

JEREMIAH

JEREMIAH 1 — THE PROPHET'S GENEALOGY AND CALL

INTRODUCTION

As we approach the second prophet it is timely to remind the student that this work is not designed to comment on every chapter and verse of the Bible. To do so would call for a number of volumes defeating the purpose. Nor does the study of the Bible for the average Christian worker require this. Particularly is this true of the prophets, which, like the psalms, repeat themselves continually. Their principal contents were outlined in the lesson entitled, "Introduction to the Prophets," and more clearly defined in the lessons on Isaiah. One who has thoughtfully pondered that "Introduction" and pursued those lessons, should be competent to interpret Jeremiah on his or her own.

There is this difference, however, between Isaiah and Jeremiah, in the latter, history is frequently blended with prophecy, particularly the history of the prophet himself. Moreover, the chapters are not arranged chronologically. For these reasons Jeremiah will be considered somewhat in detail, different lessons gathering round the leading events of his career.

It is assumed that before entering on the prophets at all, the reader has familiarized himself with the historical books of the Old Testament, which are as necessary to the understanding of the prophets as the foundation of a building is to its upper stories.

HIS GENEALOGY AND PERIOD (1:1-3)

The "Hilkiah" named is another than he who found the law-book (^{<12218>}2 Kings 22:8), but since he was a priest, Jeremiah must have belonged to the tribe of Levi. Look up Anathoth on the map. Read ^{<12218>}2 Kings 22-25 to refresh recollection of the period named in verses 2 and 3.

About fifty years had elapsed since the close of Isaiah's ministry, during which the kings were Manasseh and Amon, and the prophets Nahum, Zephaniah and Habakkuk.

HIS CALL (1: 4-10)

It is interesting that this was prenatal (v. 5). The prophet's diffidence growing out of his youth and inexperience is overruled (vv. 6-7). He is assured of divine guardianship (v. 8) and entrusted with a divine message (v. 9). What a testimony to verbal inspiration is found in that verse! While distinctively a prophet to Judah, yet his ministry is wider (v. 10). It is mainly destructive in character or result, for while under four expressions judgment is set forth, only under two is a constructive task referred to.

(3) HIS EARLIEST COMMISSION (1:11-16)

Here two symbols are employed, and through the book the same form of teaching is used both for himself and the people. An "almond tree" blossoms early: God's purposes are maturing fast. A "seething pot" means trouble: trouble coming from the north.

(4) HIS ENDUEMENT FOR SERVICE (1:17-19)

Like Isaiah, the prophet's commission is discouraging, at least in the foreview. Enemies will oppose him — kings, princes, priests and people. And no wonder, because his speech will seem so unpatriotic, since he must proclaim the subjugation of Judah to Babylon, on account of her sins. But God will be with him. Note the figures of speech descriptive of his protection (v. 18), as well as the assured promise (v. 19). But the warning is equally significant (v. 17). The prophet's hope of success lies in his courage, and his courage depends on his faith.

QUESTIONS

1. What peculiarity do we find in the books of the prophets?
2. How is the book of Jeremiah distinguished from Isaiah?

3. On what plan will this book be studied?
4. Name the four points in the outline of chapter 1.
5. Have you discovered Anathoth?
6. Have you read the historical chapters in 2 Kings?
7. Name the prophets between Isaiah and Jeremiah.
8. Quote verse nine of this lesson.
9. What form of teaching is frequently found in Jeremiah?
10. What is to be the burden of his message?

JEREMIAH 2-12 — PERSECUTED IN HIS HOME TOWN

The length of this lesson may alarm, but preparation for it only requires the reading of the chapters two or three times. One who has gone through Isaiah will soon catch the drift of the Spirit's teaching and be able to break up the chapters into separate discourses and the discourses into their various themes. The main object of the lesson is to dwell on the prophet's personal experience in his home town which is reached in the closing chapters.

It is thought that the discourses in this section were delivered prior to the finding of the law-book in 2 Kings, which explains their more moderate tone as compared with the later ones, but this is a feature not relevant to this work.

