

Jeremiah: The Weeping Prophet

"*Yahweh Establishes*"

Jeremiah the Hebrew prophet, watched the nation of Judah decline until it was carried away into captivity by the Babylonians. He watched and wept as the Temple was destroyed.

One of the difficulties in interpreting Jeremiah is due to chronological inconsistency. It is not presented in chronological order. Jeremiah compiled his prophecies in stages; he often places prophecies together that are dated years apart. This may be attributed to the times in which he prophesied which were filled with stress, upheaval and despondency. Those were chaotic days in Judah.

AUTHOR: Jeremiah, the weeping prophet (1:1; 9:1; 20:9) is the central personality in the book and is considered by most conservative scholars as the author. He is one of the greatest prophets of Israel. Notations at the beginning of chapters, scattered throughout the book, indicate the authorship of Jeremiah. He is a major writing prophet in the Old Testament who prophesied during the reigns of the last five kings (Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah) at the time of the decline and fall of the southern kingdom of Judah. He was the son of Hilkiyah, a priest, and grew up in the little town of Anathoth, about three miles northeast of Jerusalem (Jer. 1:1-2). He is mentioned by name in 2 Chronicles 35:25; 36:12, 21, 22; Ezra 1:1; Daniel 9:2; Matthew 2:17; 16:14; 27:9. He was never married (Jer. 16:1-4).

NAME: There is uncertainty among Hebrew scholars concerning the meaning of the name "Jeremiah." The most literal translation is "Yahweh loosens (the womb)." Some suggest it means "Yahweh exalts," "Yahweh establishes," "Yahweh sets free." J. W. Watts suggests, "JHVH founds," or "JHVH hurls" with the sense of laying a foundation is based on 1:10, 12, 19. Yahweh establishes, appoints or sends.

DATE: Jeremiah began his ministry about seventy years after Isaiah, i.e., 626-585 B.C. God called him to the prophetic ministry during the 13th year of Josiah's reign (Jer. 1:2-10; 23:5) in 626 B.C. His ministry lasted for about fifty years because even after the fall in 586 B.C., he continued to prophesy in Egypt. The prophet's writing ministry began in the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign in 605 B.C. (36:1, 2), and was completed sometime after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Jeremiah was a contemporary of Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel, and Ezekiel.

PURPOSE: The prominent theme is the coming captivity of Judah. God judges sin and rewards righteousness. He confronted hypocritical priests, false prophets and corrupt kings. You reap what you sow, regardless of who you are. The book begins with the call of Jeremiah and ends with the captivity of Judah. It is a book depicting the coming judgment of God on His rebellious people. Moreover, part of his purpose focuses on the most distant future when the old covenant will be replaced by the new covenant (Jer. 31:31-37).

KEY VERSE: 3:14a

KEY WORD: return

METHOD: Jeremiah is a colorful prophet who spoke in Temple courts, royal palace, city gates,

feast and fast days to anyone who would stop to listen to him. He used lots of symbolism such as a long journey, potter's wheel, breaking a pitcher into fragments, purchase of a field in the time of siege, etc. Jeremiah dictated his messages to a scribe, Baruch over a period of several years (36:1-4). Baruch delivered the messages to King Jehoiakim since Jeremiah was banned from the royal court. The book is not written in chronological order and is difficult to outline. Perhaps the best outlines are based on the kings with whom Jeremiah is associated.

STYLE: Jeremiah was a master at using figures of speech, metaphors, and symbolic behavior to communicate his message. His style is simple, sometimes labored and tedious, powerful with evidence of a deep spiritual passion. He usually starts with a simple story or illustration and follows with applications. It contains symbolism, illustrations, biography, history and prophecy. However, it is one of the most difficult books to understand because it does not have a chronological arrangement. Because of hostile opposition from his own countrymen he was forced to re-write his book after it was destroyed (Jer. 36:22-23, 32). He was, by nature, gentle and tender in his feelings, and sympathetic, but a decided contrast to this is found in the hard and unmerciful judgment which was his mission to announce. Jeremiah was commanded to preach the judgment upon Judah. God made him strong and firm and immovable like iron for his mission (1:18; 15:20). This contrast between his naturally warm personal feelings and his strict Divine mission appears in the heart-utterances found in his prophecies. He remained faithful to the word of God despite the indescribable hardships.

BACKGROUND: Jeremiah probably had the most difficult ministry in the O.T. (Jer. 5:31) where he encountered a strange combination of Canaanite religions, Jezebel's Baalism, Babylonian cults, and a meaningless formal Judaism. He helped Josiah, the last of the good kings, in his reforms. When Nebuchadnezzar invaded Palestine in 605 B.C., Jeremiah said it was the will of God that Judah submit to him. When false priests and prophets prohibited Jeremiah from appearing in public God told him to put his prophecies in writing. These were read in the Temple on a fast day by his servant Baruch. King Jehoiakim destroyed the book and ordered the arrest of Jeremiah. "But the LORD hid him." Jeremiah wrote the prophecy again, and later was persecuted by the military authorities under King Zedekiah. When Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem and withdrew Jeremiah prophesied that the Babylonians would come again and burn the city. The king accused him of being a traitor and put him in prison.

