

Old Testament Survey

Jeremiah

The Meaning of Jeremiah

Jeremiah's name means "Jehovah Establishes." Jeremiah prophesied during the last days of the Judean kingdom in the face of rising opposition. God's judgment against Jerusalem at this point could not be averted. Nevertheless, God would remain faithful to Israel and regather them at a later time.

General Outline of Jeremiah

- I. Prophecies under Josiah and Jehoiakim - Jeremiah 1:1-20:18
 - A. Prophet's call and commission - Jeremiah 1:1-19
 - B. Sin and ingratitude of the nation - Jeremiah 2:1-3:5
 - C. Prediction concerning devastations from the north (the Chaldean invasion) - Jeremiah 3:6-6:30
 - D. Threat of Babylonian exile - Jeremiah 7:1-10:25
 - E. Broken covenant and the sign of the girdle - Jeremiah 11:1-13:27
 - F. Drought: the sign of the unmarried prophet; the warning about the Sabbath - Jeremiah 14:1-17:27
 - G. Sign of the potter's house - Jeremiah 18:1-20:18
- II. Later Prophecies under Jehoiakim and Zedekiah - Jeremiah 21:1-39:18
 - A. Nebuchadnezzar, God's instrument of punishment - Jeremiah 21:1-29:32
 - B. The future Messianic Kingdom - Jeremiah 30:1-33:26
 - C. Zedekiah's sin and the loyalty of the Rechabites - Jeremiah 34:1-35:19
 - D. Jehoiakim's opposition and destruction of the prophetic scroll - Jeremiah 36:1-32
 - E. Jeremiah jailed during the siege - Jeremiah 37:1-39:18
- III. Prophecies after the fall of Jerusalem - Jeremiah 40:1-45:5
 - A. Ministry among the remnant - Jeremiah 40:1-42:22
 - B. Ministry among the fugitives in Egypt - Jeremiah 43:1-44:30
 - C. Encouragement to Baruch - Jeremiah 45:1-5
- IV. Prophecies against the heathen nations - Jeremiah 46:1-51:64
 - A. Egypt - Jeremiah 46:1-28
 - B. Philistia - Jeremiah 47:1-7
 - C. Moab - Jeremiah 48:1-47
 - D. Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Arabia, Elam - Jeremiah 49:1-39
 - E. Babylon - Jeremiah 50:1-51:64
- V. Historical appendix - Jeremiah 52:1-34

A Biography of Jeremiah

1. Jeremiah began his ministry when he was about 20. That would place the start of his ministry around the year 626 B.C. For the bulk of his ministry he lived in his home town of Anathoth. He was apparently well-off financially as he was able to purchase the forfeited field of a bankrupt kinsman.
2. Jeremiah flourished under the godly reign of Josiah, the last of the godly kings of Judah. Jeremiah did not enjoy popularity under the remaining kings as he was openly opposed to their pro-Egypt stance and the increasing idolatry of the nation.
3. Jeremiah became so undesired that it appears he was banned from the temple, having to send Baruch there whenever he needed to proclaim a message to the people. Later, under Zedekiah, Jeremiah was imprisoned as a traitor but later rescued by Zedekiah because he feared the messenger of God.

4. Jeremiah was offered a place of honor as well as a pension from Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem. He turned it down, however, and stayed in Jerusalem to help the remnant. After the murder of Gedaliah, Jeremiah was kidnapped and taken to Egypt by a fugitive faction of Jews. Jeremiah remained in Egypt where he continued to prophesy and most likely died there.
5. Jeremiah appeared to be sensitive and sympathetic, hence the nickname “weeping prophet.” Unfortunately, his message was one of judgment and doom, and this most likely went against his compassionate nature. He tried to ignore his call on some occasions, but felt the “fire in his bones” and could not ignore God’s calling on his life.

History of the Text

1. Apparently there was an earlier version of Jeremiah which precedes the version we have today.
 - a. We do know that Jehoiakim destroyed the original text of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36:1-32).
 - b. Baruch produced a second copy which appears to have been shorter. The LXX appears to be about 1/8 shorter than the version in the MT which would point to two variant textual lines.
 - c. Additionally, the arrangement of chapters between the MT and LXX differ.
2. The variations between the LXX and MT can be attributed to two versions. One which may have been produced and disseminated in Jeremiah’s time, and another which was produced by Baruch after Jeremiah’s death.
3. Even though the text of the MT is different than the LXX, and that is the version we have today, the original messages were from Jeremiah and have been preserved for us by Baruch.

The Integrity of Jeremiah’s Text

1. Rationalist critics deny the historicity of several portions of Jeremiah. Specifically:
 - a. Jeremiah 10:1-16 because it sounds like a message from II Isaiah.
 - b. Jeremiah 17:19-27 because of its emphasis on Sabbath-keeping. This sounds like Ezekiel and the priestly code which came much later according to the critics.
 - c. Jeremiah 30-31 because of its Messianic expectations (which sounds post-exilic) and its emphasis on personal responsibility (which sounds like Ezekiel 18).
 - d. Jeremiah 51 because in verse 41 Babylon is referred to by its *Athbash* equivalence, a later artificial device in which the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is replaced by the last letter.
2. All of these depend on:
 - a. The assumption that the P document exists and is post-exilic.
 - b. The existence of II Isaiah.
 - c. An evolutionary development of the Messianic hope.

Miscellaneous Historical Matters

1. The Seventy-Years Captivity in Jeremiah 29:10.
 - a. Judah went into final captivity in 586 B.C. They were allowed to return in 537 B.C., two years after the fall of Babylon. This is only fifty years, hence we must seek another end point.
 - b. Another possibility is to date the beginning of the captivity in 605 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar first invaded Judah. This would make 536 B.C. approximately 70 years later.
 - c. Another possibility is to begin the dating of the seventy years when Nebuzaradan destroyed the temple in 586 B.C. and end it when the temple was rebuilt in 516 B.C. This seems to be favored by Zechariah in Zechariah 1:12. The angel in this verse appears to see the captivity as still progressing, and since this prophecy was given in 519 B.C. this would appear to be the date.
2. The Devastation of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah 43:9-13
 - a. Greek historians make no reference to such an invasion although Josephus does. Critics discount Josephus' statement as being merely concocted to fit with Jeremiah.
 - b. However, a small fragment from the Babylonian chronicles does refer to a campaign against Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar.
 - c. Another reference to this is found in an inscription on the statue of Nes-hor in which this invasion is mentioned.