounds Jehoiakim and carries him off to Babylon, resulting in the first group of captives (606/605 BC), which included Daniel
- Jehoiachin (598-597 BC) – II Kings 24:8-16, 27-30; II Chronicles 36:9-10
 - Referenced in 22:24 (as Coniah)
 - Son of Jehoiakim
 - Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem, takes Jehoiachin and his family captive, resulting in the second group of captives (597 BC), which included Ezekiel
 - Nebuchadnezzar installs Mattaniah as king and changes his name to Zedekiah
- Zedekiah (597-586 BC) – II Kings 24:17-25:22; II Chronicles 36:11-21
 - Referenced in 1:3 and covered in chapters 21-24, 27-29, 34, 37-39, 52
 - Son of Josiah
 - Zedekiah rebels against Nebuchadnezzar
 - Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem again, breaks through the wall, burns the temple and the king's house, and carries away the rest of Judah (586 BC)
 - Zedekiah is carried away to Riblah, his sons are killed, his eyes are put out, and he is carried off to Babylon
 - Nebuchadnezzar installs Gedaliah as governor over the poor people who were left behind in Judah as vinedressers and farmers

Jeremiah was a contemporary of the following prophets:

- Zephaniah (630-625 BC)
- Nahum (630-612 BC)
- Habakkuk (612-606 BC)
- Daniel (606-536 BC)
- Ezekiel (592-570 BC)

In addition to the book itself, I will be using material from the following:

- Harkrider, Robert, Jeremiah and Lamentations. Russellville, AL: Impressive Image Production, 1986.
- Mott, L.A., Thinking Through Jeremiah. Chillicothe, OH: DeWard Publishing Company, Ltd., 2009.

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Call of Jeremiah

- Historical setting (1:1-3)
 - Jeremiah's call (1:4-10)
1. What was different about Jeremiah's calling as a prophet and how would it become important during his ministry (1:5, 43:1-2)?

 2. What is Jeremiah's objection to his calling, and how does God answer it (1:6-9)?

 3. What position of authority does God give Jeremiah and how would Jeremiah exercise that authority (1:10, 23:29)?
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- Two visions (1:11-16)
4. What two visions does God give Jeremiah, and what are their meanings (1:11-16)?
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- Charge to Jeremiah and assurance of divine aid (1:17-19)
5. What three figures does God use to describe His protection and why would God's protection of Jeremiah be important (1:18-19)?

First Speech: The Case against Israel

- The devotion of Israel's youth (2:1-3)
 - Israel's defection from God (2:4-8)
6. How does Jeremiah describe Israel's defection from God, and what phrase does he use to describe Israel's idolatry (2:4-8)?

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- God's indictment against Israel's apostasy (2:9-13)
7. What charges does God bring against Israel (2:9-13)?
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- The consequences of Israel's course (2:14-19)
8. What were the consequences of Israel's apostasy (2:14-19)?
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- Israel's incurable passion for idolatry (2:20-25)
9. What seven metaphors does Jeremiah use to describe Israel's rejection of God and their incurable passion for idolatry (2:20-26)?
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- The end result of Israel's idolatry (2:26-28)
 - Israel's guilt in spite of its denial (2:29-37)
10. How could Israel proclaim its innocence in light of the evidence outlined in verses 2-34 (2:35)?
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- Conclusion: Jehovah's call to repentance and Israel's response (3:1-5)
11. With what invitation does Jeremiah conclude this first message, and what is its significance to the Law of Moses (3:1-3)?
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12. What is Israel's response to God's invitation (3:4-5)?
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- The next speech (3:6) begins with a renewed call for a return to God and elaboration of the meaning of repentance and returning to God