

Jeremiah

“A Dying Nation”

I. Introduction to Jeremiah the Book

Jeremiah is the 24th book of the Old Testament and the second of the Major Prophets. Jeremiah has 52 chapters, and by word count is the longest of the prophetic books. It chronologically follows the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah watched the fall of Israel to Assyria and prophesied of a better day when Messiah would suffer for the sins of man, and ultimately reign supreme. Jeremiah watched as Judah fell to Babylon and prophesied of a remnant returning to Israel after seventy years of captivity. This captivity was both punitive and corrective. During the captivity, Israel would be cured of its idolatry and the way would be paved for the coming Messiah.

Jeremiah's prophesies follow approximately sixty to eighty years after Isaiah and during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. Jeremiah is best understood when seen in light of 2 Kings 22-25 and 2 Chronicles 34-36. At sixteen years of age, young King Josiah began to seek the Lord and by age twenty, he purged Judah and Jerusalem of altars, images and high places. At twenty-six he began a Temple restoration project to restore worship of YHWH and insight revival in the people. It was during this time Hilkiah found a copy of the law of God. When it was read to King Josiah, he repented of personal sin and called the nation to turn to the Lord. Thousands, in Israel devoted themselves to the Lord. This would be the final revival in Israel's history. It was during this time, Jeremiah began his ministry. After Josiah's death, four final kings would reign. They would undo all the reforms Josiah accomplished. These four kings would ignore the warnings of God, make an allegiance with Egypt, and finally, be overthrown by Babylon. Zedekiah has the sad testimony of being Judah's final king.

The book of Jeremiah was transcribed by Jeremiah to Baruch, his Scribe, and burned by King Jehoiakim. A second copy was written by Baruch. Tradition maintains the book was edited by Ezra, and again at the time of Septuagint, until it has reached its present final state.

Jeremiah is somewhat difficult to navigate because the events do not follow chronological order. The overall theme of Jeremiah is the death of a nation. A careful study will reveal the cause and cure of a nation's demise. Judah abandoned God and His Word, suffering collapse.

Introduction to Jeremiah the Man

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah the priest from Anathoth, a small town located about three miles north-east of Jerusalem. Hilkiah may have been the same priest who discovered the Word of God which led to national revival under the reign of Josiah. “Now when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD given by Moses.” (2 Chronicles 34:14)

Jeremiah was of the lineage of Aaron, and at the age of thirty would begin to minister to Israel as a priest. However, God had other plans. Jeremiah was called to the ministry of a prophet at an early age. His ministry began during the reign of Josiah in 627 B.C. when he was between seventeen and twenty-two years old. He continued as a spokesman for God for over forty years, until in 532 B.C. he was put to death in Egypt. There is no authentic record of his death.

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Jeremiah was called to be God’s final voice, before the fall of Judah. His message was simple: turn from sin, return to the Lord; for God still had a plan for Israel. Jeremiah is known as “the Weeping Prophet” as he pled with the people to turn to God. He suffered constant persecution for his messages.

Jeremiah 11:19 – The people of his own village sought to kill him

12:6 – His own family conspired against him.

20:7 – He was mocked and ridiculed.

20:2 – He was arrested and put in stocks.

38:6 – He was thrown into a pit that served as a dungeon.

Jeremiah has become an example of faithfulness. Despite all the opposition and lack of response from the people, Jeremiah continued to proclaim the truth of God’s Word and call the people to return to the Lord.

II. Why Study Jeremiah

In a world where success is measured by accomplishment, why study about a prophet with no converts? Two good reasons to be familiar with Jeremiah’s prophesy:

Personal and practical

Natural, even universal

Personal and Practical

Jeremiah teaches that God has a plan for each of his children. Society dictated Jeremiah would be a priest, but God called him to be a prophet. This is clearly stated in Jeremiah 1:5:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;”

(“knew” – is the Hebrew word “yada”; intimate personal knowledge),

“Before you were born I sanctified you;”

(“sanctify” – to set apart for service)

“I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”

(“ordained” – to put in place)

Jeremiah teaches how to fulfill that which God has planned for us. He responded to the call of God. We will become what God has planned, if we forsake the call of the world, and respond to the call of God. In Matthew 16:24, Jesus declares, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”

Jeremiah was committed to the Word. Throughout his ministry, he makes reference to the Word of God. We see this in Jeremiah 15:16:

“Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts.”

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And in Jeremiah 20:9 – 10 “Then I said, ‘I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.’ But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding [it] back, and I could not. For I heard many mocking: ‘Fear on every side!’ ‘Report’ they say, ‘and we will report it!’ All my acquaintances watched for my stumbling, saying, ‘Perhaps he can be induced then we will prevail against him, and we will take our revenge on him.’”

Growing up, Jeremiah was surrounded with the good influence of his father, Hilkiah who found the Word of God during the restoration of the Temple, His Aunt Huldah, who was a prophetess, and Barush and Josiah, who were his friends. If we want to become what God has called us to we must:

- Commit
- Get in the Word
- Get around Godly influences

Jeremiah teaches there is no excuse for neglecting service to the Lord. Jeremiah 1:6 – 10: “Then said I: ‘Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth.’ But the LORD said to me: ‘Do not say, ‘I am a youth,’ for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you,’ says the LORD. Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: ‘Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant.’”

