

Jeremiah

Though there were many great prophets in the course of Israel's history, Jeremiah ranks as perhaps the greatest in terms of his personal presence. If Isaiah's themes and literary skill are unsurpassable and Ezekiel's mode of prophetic discourse uniquely incredible, then Jeremiah's very personal, and painful, participation in the prophetic enterprise sets him apart as the messenger of God who most identified with the sorrow that Yahweh must have felt over the rejection of His chosen people. Hence, unlike the other writing prophets, the message of Jeremiah is significantly bound up with the prophet's own spiritual and psychological states, induced as they were by the difficulty of his mission and the hostility to its reception. God does not judge without sorrow; his servants cannot but share His own heart for His special people.

Authorship

This book abounds with references to and autobiographical information about its author Jeremiah.¹ He was a priest, the son of Hilkiah, from the village of Anathoth, just northeast of Jerusalem. He may well have descended from Aaron through Eli, the priest at the sanctuary at Shiloh (cf. 1 Sam 1—4). Jeremiah had a very high profile as a prophet, not only to Judah during its darkest hour, but also to all the nations of his place and time. His task was to announce judgment to the nation of Judah for its protracted disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant and to the nations for their general wickedness. He experienced much pain and hardship in this service, due in large part to the nation's rejection of his message and mistreatment of his person. Jeremiah's personal suffering

¹ For a discussion of historical-critical approaches to the book as they affect authorship see Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 289-91.

becomes part of the message of the book as he willingly enters into hardship on behalf of Israel for its ultimate redemption.

Date

Jeremiah's prophetic ministry extended from 627 B.C. ("the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah"—1:2) until at least 586 B.C. (the fall of Jerusalem), though the events of chapters 40—44 would extend that until to at least 582 B.C. Hence, his ministry extended over four decades.

Historical Setting

Jeremiah's ministry began during the time of Josiah who undertook to institute religious reforms based on the Book of the Law (cf. 2 Chr 34:8–21). Ultimately these reforms did not take hold in the nation as a whole and Judah plummeted headlong into judgment, following the path of her northern "sister" Israel (cf. 3:6–10). Assyria, which been the rod of discipline against Israel, had begun to decline, creating a brief power vacuum that resulted in a three-way struggle between Assyria, Egypt and Babylon with Judah caught in the middle. Eventually Assyria was defeated by Babylon, which pressed southward, defeating pharaoh Necho at the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. This left Babylon in a position to subjugate all the states between them and Egypt, which they did, including Judah. As Judah's kings vacillated between submission and rebellion, Babylon afflicted them with increasing severity in two invasions (605 B.C. and 597 B.C.) taking captives and plunder both times. Finally, in 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, ransacking and burning the temple and city, and deporting the majority of the remaining population to Babylon. During this whole time God used Jeremiah to communicate His sovereign intentions for all these nations.

Original Readers

In view of the features of historical supplement attached as a sort of epilogue (chapter 52) it must be assumed that the intended audience for Jeremiah's literary work was the community of captives living in Babylon. They were the ones through whom the hope of restoration would be realized. Therefore they needed to be fully aware of why they were in captivity in the first place and to be fully confident that the One who had put them there was still active in the nations to bring them back.

Occasion

The most obvious feature of Jeremiah is that it is a non-chronological compendium (some would say a hodgepodge) of various oracles of judgment (often datable) delivered over several decades. This would indicate that the purpose of the final literary work is not likely to be the same as that of the various individual oracles. Most of the prophetic oracles were delivered to elicit repentance in order to avoid judgment, or at least the most severe aspects of judgment. By the time these oracles are put together in a written form these judgments had already taken place. Therefore the occasion for the writing of Jeremiah lies in the prophet's desire to communicate with those who had experienced and survived those judgments, that is, the captives living in Babylon, in order to assure them of future and thus establish them in hope.²

² For a treatment of how the oral prophecies may have been reworked into the written, canonical form see Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 345-53. Though not all of Childs' conclusions with respect to authorship are warranted he does express the essence of Jeremiah as a literary creation when he says "the present form of Jeremiah's oracles goes beyond a historical recounting of the prophet's activity. Rather, the memory of his proclamation was treasured by a community of faith and consciously shaped by theological forces to serve as a witness for future Israel. One of the major forces arose from hearing the prophet's words in conjunction with the law of Moses, and in placing Jeremiah in a chain of divine messengers who warned of Jerusalem's destruction. Indeed, for that generation which experienced the truth of Jeremiah's prophecy, his role acquired an even greater relevance" (ibid., 347).

