

Introduction to Jeremiah

Intro: With this lesson we begin the study of the prophecy of Jeremiah. This book is not studied as regularly as perhaps Isaiah, but Jeremiah is a prophet of equal stature. He was a great man who endured great sufferings for the sake of a message that most people would have rather not heard but needed to hear! Baxter reminds us of three outstanding qualities of the man himself which we will be privileged to think about repeatedly: his sympathetic suffering; his patient perseverance; his utter faithfulness. You will remember that when the populace explored which prophet of whom Jesus reminded them, some said, "...Jeremias, or one of the prophets".

The man

Jeremiah--His name may mean "the Lord throws, founds, loosens, exalts"

Son of Hilkiah--Probably not the Hilkiah, who found the book of the law in the temple (2 Kg. 22:8).

Of the priests in Anathoth--Possibly a descendant of Abiathar, whom Solomon sent to Anathoth (1 Kg. 2:26). Whether Jeremiah served as priest himself is uncertain. What is clear is that he personally had the profoundest respect for the covenant law that God had given to Israel at Sinai and often appeals to its provisions as a basis for his remarks. Such was one of the true roles of the priests in instructing the people.

Jeremiah was born probably a few years before 640 b.c. He was but a young man, "naar", when called to be a prophet (1:6) The 13th year of Josiah would be 627 b.c.

To whom the word of the Lord came...

The times

In the days of Josiah--King from 640-609, dying just three years before the invasion by Nebuchadnezzar, in keeping with God's promise. Remember then that much of Jeremiah's message is given while Josiah is embarking upon a significant effort at reform (Cf. 2 Chron. 34:3, in his 8th year (a 16 year old) he began to seek the Lord; by the 12th year (age 20) he began the cleansing of Jerusalem; in the 18th year (age 25) he reinstated the Passover after the book was found). Jeremiah began his work near the beginning of Josiah's efforts to cleanse Judah of idolatry. He would have provided the spiritual voice to assist the king in these things. Jeremiah lamented the death of Josiah (2 Chron. 35:25)

Jehoahaz is omitted it would seem because of the shortness of his reign.

In the days of Jehoiakim--Remember that he was wicked. We will see the evidence of that in the book of Jeremiah as well.

Until the 11th year of Zedekiah (586 b.c.)

Jeremiah lived during the midnight hour of Judah's history. He was the see the fulfillment of the tragic end prophesied by God's spokesmen since the days of Isaiah. No wonder he is called the "weeping" prophet. Jeremiah wrote five lamentations related the fall of the Jerusalem, found in the book "Lamentations".

Jeremiah's call

Known by God before conception, formation in the womb, and birth, v. 5

Jeremiah's reluctance, v. 6; God met all the Jeremiah's fears

Inadequacy--I am a youth; But God insists that young people may do what God says as well as older people! "Everywhere I send you, you shall go! All that I command you shall speak!", v. 6-7 Jeremiah's success depends not upon his experience or age but upon simple obedience to God!

Opposition--I will deliver you, v. 8

Jeremiah's commission, v. 10--"I have appointed you prophet to the nations"

I have put my words in your mouth (there is no better definition of a prophet! Remember this passage!) This is why modernists who seek to redate the prophecies of the O.T. are wrong! By symbolic act God made this known; Peter confirms this truth (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

Over the nations...the kingdoms--It is as if Jeremiah's very proclamations would effect the earth shaking changes that were about to come about! And so they would because they were decrees of God!

Jeremiah's call confirmed

The almond rod--The connection between symbol and message may at first evade us. The Hebrew word for the rod of the almond tree, "shaqed", means "watchful or vigilant" because this tree is the first to bud and produce leaves. In a similar way, I will watch "shoqed" over my word to perform it. The idea is God's hastening the fulfillment of that of which he speaks. Cf. Is. 55:11. This symbol emphasizes the surety of the message.

The boiling pot--This symbol emphasizes the content of the message. Out of the boiling pot comes the punishment of God upon the land of Judah. The rule of foreigners is to be all-encompassing. It is because of Judah's sin.

A firm call to courage and confidence--gird, arise, speak, do not be dismayed! Note the imperatives that evoke these qualities.

Jeremiah's invincibility in God's protection, v. 18.

There is realism: they shall fight. But there is hope: They will not overcome. I am with you to deliver you!

The book itself

This book defies analysis in one sense. The prophecies are obviously not written in chronological order. The best analysis seems to be topical:

1:1-19 Introduction: Jeremiah's call and confirmation of call

2:1-20:18 General prophecies during the days of Josiah (cf. 3:1, but no other dates or circumstances defined).

21:1-33:26 Specific prophecies of judgment and salvation to come

34:1-45:5 Episodes in Jeremiah's life centering around the fall of Jerusalem

46:1-51:64 Prophecies against the nations around Israel

52:1-34 Historical supplement: The fall of Jerusalem