Note in chapter 2 the divine expostulation (vv. 1-13); the reminder of the divine goodness (vv. 14-22); the vain excuses made by the nation (vv. 23-28); and the lamentation of the Lord over its condition (v. 29-3:5).

In chapter 3, beginning afresh at verse 6, we have God's complaint against Judah for learning nothing from "her treacherous sister," i.e., from Israel's experience (vv. 6-11); this is followed by a plea to that same Israel (now scattered through the north country by Assyria), to return if she would, and mercy would be shown her. In this connection the promise for the future is set before her (vv. 12-17); Judah and Israel will be reunited then, and so on to chapter 4:1-2.

Chapter 4 and the following, indicate that a mere outward reformation is not sufficient to bring divine blessing. Judgment is coming from the north! "A lion out of his thicket!" "A stormwind!" The prophet laments.

In chapter 7 there is a call to repentance and a spiritual religion. In chapters 8 and 9 coming judgment is again announced.

THE TREACHERY OF FRIENDS

Coming to chapter 11:18, we see the beginnings of the persecution that farther on became so bitter against the prophet as to make him a striking type of the suffering Savior. It takes its rise among his neighbors and kinfolk in Anathoth. At first he is unsuspecting, but God reveals the plot to him. They would kill him, destroying the tree to be rid of the fruit. He appeals to God, whose answer is in the closing verses of the chapter. Anathoth was to suffer, but not immediately.

In chapter 12 the prophet expresses his surprise at this in the spirit of Job, and that of ~~1370~~ Psalms 37 and 73. The divine comfort he receives is to be told that worse things will follow. His friend Josiah is now on the throne, but wait till he is gone and Jehoiakim and Zedekiah reign! He is now like a man running a race with men, but then it will be like running a race with horses! He is dwelling in a land of comparative peace now, but then he will be in "the swellings of Jordan."

To understand this keep the politics of the period in mind. Judah is turning to Egypt for help against Babylon, the Gentile nation now in great power. But the divine purpose is that she shall submit herself to the yoke of Babylon. The prophet is proclaiming this against a strong party in the nation that will not have it so. They consider him a pessimist, a traitor to his country who must be silenced. And silenced he would have been if it were not for God.

QUESTIONS

1. How should one prepare himself to get the results out of these lessons?
2. When, presumably, was this series of discourses delivered, and how is that fact supposed to be exhibited in them?
3. Name some of the leading features of these discourses.

4. Of whom is Jeremiah a type, and in what aspect?
5. Give the history of his earliest persecution.
6. Who is the human author of ~~4973~~ Psalm 73?
7. How does God "comfort" the prophet?
8. What is the outward cause of his persecution?

JEREMIAH 13-20 — “IN THE SWELLING OF JORDAN”

God told the prophet worse was to come. The Swelling of Jordan would be experienced later, and in the present lesson, especially towards the close, we have an illustration of it.

There are things of interest to look at in the meantime, for example, an illustration of that symbolic teaching mentioned earlier.

In chapter 13 we have what two symbols? See verses 1-11 for the first and verses 12-14 for the second. The prophet acted these out before the people just as he was told. The significance of the first is apparent, the second means that the destruction of Jerusalem would be brought about by her own conduct. The evils in her would cause her to be filled with a rebellious spirit as with drunkenness. "Mutual self-seeking and distrust would produce a condition where God could not pity."

Look at the prophet from the point of view of intercessor (chaps. 14-15), nothing more affecting in the same line being found anywhere in the Bible. Note the occasion (14:1-6); the first supplication (vv. 7-9); the divine reply (vv. 10-12); the renewal of the prayer and the excuse for Judah that is pleaded (v. 13); God's answer (vv. 14-18); the prophet's pleading and confession (vv. 19-22); his final rejection (15:1-9). See the personal lament and inquiry that follow (vv. 10-18), and God's comfort and instruction to him (vv. 19-20).

Chapter 16 has a peculiar interest as carrying out ~~4173~~ 1 Corinthians 7:32-33. The prophet's life must be an independent and separated one. He must be a celibate, and shun all social amusements (vv. 1-9). His attitude in these matters would be symbolic and give him further opportunity to instruct and warn the people (v. 17, and the following).