Special Issues

The Autobiographical Character of Jeremiah's Work. Far more than any other prophet Jeremiah reveals his thinking and, especially, his feelings about arduous ministry to which he had been called. He has become, by tradition, the "weeping prophet" due to his repeated outbursts of emotion over difficulty and mistreatment. His stature with respect to use by New Testament authors marks him as perhaps the greatest of the prophets. And yet his direct statement about the coming of Messiah is meager in comparison with other Old Testament prophets, some of whom wrote a mere fraction of his work. Given the striking parallels between his experience and that of Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry, a strong case can be made that Jeremiah's major messianic contribution lies in his very experience as Yahweh's prophet of judgment against the temple and its environs. He thus becomes the prophetic embodiment of the coming Messiah in the arduousness undertaking of His three and one half year ministry of warning and weeping.³

Relationship to the Mosaic Covenant. Jeremiah's reference to the Mosaic Covenant, especially in its Deuteronomic formulation, has often been noted. Critical scholars often argue for certain redactional hypotheses on that basis. However, it is best to see this simply as the logical conclusion of a process begun centuries earlier by the prophets who had been sent to Israel with messages of covenant violation. The discovery of the Book of the Law under Josiah, and his subsequent attempt at reform, indicate that the situation was ripe for the prosecution of Yahweh's case against his covenant nation.

³ Harrison comments on the comparison: "Yet throughout their ministries both men exemplified the covenant ideal of a close personal relationship with God based on holiness of life, and demonstrated by their actions that their highest commission was to perform the will of God fully and responsibly." R. K. Harrison *Jeremiah and Lamentations* in *The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: Inver-Varsity Press, 1973), 37. For a summary of the comparisons between Jeremiah and Jesus see also Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 300-301.

A proper reading of Jeremiah is not possible without a thorough understanding of God's relationship with the nation of Israel as based on the Mosaic Covenant.

Message

Though, like Jeremiah, the innocent may suffer when God judges a nation, He remains faithful to deliver from death those servants of His who trust in and obey Him.

Outline

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| II. | Jeremiah is called and commissioned as a prophet to the nations. | 1:4—6:30 |
| | A. Jeremiah is called and ordained as a prophet to the nations. | 1:4–10 |
| | B. Jeremiah is shown visions of his prophetic ministry. | 1:11–19 |
| | 1. His is a ministry of immediate performance. | 1:11–12 |
| | 2. His is a ministry of judgment from the north. | 1:13–16 |
| | 3. He must be prepared for rejection. | 1:17–19 |
| | C. Jeremiah is given the message of his prophetic ministry. | 2:1—6:26 |
| | 1. Judah will be prosecuted for covenant violation. | 2:1—3:5 |
| | a. Israel's acceptance of Yahweh's covenant is recalled. | 2:1–3 |
| | b. Israel's history of covenant violation is rehearsed. | 2:4—3:5 |
| | 1) Israel had forsaken Yahweh for idols. | 2:4–13 |
| | 2) Israel had refused to respond to Yahweh's discipline. | 2:14–3:5 |
| | 2. Judah will be judged for covenant violation. | 3:6—6:26 |
| | a. The northern nation, Israel, had been judged for unfaithfulness as an example to Judah. | 3:6—4:2 |
| | b. Judah is called to repentance in the face of imminent judgment from the north. | 4:3—6:26 |
| | 1) Judah and Jerusalem are commanded to repent. | 4:3–4 |
| | 2) Judah and Jerusalem are facing imminent destruction by invasion from the north. | 4:5–26 |
| | 3) The whole land will be a desolation but not completely. | 4:27—5:19 |
| | 4) The people will be judged because they have not responded to Yahweh's warnings. | 5:20—6:26 |
| | D. Jeremiah is given the task of being an assayer of the people of Judah. | 6:27–30 |
| III. | Jeremiah, as the prosecutor of Yahweh's covenant lawsuit, delivers prophecies of judgment and hope to Judah. | 7:1—33:26 |
| | A. Jeremiah prosecutes Yahweh's covenant lawsuit against Judah. | 7:1—24:10 |
| | 1. Judah is convicted of callously defiling the house of Yahweh through hypocritical and idolatrous worship. | 7:1—10:25 |
| | a. Israel is charged with a false confidence in the presence of the temple in the face its defilement. | 7:1—9:26 |