Jerusalem fell when its walls were breached in the fourth month of 586 B.C. One month later, the temple was burned, along with the palaces, houses, and other administrative buildings. An additional 4,600 Jerusalemites were deported to Babylon. Gedaliah was appointed governor of Judah at Riblah. Jeremiah, who had been imprisoned by Zedekiah, was released and sent to serve under Gedaliah. Gedaliah was assassinated and his supporters fled to Egypt, fearful of Nebuchadnezzar's revenge. Jeremiah was given a choice of going to Babylon under protection or remaining in Palestine. He stayed with the remnant in Palestine until he was carried by force to Egypt (Jer. 42:1ff; 43:8-13; Jer. 44) where he continued his prophetic ministry (chaps. 43-44). At that time Jeremiah must have been from 70 to 80 years old. He probably died soon after this in Egypt. The church Fathers report that he was stoned to death at Daphne by the Jews. There is a rabbinical tradition that says Jeremiah, in company with Baruch, was taken from Egypt to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, and died there. Both of these reports are not well founded, however. He was "misunderstood by his own family, opposed by priest and prophet, shunned by his people, his life was a tragic experience." No wonder we know him as the weeping prophet. However, in Judah's darkest hour, Jeremiah prophesied that a remnant would return from Babylonia after their captivity to restore their way of life and to worship God again in the Temple (32:26-44).

CHRONOLOGY OF JEREMIAH

722 B.C. Northern Kingdom of Israel conquered by the Assyrians

640 B.C. Josiah becomes king of Judah

622 B.C. Josiah's reforms (2 Kings 22, 23)

625-605 B.C. Nabopolassar, father of Nabuchadnezzar conqueror of Assyria reigned over Babylon

626 B.C. Call of Jeremiah

640-608 B.C. Reign of Josiah

632 Josiah renounces the Assyrian cult

612 B.C. Fall of Nineveh to the Babylonians and Medes

608 B.C. Death of Josiah at Megiddo

608 (3 months) reign of Jehoahaz

608-597 B.C. Reign of Jehoiakim

605 B.C. Battle of Carchemish, defeat of Egypt by Chaldeans and Medes and fall of Assyrian Empire

605 B.C. First siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel exiled to Babylon)

605 B.C. Death of Nabopolassar

605-562 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar reigned over Babylonian empire

601 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar defeated by Necho at Egyptian border

597 B.C. Jehoiakim died violently in Jerusalem

597 B.C. Jehoiachin (Jeconiah or Coniah), exiled to Babylon with Ezekiel

597-586 B.C. Reign of Zedekiah; Second siege of Jerusalem

594 B.C. Rebellion in Babylon

592 B.C. Call of Ezekiel

588-586 B.C. Final siege of Jerusalem

586 B.C. Fall of Jerusalem and Judah, destruction of Solomon's Temple, beginning of Babylonian Captivity

586 B.C. (?) Assassination of Gedaliah

585 B.C. Jeremiah taken to Egypt

582 B.C. Last exiles taken to Babylon by Nebuzaradan

SPECIAL THEMES:

The scope of Jeremiah's ministry reaches beyond Judah to the Gentile nations (chaps. 46-51). He is a "prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5, 10). He saw nations rise and fall, and he was absolutely sure that Yahweh was the power behind those events. He refers to such places as Egypt, Uz, Philistia, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Sidon, Elam, and Media, and others both named and unnamed (25:15–31; 27:2-4). He even calls Nebuchadnezzar Yahweh's "servant" (Jer. 25:9; 27:6; 43:10).

1. Gentiles share in the Messianic Kingdom (3:14-18; 12:15-17; 16:14-21; 48:47; 49:6).
2. The greater Son of David will be the King of Kings (23:1-8; 30; 31; 33:14-26).
3. The New Covenant with Israel (31:31-34; 32:36-44; Heb. 8 and 10).
4. Messiah in Jeremiah

Fountain of Living Waters (Jer. 2:13; Jn. 4:10-14)

Great Physician (Jer. 8:22; I Pet. 2:24; Matt. 9:35)

Good Shepherd (Jer. 23:4; 31:10; Isa. 40:11; Jn. 10:11ff)

Righteous Branch (Jer. 23:4-6; 33:15-16)

David the King (Jer. 30:9; Luke 1:32-33; Rev. 5:5)

Redeemer (Jer. 50:34; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19; Heb. 9:12)

Our Righteousness (Jer. 23:6; 2 Cor. 5:21)

Jeremiah is mentioned only in Matthew 2:17 (Jer. 31:15); 16:14; 27:9 (cf. Jer. 32:9; Zech. 11:13). The stoning of God's messengers in Matt. 23:37 and Heb. 11:37 also refers to Jeremiah.

The messianic prophecies contained in Jeremiah find their full and complete realization in the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He is clearly seen as the coming Shepherd and Righteous Branch in chapter 23:1–8. 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 God's chosen people (Deut. 28–30), and David (2 Sam. 7:1–17).

Many scholars have pointed out that Jeremiah also declares Yahweh's message of the curse on Jehoiachin (Jeconiah, Coniah). Yahweh decreed that no physical descendant would succeed Jehoiachin 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. It is clear that no son of Joseph could sit upon the throne of David, for he would be under the curse of Jehoiachin. Moreover, 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. Jesus Christ is the only possible legitimate *legal* and *royal* Messiah.

The centerpiece of Jeremiah's future age was the return from Exile. Yahweh's people would return after seventy years (Jer. 25:12; 29:10) purified by the Exile. However, Jeremiah saw farther into the future than the Exile. God gave him a vision of a renewed Jerusalem that would reflect God's holiness (Jer. 31:23–25) and bear a new name, "The Lord is our righteousness" (Jer. 33:16). The Messianic age is distinguished by a restored Davidic Ruler, the Righteous Branch, who will dispense equity and justice (Jer. 23:5; 33:14–16). Both Judah and Israel will come to Zion (Jer. 50:4–5), and the Gentiles will benefit from the blessings of that new day (Jer. 3:17). The new covenant will be written on the hearts of men and women, and the law of God

will be thus internalized (Jer. 31:31–34). His prophecy of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 finds its fulfillment the Christ.

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