Another symbol in chapters 18-19, and a lesson about the divine sovereignty. Judah was a vessel marred in the making, not through want of skill on the potter's part, but because of resisting elements in the clay. It is to be broken that a better vessel may be made.

It is the use the prophet makes of this earthen vessel that brings on him the suffering recorded in the next chapter. Read chapters 19 and 20 together. He is in the swelling of Jordan now (20:1-2; compare ~~20:1~~ Luke 20:2). See how he meets his enemy and God's in the next verses (vv. 3-6), remembering as he does, the divine warning not to be "dismayed at their faces" (chap. 1). But when the crisis is past and he is in his own chamber, how discouraged he appears (vv. 7-10). He complains that God had coerced him into this ministry. He would turn his back upon it if he could, but God will not permit him. He is between two fires, persecution without and the Holy Ghost within, and the latter being the hotter fire of the two he is compelled to the work again.

In other words God gains the victory in him (vv. 11-13), and he is at length able to sing praises to His holy name.

QUESTIONS

1. From what chapter and verse is the title of this lesson quoted?
2. Name the two symbols in chapter 13.
3. What does the second mean?
4. What was the occasion of the prophet's intercession?
5. What two earlier servants does God name as having great power in prayer?
6. What is the general theme of 1 Corinthians 7?
7. What great doctrine is illustrated in the symbol of chapter 18?
8. Tell the story of the prophet's experience in chapter 20.

JEREMIAH 21-24 — MESSAGES IN ZEDEKIAH'S REIGN

These chapters furnish a convenient unit, as they are apparently a group of discourses delivered in Zedekiah's reign — the king of the captivity period.

The first, and one of the most interesting, is that concerning the siege (chap. 21). Note the occasion (vv. 1-2) and observe that Pashur was not he of the last lesson. The siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar had begun and the king of Judah hoped the prophet would have some encouraging word from God for him and the nation. But the opposite was the case (vv. 3-7). The message to the people (vv. 8-10), was the theme Jeremiah had to proclaim for the greater part of his ministry down until the event occurred.

Chapter 22 is chiefly about the previous kings of Judah in Jeremiah's time. They need not weep for Josiah whom the Lord had taken to Himself (v. 10), but for Shallum (v. 11), another name for Jehoahaz (see margin), the son of Josiah who had been carried to Egypt as we saw in the book of Kings. They should not lament for Jehoiakim, now dead, for he was unworthy of it (vv. 13-19). Coniah, the fourth king (vv. 24-30), is another name for Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, taken captive by the Babylonians, whose story we were made familiar with in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles.

Chapter 23 contains one of those beautiful messages of the future redemption of Judah and Israel with which we have become acquainted in the Psalms and Isaiah (vv. 1-8). Observe the Messianic allusion in verses 5-6. And do not overlook God's testimony to His own Word that follows, coupled with the judgment pronounced on the false teachers who put their own word instead of it.

Chapter 24, the type of the good figs and the bad, explains itself. The Jews carried into captivity earlier than Zedekiah's time would have an opportunity to return from Babylon after a while, but those now in the land and to be carried away later would not have such opportunity.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the title of this lesson and why is it given?
2. On what theme is the first discourse?
3. State the circumstances.
4. What four former kings of Judah are referred to?
5. What name is given our Lord Jesus Christ in chapter 23?
6. Can you tell the story of the good and bad figs?

JEREMIAH 25-26 — MESSAGES IN JEHOIAKIM'S REIGN

Having just considered discourses in Zedekiah's reign, and now returning to that of Jehoiakim (25:1), it can be seen that the chapters are not arranged chronologically.

The first message is that of the seventy years captivity. We are familiar with that period as Judah's forced stay in Babylon, and it is interesting to see the place where it was definitely predicted (vv. 11-12).