- 1) The temple's presence does not excuse the wickedness of the people. 7:2–27
- 2) The temple's presence will not protect against Yahweh's judgment of the people. 7:28—8:3
- 3) The temple will not protect from the consequences of following the corrupt prophets and priests. 8:4—9:26
- b. Israel is charged with adopting the idolatrous practices of the Gentiles. 10:1–16
- c. Israel will be judged through captivity. 10:17–25
2. Judah is convicted of breaking the law of the covenant. 11:1—13:27
 - a. Israel is charged with grievous violation of the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant. 11:1–17
 - b. Jeremiah is assured of Yahweh's loyalty to him as well as the nation. 11:18—12:17
 - c. Israel's pride in its self-sufficient independence will be broken through captivity. 13:1–27
3. Judah is assured of the ultimate penalty for covenant violation: scattering among the nations. 14:1—17:27
 - a. Israel's destruction is certain. 14:1—15:9
 - 1) Famine is a sure sign of covenant violation. 14:1–22
 - 2) Covenant violation is beyond repair. 15:1–9
 - b. Jeremiah is assured of Yahweh's deliverance of him personally. 15:10–21
 - c. Jeremiah's life-style is to be a symbol of the certainty of Israel's coming judgment. 16:1—17:18
 - d. The Sabbath is set forth as a sign of conformity to the Mosaic Covenant. 17:19–27
4. Judah is convicted of failing as a holy nation. 18:1—20:18
 - a. Through the image of a potter Israel is charged with failing to become the kind of nation that Yahweh had intended. 18:1–17
 - b. Israel plots against Jeremiah as God's mouthpiece. 18:18–23
 - c. Through the broken flask Israel is assured that destruction is coming on city and people. 19:1–15
 - d. Through Pashhur's confinement of Jeremiah Israel is assured that it will be carried captive to Babylon. 20:1–6
 - e. Jeremiah bemoans yet accepts his difficult ministry. 20:7–18
5. Judah's kings and prophets are convicted of covenant failure. 21:1—24:10
 - a. Judah's current kings are faulted for their failures. 21:1—22:30
 - 1) Zedekiah would be carried into captivity. 21:1–10
 - 2) The house of David is commanded to rule according to Torah and warned of judgment. 21:11—22:10
 - 3) Shallum will die in captivity. 22:11–17
 - 4) Jehoiakim will die in Jerusalem. 22:18–23

- 5) Coniah will die in Babylon without an heir. 22:24–30
 - b. A righteous king—BRANCH—will one day rule over the nation restored from captivity. 23:1–8
 - c. Judah’s prophets are faulted for their false counsel and misplaced trust. 23:9–40
 - d. As good or bad figs, some in Israel will be restored to the land while others will perish in captivity. 24:1–10
- B. Jeremiah prophesies judgment for Judah and all the nations. 25:1–29:32
 - 1. Jeremiah announces the specifics of the coming judgment. 25:1–38
 - a. Judah will be captive in Babylon for seventy years. 25:1–14
 - b. The nations will go into captivity and destruction. 25:15–38
 - 2. Jeremiah counters Judah’s denial of the captivity. 26:1–29:32
 - a. Jeremiah is kept from dying like other prophets had. 26:1–24
 - b. Jeremiah enacts bondage for Judah and the surrounding nations. 27:1–22
 - c. Jeremiah dispels Hananiah’s false prophecy of a short captivity. 28:1–17
 - d. Jeremiah writes to the captives counseling them to reconcile themselves to seventy years of captivity. 29:1–32
- C. Jeremiah promises restoration from captivity. 30:1–33:26
 - 1. Jeremiah writes the prophecy of the restoration of Israel. 30:1–31:40
 - a. Israel and Judah will be regathered to the land of promise. 30:1–31:26
 - b. Israel and Judah will be renovated into a numerous people. 31:27–30
 - c. Israel and Judah will be regenerated through a new covenant. 31:31–37
 - d. Jerusalem will be rebuilt. 31:38–40
 - 2. Jeremiah enacts the certainty of the restoration of Israel. 32:1–33:26
 - a. While in prison, Jeremiah signifies Israel’s future restoration to the land by redeeming a field. 32:1–44
 - b. Jeremiah is assured of future restoration through David’s BRANCH. 33:1–18
 - c. Jeremiah is invited to consider Yahweh’s covenant with Israel as unbreakable as His covenant with day and night. 33:19–26
- IV. Jeremiah reviews the fall of Jerusalem in order to confirm the accuracy of all his prophecies. 34:1–45:5
 - A. Jeremiah predicts Jerusalem’s fall. 34:1–38:28
 - 1. Jeremiah announces the certainty of Judah’s fall to Babylon. 34:1–7
 - 2. Jeremiah summarizes the reasons for Judah’s fall. 34:8–38:28
 - a. Israel violated Torah by refusing to liberate each other from servitude. 34:8–22
 - b. Israel had failed to follow the Rechabites example of obedience. 35:1–19

