

Old Testament Survey—Jeremiah

The prophets in Israel were an amazing group of men. They spoke for God, often doing so standing alone against the multitudes. Certainly Jeremiah did.

Discuss: What do you recall about the prophet Jeremiah? Chapter one is the record of Jeremiah's call. He learned from God early on the nature of the ministry to which he was called. Let's examine...

Q: When did Jeremiah begin his ministry, acc. to v 2? When Josiah was king

Q: What happened during the reign of Josiah? Revival (2 Chron 34)

Q: Under what conditions did Jeremiah finish his ministry, acc. to v 3? Exile

He saw the highs under Josiah and the lows under Jehoiakim.

Discuss: What would it be like to minister during a down-sizing, downward spiral time as did Jeremiah?

Q: When did God designate Jeremiah to be a prophet, acc. to v 4? Before he was born

Q: How did Jeremiah feel about God's choosing of him, acc. to v 6? Like Moses did!

Q: What terms did God use to describe the nature of Jeremiah's coming ministry? V 10

Q: What did God reveal that would soon happen to Jeremiah's people? Vv 14-16

Q: What kind of response did God predict the people would give to Jeremiah's ministry? Vv 17-19 Give them my message but they will not listen to you!

Summary: Few men of God have faced a tougher task than did Jeremiah. How so? He ministered during a very difficult transition time in Israel's history. Judah had passed the point of no return. Early on in his ministry, Jeremiah saw revival in the executive branch of Judah's government. But it was short-lived. Judgment was coming, and it was Jeremiah's task to tell the people so. He was also to be the compass to guide God's people through those turbulent years (though they never appreciated his guidance).

Note: Jeremiah was a man who was not fully appreciated until he was gone. Can you think of other examples of individuals of whom the same was true?

L.H.B. (403): "Challenging times both demand and produce people capable of meeting the challenge... Through four turbulent decades, Jeremiah declared the word of God to king and commoner alike at great personal cost. He demonstrated not only what a prophet should say but what he should be. His book recounts both his life and message and provides the paradigm for all true prophecy."

Now let's move from Jeremiah the man to Jeremiah the book...

Who wrote the book?

--Jeremiah

--A compilation process was involved. Jeremiah dictated much of what is found in chapters 1-25 to Baruch, which summarized the first twenty years of Jeremiah's ministry, but Jehoiakim burned this first scroll. So Jeremiah dictated a second, even longer scroll (see 36:32). Much of the first half of the book is in the first person, indicating Jeremiah either dictated it or that it was the record of his sermons recorded by Baruch. Much of the second half of the book uses the third person and is narrative (commonly credited to Baruch; see L.H.B., 409).

Note: The LXX is considerably shorter than the Hebrew and organizes the material in a different order (ch 33 is missing; ch 46-51 placed after ch 25). The differences may suggest that the final book was published in more than one form (L.H.B., 410).

When was the book written?

--6th century B.C.

--Jeremiah began his ministry in 626 B.C. and served as a prophet into the period of the captivity. Harrison feels the book was written by 520 B.C.

Why was the book written?

The book of Jeremiah is the record of how God kept His Word established in the Mosaic covenant (Deut 8:19-20; Deut 28), "If you disobey Me, judgment is coming." It was Jeremiah's job to pronounce the death note for Israel .

Jeremiah's message accused his people of two violations. One, they had broken God's covenant. Two, they lacked circumcision of the heart. Sadly, Jeremiah announced that not one righteous person could be found in Judah (5:1).

Because of his message, Jeremiah was considered a traitor and treated with scorn. So bad was it that he was not allowed to marry. Why was he so unpopular? Jeremiah was against religion that has no effect on people's lives. Do we face this problem today?

What is the outline of the book?

Key: Jeremiah was not interested, strictly speaking, in chronology, but in themes.

- I. Prophecies under Josiah and Jehoiakim (ch 1-20)
- II. Later prophecies under Jehoiakim and Zedekiah (ch 21-39)
- III. Prophecies after the fall of Jerusalem (ch 40-45)
- IV. Prophecies against the heathen nations (ch 46-51)
- V. Historical appendix (ch 52)

(Archer, pp. 367-8)

Note: Jeremiah is a master communicator. He uses a variety of images to reveal truth. For instance: potter (ch 18), clay pot (ch 19), figs (ch 24), cup of wine (ch 25), yoke (ch 27), scroll (ch 36), dungeon (37:16), cistern (38:6). His life was his message, too.

One notable act was when he bought a field (ch 32; this was like buying suntan lotion in Alaska in January! Why buy a field if we're going into captivity? Because our descendants are coming back! An act of faith!)

Discuss: What can we learn about creativity in teaching God's Word from Jeremiah?

What is the message of the book in one sentence?

The book of Jeremiah is the message God delivered to His people Judah after they had passed the point of no return.

What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?

1. Jeremiah teaches us about true patriotism.

In his day the people had elevated the Davidic covenant over the Mosaic covenant. They ignored the moral implications of the latter, and claimed the glorious promises of the former. They believed that God would never let the city of David fall if they protected the temple and observed temple rituals. Jeremiah attacked this and was accused of being unpatriotic.

Discuss: Was Jeremiah unpatriotic? What is true patriotism that honors God?

2. Jeremiah emphasizes the importance of the heart over externals.

The people accused him of being anti-temple. He was not anti-temple. He was against ritual in the temple that didn't influence the people's conduct.

See: Temple Messages (chs 7, 17, 26)

Q: Where did he preach the message in ch 7? 7:1 At the gate of the temple

Q: What sin did Jeremiah attack in 7:3-8? They were going through the motions of temple worship, but it made no impact on their lives.

Jeremiahs' point, "You don't need the ark. You don't even need the temple or Jerusalem in order to worship God. If you will seek the Lord (no matter where), you will find Him (see 29:13).

Discuss: Who else in the Bible had a message like this? Jesus did. People thought Jesus was Jeremiah because the character of His message against externals sounded like Jeremiah. Stephen developed the same theme (Acts 7).

3. *Jeremiah teaches us about prayer.*

Notice a tension.

a. God told Jeremiah, "Don't pray for this people." (7:16; 11:14; 14:11; 15:1). God said, "Even if Moses and Samuel interceded in their behalf, it wouldn't change My mind! They'd still go into exile!"

b. Jeremiah did pray for his people. One has observed that Jeremiah prays for people more than any other prophet (in chapters 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 32; 42:4).

Discuss: How do we reconcile this apparent tension in Jeremiah's prayer life?

We see the *pathos* of Jeremiah. He identifies with God (in his prophetic ministry) and he identifies with his people (in his prayers for them).

4. *Jeremiah explains the importance of the new covenant.*

The Old Covenant wasn't bad, but it lent itself to emphasis on externals (which was the fault of the people, not the covenant). The attitude of the people had become, "What is the minimum we can do and still be accepted by God?"

Jeremiah revealed that a New Covenant was coming. How would it be different from the Old Covenant? See Jer 31:31-34

Under the New Covenant, there is much freedom and flexibility. The New Testament doesn't give us a lot of prescription for church life. It doesn't tell us how many services a week a church should have. It doesn't tell us what order of service to follow in the Sunday morning worship. It doesn't prescribe how many verses a day we should read from the Bible. The essence of the New Covenant is the same as the Old, "Love God. Love people." But the Torah is internalized now. We don't operate under a rigid code.

Discuss: Why not? What is the danger of developing a tradition that maps out everything?