Note what leads up to the prediction, God's patience and faithfulness towards His people in their sin (vv. 3-7); and His choice of Babylon as the Gentile power, into whose hands he is pleased for the time being, in judgment on Judah, to commit the sovereignty of the earth (vv. 8-9). Note what follows. Babylon's motive is selfish, and her time of punishment will surely come (vv. 12-14). Practically all the nations are now included in the coming judgment (vv. 15, to the end). The complete fulfillment is at the end of the age.

Some will be more interested in the next chapter, where the prophet because of his boldness (vv. 1-7) is arrested and threatened with death (vv. 8-9). In this case the priests, the prophets and the people are against him, but not the princes (v. 10). This is the method God adopted in the execution of His original promise to Jeremiah (1:17-19). That is, He did not permit all of his enemies to be united against him at the same time.

The prophet has a hearing (vv. 12-15). The princes express their opinions (v. 16). The elders give their judgment (vv. 17-19). A case is cited of a prophet who, unlike Micah, lost his life as the result of his fidelity (vv. 20-23). But happily that was not true of Jeremiah (v. 24).

QUESTIONS

1. What period does this lesson cover?
2. Give the chapter of the seventy years captivity.
3. What distinction is divinely given Babylon?
4. How does God deliver Jeremiah from his enemies?
5. Give the history of the prophet's trial.

JEREMIAH 27-34 — MORE MESSAGES FOR ZEDEKIAH

In some respects the most important chapter here is the first, which deals with Babylon's supremacy, and reveals the beginning of "the times of the Gentiles," or "the fulness of the Gentiles" (~~45125~~Romans 11:25). The term refers to the period when Israel, because of her disobedience to God, has forfeited her place of power in the earth and is scattered among the nations. It begins when God transfers this power to the Gentiles as represented by Babylon, and continues until Christ comes a second time for the deliverance of Israel from the Gentiles at the end of this age. The occasion of the transfer is set forth here.

Babylon is increasing in power, and threatening the smaller nations standing in the way of her mastery of the Mediterranean. These by their ambassadors are now in conclave in Jerusalem, presided over by Zedekiah, meditating the means of defense or opposition to the common enemy. God seizes the occasion to send the prophet to them with a revelation of His will in the premises (vv. 1-11).

Verse one speaks of it as in Jehoiakim's reign, but the context shows that it is an error.

With what symbolic action does the prophet introduce his message (vv. 2-3)? What nations are represented in the conclave? What is the divine declaration he makes (vv. 6-7)? What penalty is attached to the failure to comply with God's will (v. 8)? What promises to submission (v. 11)? What special message is vouchsafed to the king of Judah (vv. 12-15)? What other classes in Judah are addressed (vv. 16-18)?

When God calls Nebuchadnezzar his "servant" (v. 6), it does not mean that the king knows and consciously desires to please Him, but only that, like the king of Assyria before him, he is being used for the time being to execute God's purposes of chastisement on His people.

Chapter 28 gives a flesh illustration of the persecution Jeremiah endured from the enemies of the truth. Read carefully it will explain itself. May its warnings and encouragements not be lost upon us.

Chapter 29 recalls the earlier one on the good and bad figs. To the "good figs" the prophet sends this letter (v. 1), that is to the earlier captives (v. 2), who are to return after seventy years as the others are not (vv. 10-14). To what evil teaching were they exposed in the land of their captivity (vv. 8-9, 15-19)? What were the names of the false prophets (vv. 21-23)? What man tried to stir up evil against Jeremiah by a letter (vv. 24-29)? What punishment would befall him (vv. 30-32)?

Chapters 30 and 31 speak again of the future redemption of Israel. What command comes to the prophet touching this testimony, and why (30:1-3)? What language shows that the end of the age is in mind (vv. 7-9)? Have these words yet been fulfilled in Israel's history? Compare also verses 18-24, and indeed the whole of the next chapter.