- c. Jehoiakim had scornfully rejected the revealed and written word of Yahweh. 36:1–32
 - d. Zedekiah refused to submit to the Chaldeans, as counseled by Jeremiah. 37:1—38:28
 - B. Jeremiah reports the fact of Jerusalem’s fall. 39:1–18
 - 1. Jerusalem and Zedekiah are taken as Jeremiah had predicted. 39:1–10
 - 2. Jeremiah is delivered as Yahweh had promised. 39:11–18
 - C. Jeremiah describes the aftermath of Jerusalem’s fall. 40:1—45:5
 - 1. Israel continues to rebel against Yahweh’s judgments. 40:1—43:13
 - a. Gedaliah is assassinated for obeying Yahweh. 40:1—41:18
 - b. The remnant flees to Egypt against Yahweh’s command. 42:1—43:13
 - 2. Egypt is defeated, bringing judgment to the rebellious remnant. 44:1–30
 - 3. Baruch becomes an example of the blessing of obedience. 45:1–5
- V. Jeremiah delivers prophecies of judgment against the nations. 46:1—51:64
 - A. Jeremiah prophesies against Egypt. 46:1–28
 - 1. Egypt’s defeat had begun at Carchemish. 46:1–12
 - 2. Egypt’s demise would now be completed in their own land. 46:13–26
 - 3. Israel’s defeat will be neither complete nor permanent. 46:27–28
 - B. Jeremiah prophesies against the nations of Canaan. 47:1—49:33
 - 1. Philistia will be plundered. 47:1–7
 - 2. Moab will be destroyed. 48:1–47
 - 3. Ammon will become desolate. 49:1–6
 - 4. Edom will be punished. 49:7–22
 - 5. Damascus will be consumed by fire. 49:23–27
 - 6. Kedar and Hazor will be devastated. 49:28–33
 - C. Jeremiah prophesies against Elam. 49:34–39
 - 1. Elam will be scattered to the four winds. 49:34–38
 - 2. Elam will be brought back from captivity. 49:39
 - D. Jeremiah prophesies against Babylon. 50:1—51:64
 - 1. Babylon will fall so that Israel may return to the land. 50:1–17
 - 2. Babylon will be utterly destroyed for her sins whereas Israel will be restored and revived, forgiven of her iniquity. 50:18—51:26
 - 3. When Babylon falls Israel must return to Jerusalem. 51:27–58
 - 4. Epilogue: Jeremiah delivers a book of Babylon’s judgment to Seraiah for public reading. 51:59–64
- VI. Epilogue: The essence of Jeremiah’s prophecies is reviewed as a historical supplement. 52:1–34
 - A. The fall of Jerusalem is reviewed. 52:1–11
 - B. The plundering and burning of temple and city are reviewed. 52:12–23
 - C. The deportation of the population to Babylon is recounted. 52:24–30
 - D. The elevation of Jehoiachin will elicit hope in restoration to the land. 52:31–34

Argument

I. Title: Jeremiah the priest will prophesy until Jerusalem's captivity (1:1–3).

Even though Jeremiah does not organize his prophecies chronologically, the historical context in which they were given is of extreme importance since one of the book's purposes is to confirm that Yahweh is the sovereign of the nations in history and will work His will just as He predicts through the messenger. Jeremiah is from a priestly family who would be especially sensitive to the coming judgment on the temple at the time of Judah's captivity. The prophet will utilize all of the particulars of this introduction in his message.

II. Jeremiah is called and commissioned as a prophet to the nations (1:4—6:30).

Jeremiah is called into Yahweh's service by being informed that he had been ordained for this before birth (1:5) and by being assured that he would be equipped for the task despite his feelings of inadequacy (1:6–8). As the herald of the Lord's words Jeremiah would exercise judgmental and restorative authority over the nations and kingdoms (1:9–10). He is given a vision of his ministry in the almond tree, which meant that God was ready to perform his word, and the boiling pot, which meant that it was a word of judgment, namely, the coming of peoples from the north against Judah (1:11–16). Unfortunately the nation would not listen to him, a situation for which he must be prepared (1:17–19).