Jeremiah thought his inexperience and lack of eloquence excused him from service. But God responded to these claims, by reassuring Jeremiah, “. . . I am with you . . .”; “I have put My Word in your mouth.” These two truths counteract any objections to service. No obstacle can stand if God is with us. He transformed Jeremiah into what he was not, by a touch to his mouth. What Jeremiah was not before his call, he became with the touch of God. God is still in the business of transforming His servants by the power of the Spirit.

Jeremiah teaches there is hope for the backslider. In Jeremiah 3:22a, God invites the backslider to return. “Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.” Jeremiah 18:1 – 4 speaks of the restoring power of God in the life of a backslidden child. “The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying: ‘Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause you to hear My words.’ Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make.”

We learn from this portion of Jeremiah that God, like the potter, has a plan for us, and will keep working until it is complete. Philippians 1:6 encourages the child of God, “. . . being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;” God, like the potter, uses the monotony of the wheel to complete the task. Rather than always trying to change our circumstances, we ought to let God use them to

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complete His task. Philippians 4:11 states we are to be content with our state, “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content . . .”

And 1 Corinthians 7:24 instructs the believer to, “. . . let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.” In this passage, Paul is speaking specifically of marriage.

Jeremiah’s message is, although there are consequences to sin, God wants to restore us to himself. The Jeremiah 29:11 passage is found in a letter written to those who were taken in the First Deportation from Judah to Babylon. Daniel would have read this promise. “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

Natural, even Universal

The most important lesson of Jeremiah is learning what will destroy a nation. Jeremiah tells the story of the fall of Judah from Heaven’s perspective. It was not their domestic or foreign policies that needed to change, but their view of God, His Word and righteousness. To best understand the message of Jeremiah we should begin with the end of the book. Jeremiah 52 records the fall of Judah to Babylon.

After eighteen months under siege, where the living conditions would be deplorable, it is impossible to estimate the amount of human anguish. Ezekiel 4 portrays their suffering, and 2 Kings 6 describes a similar siege against Samaria. There was great famine, cannibalism, and the people blamed God. In Jeremiah 19:9 the same is true of Judah. “And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and everyone shall eat the flesh of his friend in the siege and in the desperation with which their enemies and those who seek their lives shall drive them to despair.” Nebuchadnezzar’s troops broke through the walls, killed the leaders, burned the city and led people captive as POW’s. The once glorious city, designed to be a light to the world, lay in smoldering rubble. “I will make this city desolate and a hissing; everyone who passes by it will be astonished and hiss because of all its plagues.” Jeremiah 19:8

How did a nation built on the foundation of God’s Word become an empty pile of rubble? Jeremiah 2:9 & 11 answers this question. “Therefore I will yet bring charges against you,” says the LORD, “And against your children’s children I will bring charges” . . . “Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods? But My people have changed their Glory for what does not profit.” The charge was they had forsaken God. Over and over Jeremiah explained their national calamity was a result of forsaking God. Jeremiah 9:13 - 14 expresses Heaven’s view, “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns--broken cisterns that can hold no water. Is Israel a servant? Is he a home-born slave? Why is he plundered?”

As a result of Jeremiah’s prophesies the people sought to silence him, Jeremiah 11:21.

They followed the dictates of their own hearts, Jeremiah 16:12.

They forsook the Word of God, Jeremiah 22:8 - 9.

King Jehoiakim symbolically burned the Word, Jeremiah 36:23.

Another copy replaced it, Jeremiah 36:28.

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God’s Word can be rejected, but will never change. They ultimately did whatever they wanted. Jeremiah 44:16 – 17 “As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we will not listen to you! But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, were well-off, and saw no trouble.” It is not difficult to see many similarities between Judah’s final days and the time we are living in.

What is the solution? Jeremiah 38:20b shows the heart of the Prophet, “Please, obey the voice of the LORD which I speak to you. So it shall be well with you, and your soul shall live.” The world needs men and women who will dedicate themselves wholly to the Lord and stand as salt which preserves, and light which transforms. Now, more than ever, our world needs to hear and see the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah gave not only the diagnosis, but also the cure.

Jeremiah 18:8 Turn from evil.

Jeremiah 26:13 Amend your ways.

Jeremiah 6:16 Turn back to the Word.

III. Great truths of Jeremiah

Jeremiah 17:7 – 8 Promise for those who trust the Lord.

Jeremiah 29:11 Promise of a future and a hope.

Jeremiah 31:3 Promise of the love of God.

Jeremiah 32:27 Promise of God’s help.

Jeremiah 33:3 Promise that God hears our cry.

IV. Type of Christ

Jeremiah himself served as an illustration or type of Christ.

He wept over the spiritual condition of the nation as did Christ.

He suffered under the hand of sinful men.

He remained faithful till death.

Jeremiah also prophesied of Christ.

Jeremiah 31:15 Speaks of the suffering under Herod at Christ’s birth.

Jeremiah 23:5-6 Jesus, the righteous one will come to reign

Jeremiah 31:31 Promise of a new covenant. This was sealed at the cross and illustrated in communion; blood of the new covenant.

Have you experienced this New Covenant?