Chapters 32 and 33 cover the same ground as the preceding chapters, except that they are more picturesque because of the real estate transaction they record. What was the period, and what was the prophet enduring at the time, and why (32:1-5)? What is he called upon to do (vv. 6-8)? What care is taken about this purchase (vv. 9-15)? What shows his surprise and ignorance of its meaning (vv. 16-25)? What question does God put to the prophet (vv. 26-27)? Does this demand on the prophet to purchase the field indicate any change of God's mind concerning Judah and Babylon (vv. 28-35)? What does it indicate for the future, however (vv. 36-44)? Point out at least ten reasons to show that all of these last verses point to the future. The theme is continued into the next chapter, and the Messiah once more referred to as the cause of the restoration and blessing (vv. 15-16). What name is given Him? What corresponding name is to be given Judah in that day?

Chapter 34 is self-explanatory. A special offense on the part of the leaders brings renewal of the prophecy of judgment.

QUESTIONS

1. What chapter in this lesson is the most important, and why?
2. What is the meaning of, "the time of the Gentiles"?
3. Look up that phrase or its equivalent in your concordance.
4. Describe the occasion of chapter 27.
5. In whose reign did this take place?
6. Why is Nebuchadnezzar called God's "servant"?

7. Tell the story of chapter 28 in your own language.
8. Name the chapter containing the type of the good and bad figs.

JEREMIAH 35-36 — MORE MESSAGES FOR JEHOIAKIM

This lesson opens with the story of the Rechabites (chap. 35). Verses 6-7 show the origin of their name and their "order," to quote a modern term. The principles of the latter were

- (1) abstinence from strong drink;
- (2) voluntary poverty; and
- (3) a nomadic life.

Verse 11 gives the explanation of their presence in Jerusalem. Verses 12-17 furnish the cause for Jeremiah's action in the premises, who is to use these followers of Rechab as a kind of object-lesson for Judah. Verses 18-19 are a benediction on them for fidelity to their vows. These vows were severely tested in one particular at least, as we see in verses 3-6. By comparing ~~2~~¹ Kings 10:15 it will be seen that the founder of the Rechabites was prominent in Jehu's time, and a maintainer of the true worship who assisted in the overthrow of Ahab's power.

Chapter 36 requires little explanation. Verses 1-4 witness to Jeremiah's authorship. Verse 5 shows him again a prisoner. At verse 9 a new section begins, in that Baruch who previously read the book in the court of the temple now has another opportunity to do so, the immediate outcome of which is stated in verses 11-15. From this incident grows another, namely, the interest of the princes both in the words of the book and the human author of them (vv. 16-19). At last their contents are set before the king (vv. 20-22), whose contemptuous treatment of them in the face of earnest protest is recorded (vv. 23-25). What divine judgment is pronounced against him (vv. 29-31)? And what is the further history of the words given to the prophet (vv. 27-28, 32)? Not that in this new collection of writings we have more than a copy of the old, a much fuller record of Jehovah's revelations to the prophet. Note also the last clause of verse 26. How the Lord may have "hid them" is not revealed, but the fact recalls how Martin Luther was protected by God through the friendly and powerful Elector in the Wartburg.

QUESTIONS

1. Give your recollection of the founder of the Rechabites as recorded in 2 Kings?
2. What were the principles of their "order"?
3. How did they happen to be in Jerusalem?
4. Tell the story of Jesus's testing of them;
5. What object had he in view?
6. What lessons may be gathered from the story?
7. Tell the story of chapter 36 in your own words.
8. What lessons may be gathered from it?

JEREMIAH 37-39 — CLOSING EVENTS OF THE SIEGE

We are again in Zedekiah's reign (v. 1), and the same disobedience as before marks the period (v. 2). We are astonished at the effrontery accompanying it, (v. 3). Note the occasion when this prayer is solicited (vv. 4-5). Egypt has come up to help, and the Babylonians in consequence, have raised the siege in order to meet the approaching army. Is it not an indication that God has changed His mind about Judah after all? The answer is found in verses 6-10.

Verses 11-15 tell their own sad story. Notice the vacillation of the king (vv. 16-17). Why does this man thus play hot and cold, and fast and loose with heaven? If God is the Lord, why not serve Him, and if not, why be interested to inquire of Him? Has this type of man yet vanished from the earth? How does he now lighten the prophet's suffering (vv. 18-21)? How does the last verse indicate the straitness of the siege?