Jeremiah's commission continues in chapters 2 through 6.⁴ The first major section marker ("The word that came to Jeremiah saying") does not occur until chapter

⁴ This is based on the content of these chapters as well as the section markers. The major section breaks in the book occur at the phrase "the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying" (רַב־דָּבָר מֵאֵלֹהִים וְהָיָה לְיִרְמְיָהוּ אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר אֵלָיו וְהָיָה לְיִרְמְיָהוּ אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר אֵלָיו וְהָיָה לְיִרְמְיָהוּ אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר אֵלָיו). This occurs as 7:1; 11:1; 18:1; 21:1; 25:1; 30:1; 32:1; 34:1; 34:8; 35:1; 40:1; 44:1 and 14:1 with modifications). The phrase "the word of the Lord came to me saying" indicates a minor break within these major sections primarily in the first part of the book (1:4, 11, 13; 2:1,

seven verse one (note the repetition in 2:1 of “the word of the Lord came to me saying” from 1:11). Whereas chapter one focuses on Jeremiah’s role as a prophet of judgment, this next section (2:1—6:26) focuses upon the actual message by way of outline and overview. Jeremiah had been told early on that one of his primary tasks would concern the covenant lawsuit which Yahweh was bringing against Judah. This accounts for the recounting of Judah’s positive relationship with Yahweh in the past (2:2–3) followed by a review of her subsequent failures (2:4–8) capped off by the “‘I will bring charges against you,’ says the Lord” (2:9). The covenant lawsuit is a major feature of the book and will be fully developed in the next major section (i.e. 7:1—33:26).⁵ At this point the covenant violation is summed up by reference to the nation’s persistent idolatry (2:4–13), which is coupled with its stubborn refusal to respond to Yahweh’s discipline and repent (2:14—3:5). As a result judgment is coming (4:3—6:26), having already been inflicted upon Israel, the northern kingdom, as an unheeded warning (3:6—4:2). This rather extended commission, which includes all the features that are going to be developed more fully in the rest of the book (e.g. imminent judgment, the call for repentance, the prediction of captivity, and even ultimate restoration) is designed to prepare the reader for the prosecution of Yahweh’s case, which will follow in great detail. The notice about Jeremiah being

13:3, 8; 16:1; 18:5; 24:4; 32:6. Beginning in chapter 28 this phrase is replaced by “Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah saying” (28:12; 29:30; 32:26; 33:1, 19, 23; 34:12 (a mixture); 35:12; 36:27; 37:6; 39:15; 42:7, 8). The final three occurrences at this level are “The word of the Lord which came to Jeremiah the prophet” (46:1; 47:1; 49:34). Two other phrases marking minor headings are “behold the days are coming” (7:32; 9:25; 16:14; 19:6; 23:5, 7; 30:3; 31:27, 31, 38; 33:14; 48:12; 49:2; 51:47, 52) and “hear the word of the Lord” (2:4; 7:2; 9:20; 10:1; 11:2, 6; 17:20; 19:3; 21:11; 22:2, 29; 29:20; 31:10; 34:4; 42:15; 44:24, 26; 49:20; 50:45). Even smaller divisions are marked off by the common phrase “thus says the Lord” or some form of it. By giving attention to these indicators it is possible to make some headway in discerning the admittedly complex organizational structure of Jeremiah.

⁵ For a discussion of the concept of the covenant lawsuit see J. Carl Laney, “The Role of the Prophets in God’s Case against Israel” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138/552 (October-December 1981): 313-24 and James Limburg, “The Root byr and the Prophetic Lawsuit Speeches,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (September 1969): 293–95.

appointed as “an assayer and a fortress among [Yahweh’s] people” adds confirmation that this whole section should be taken as part of the prophet’s commissioning.

III. Jeremiah, as the prosecutor of Yahweh’s covenant lawsuit, delivers prophecies of judgment and hope to Judah (7:1—33:26).

This section deals primarily with Judah up to the time of Jerusalem’s destruction in 586 B.C., which is extensively treated beginning in chapter thirty four. It does not chronicle Jeremiah’s ministry from a historical perspective, but, rather, arranges various of his messages and actions, sometimes even repeating them, in a way that topically sets forth God’s case against His unfaithful people. This section contains three main subjects: (1) Jeremiah’s prosecution of Judah for covenant violation (2) the pronouncement of her judgment for such violation and (3) a message of hope about the future restoration of the nation.

A. Jeremiah prosecutes Yahweh’s covenant lawsuit against Judah (7:1—24:10).

All of the material in this extended section can be related to Israel’s failure to become the nation that God had intended and provided for through the Mosaic Covenant. Taking the phrase “the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying” as a section marker, it is possible to discern a number of clear issues of covenant violation including defilement of the temple, breaking of Torah, failing to be a holy nation, and the failure of the Davidic monarchy.

1. Judah is convicted of callously defiling the house of Yahweh through hypocritical and idolatrous worship (7:1—10:25). Judah had assumed right along, even after the captivity of the northern kingdom, that the presence of Yahweh’s dwelling

place, the temple, would protect them from such a fate, regardless of their religious practices. Jeremiah dispels this misconception (7:2—8:3) regardless of what their corrupt prophets and priests may have been telling them to the contrary (8:4—9:26—note the “lying words” about the temple in 7:4). Instead of living according to what the temple stood for, namely, the presence of the Holy One who alone was worthy of worship, Judah had adopted the idolatrous practices of the Gentiles (10:1–16). This repudiation of the truth of the temple would get them captivity (10:17–25).

2. Judah is convicted of breaking the law of the covenant (11:1—13:27). On the basis of the Deuteronomic formulation of the Mosaic Covenant, Jeremiah warns of the curse associated with disobedience to the covenant stipulations which they were about to experience instead of its blessing (11:1–17). God’s loyalty was not the issue but rather the nation’s obedience (11:18—12:17). The symbols of the sash and the wine bottle tell Israel that she will be broken of her self-sufficient independence through captivity, thus paving the way for future obedience and blessing (13:1–27).

3. Judah is assured of the ultimate penalty for covenant violation: scattering among the nations (14:1—17:27). As the centerpiece of this section (7:1—24:10) these chapters point out that on the basis of the curses of Deuteronomy, Israel’s experience of famine was a sure sign that they were being disciplined for disobedience (cf. Deut 28:23–24). By now Israel’s disobedience was so prolonged and entrenched that there was no hope of repentance with the immediate restoration of blessing (15:1–9). Though this brought consternation to the prophet, Jeremiah is assured that the Lord will deliver him personally (15:10–21). On the basis of this promise he is to allow his whole life to be an object lesson of Israel’s coming judgment (16:1—17:18). As a conclusion to this charge

of violation of Torah, the nation is commanded to hallow the Sabbath, the preeminent sign of covenant (cf. Exod 31:12–18; Deut 5:15). Failure in the area of Sabbath observance would prove Yahweh’s case against His covenant nation.

4. Judah is convicted of failing as a holy nation (18:1—20:18). The point of the potter and the clay is that God destroys and creates nations according to His own purposes. Israel had been created to be a holy nation, Yahweh’s unique servant kingdom (cf. Exod 19:5–6). They had disobeyed that mandate continually and were thus deserving of the Lord’s judgment (18:9–10). They had been patiently warned about the consequences of this behavior but had refused to respond (18:12–14). Therefore Yahweh had no choice but to bring judgment (18:15–17). Not only had Israel disobeyed the Lord, they had abused and killed those servants sent to renew them to repentance. Jeremiah becomes the most recent recipient of such treatment (18:18–23) yet perseveres in his pronouncements against Israel’s sins and in his proclamation of coming judgment (19:1–15). Though the word of the Lord had made Jeremiah a reproach (20:8) he continues in his ministry, with much sorrow (20:9–18). In the manner of his prophetic ministry Jeremiah foreshadows the Prophet to come who would not only be similarly rejected but who would actually die for the restoration of the nation.