In chapter 38, what illustration have we of the political weakness and the moral meanness of Zedekiah (vv. 1-6)? Whom does God now raise up to befriend His servant (vv. 7-13)? What further counsel of the king follows (vv. 14-23)? Is any change of the divine policy evident in this?

Although the king urges on the prophet a subterfuge (vv. 24, 35), there is no reason to feel that the prophet employed it. He probably did not tell the princes all that transpired, nor was there obligation on him to do so, but that he deliberately lied, even to save his life, is beyond belief (vv. 26-28).

In chapter 39 the end is reached. Compare verses 5-6 with 32:4 and ~~32:13~~ Ezekiel 12:13.

Note that a remnant is left in Jerusalem though the bulk of the people are deported (v. 10). Note the deference' paid the prophet by the besieging army (vv. 11-14), and the manner in which God promised kindness to Ebed-Melech (vv. 15-18).

JEREMIAH 40-45 — LAST MESSAGE TO THE REMNANT

Chapter 40 opens with an account of Nebuchadnezzar's kindness to Jeremiah, inspired by what he had known of the latter's advice to his countrymen (vv. 1-4). Jeremiah had been the friend of Babylon, but not necessarily the enemy of his own nation. His patriotism was unquestioned, but the highest expression of his patriotism was his counsel to Judah to obey the will of God and submit to Babylon.

Jeremiah's choice of action is in verses 5-6. The new governor is loyal and things promise well (vv. 7-12). But the Ammonites see an opportunity to get even with their old enemy and obtain control of their land through the treachery of an apostate Jew (vv. 13-16).

Chapter 41 narrates how the plot is carried out (vv. 1-10), and the resultant fear on the part of the people (vv. 11-18). This fear leads them to plan an exodus from Judah into Egypt.

Chapter 42 shows them consulting with the prophet before carrying out this plan, albeit they are determined to do it.

Chapter 43 is a prophecy of Egypt's conquest by Babylon (vv. 8-13) delivered after Jeremiah's arrival there (vv. 4-7). Today the place indicated in verse nine is marked by a ruined column.

JEREMIAH'S LAST MESSAGE

The contents of chapter 44 may be regarded as the continuation of the preceding, though how long after the entrance into Egypt the prophecy was uttered is impossible to say. Some have surmised twenty-five years. Certainly the Jews had spread themselves considerably (v. 1). The

prophecy opens with a retrospect (vv. 2-6); but present conditions are no improvement over the past (vv. 7-10); only doom can await them (vv. 11-14). Opposition is aroused as of old (vv. 15-19), showing the former infatuation (v. 17). They had forgotten that God gave them these good things even when they were rebelling against him (Hosea 2). So men still trace misfortune to everything but the true cause, which is sin. Notice the prominence of women here, on whose regeneration that of society still depends. The prophecy concludes with the prediction of an awful judgment, the truth of which will be established by an appeal to history (vv. 20-30).

BARUCH COUNSELLED

Chapter 45 is a word to Baruch, the prophet's amanuensis and friend spoken doubtless at an earlier period than its position indicates, and some would say just after the events of chapter 36. Weighed down by responsibility and dismayed at the aspect of things, he is seeking better things for himself — an easier lot dare we say? At all events he is warned of his moral danger at the same time that he is promised physical deliverance at least, in the dire hour coming on the land (v. 5). He accompanied Jeremiah into Egypt, and to his labors doubtless, we trace the copies of these prophecies which have circulated in that country, and given rise to a Greek version of them (the Septuagint so-called).

QUESTIONS

- 1.** Explain Nebuchadnezzar's interest in Jeremiah.
- 2.** Did this interest compromise the prophet's character of a patriot in any way?
- 3.** What is Jeremiah's choice of a location, and with whom does he now take up his home?
- 4.** Give the history of Gedaliah's brief authority in your own words.
- 5.** Give the history of the people's dealings with Jeremiah at this crisis.
- 6.** Analyze the prophet's last message.
- 7.** Explain chapter 45.