5. Judah’s kings and prophets are convicted of covenant failure (21:1—24:10). By grouping prophecies concerning Judah’s pitiful kings, Jeremiah makes his case against the office of the king. God had given specific instruction for the monarchy’s faithful participation in His covenant arrangement with the nation of Israel (cf. Deut 17:14–20). Zedekiah, Shallum, Jehoiakim, Coniah (Jehoiachin), and most all the rest had failed miserably (21:1—30). Because they had broken the covenant (22:1–9) the nation

would be judged. According to pattern, Jeremiah does not miss the chance to interject a word of hope. One day a Branch of righteousness would be raised to David and he would give the kind of leadership by which Israel could be blessed (23:1–6). He would lead the nation back from captivity (23:7–8). The prophets are once again condemned because they had been sent by Yahweh to be conscience and counselor to the king on His behalf (23:9–40). Their failure had worsened and accelerated the failure of the kings. The whole situation was like a basket of figs—some of Israel were good and would be preserved and restored to the land, whereas others, like Zedekiah, would be consumed from the land (24:1–10).

With this, Jeremiah's prosecution of Yahweh's covenant lawsuit against Judah comes to a conclusion. All possible charges have been laid; all have been proved beyond any argument. As in most judicial proceedings the next phase is the pronouncement of sentence. In this case it is a coming seventy-year captivity in Babylon.

B. Jeremiah prophesies judgment for Judah and all the nations (25:1—29:32).

Jeremiah had been prophesying captivity at the hands of the Babylonians throughout his ministry, as the various oracles make clear. However, in line with the literary shaping of the historical prophecies into the form of a covenant lawsuit, the prophet now develops more fully Judah's coming desolation as a judicial pronouncement of judgment. Because of persistent disobedience Judah, and her neighbors, will go into captivity for seventy years (25:1–11). When that is over, Babylon itself will be judged as a demonstration of God's righteousness (25:12–14). In fact all nations will come under judgment when Yahweh moves to accomplish His purposes for Israel (25:15–38). This message, like all the rest, is resisted and Jeremiah is even threatened with death (26:1–

24). After the prophet enacts the coming judgment through bonds and yokes (27:1–22) a false prophet, Hananiah, presents an alternative scenario—a two-year captivity—which Jeremiah decisively dispels (by means of Hananiah’s death!). A letter to the captives in Babylon confirms God’s intention for them to remain under the yoke, despite false testimony to the contrary (29:1–32). The sentence has been pronounced. Its execution is coming.

C. Jeremiah promises restoration from captivity (30:1—33:26).

Once again, this section presents an extended treatment of the theme of hope, which had been inserted in regular snippets to this point. Four features of Israel’s future restoration are outlined under the heading “behold the days are coming says the Lord.” First, the whole nation, Judah and Israel, will be regathered to the land (30:1—31:26). Though the nations to which Israel will be scattered will come to a complete end, God’s chosen people have a secure future (cf. 30:11). Yahweh will do marvelous things in regathering His people. Secondly, Israel will be renovated, that is, she will be built into a numerous people (31:27–30). Third, the nation will experience regeneration through a new covenant. This ministry of the Spirit, also spoken of by Ezekiel (cf. Ezek 36:25–27), will result in Israel’s complete and willing obedience, whereby she will finally experience the fullness of blessing originally promised in Deuteronomy. Lastly, Jerusalem will be rebuilt, never again to experience destruction (31:38–40). This prophecy is yet to be finally fulfilled, though all has been set in place for that to happen. Whereas Israel had broken the Mosaic Covenant beyond repair, a fact that Jeremiah has already made clear, a New Covenant is promised whereby Israel’s performance is guaranteed. To this end, Jeremiah is commanded to enact the certainty of restoration by redeeming a field from his

prison house (32:1–44). Jeremiah is invited to ask God for assurance of these things and receives it in the form of the promise of Messiah (33:1–18). This is as certain as day and night (33:19–26).

Jeremiah has completed the case against Judah, pronounced judgment, and assured them of the nation's ultimate security as the Lord's special treasure. At this point the readership would be faced with certain questions such as "Can we believe this?" or "Will our captivity really end?" To help them answer in the affirmative, Jeremiah narrates the fall of Jerusalem to show that it happened just as had been predicted.

IV. Jeremiah reviews the fall of Jerusalem in order to confirm the accuracy of all his prophecies (34:1—45:5).

Once again Jeremiah develops a particular theme by combining chronologically rearranged oracles that he had delivered over the years pertaining to that theme, some of them going back nearly twenty years. In three sections the prophet overviews the reasons for Jerusalem's fall (34:1—38:28), states the fact of Jerusalem's fall (39:1–10), and then describes its aftermath (40:1—45:5). At Nebuchadnezzar's besieging of Jerusalem Jeremiah informs Zedekiah that the city will fall and that he will go into captivity. Within two years (the siege lasted from 588 B.C. to 586 B.C.) that event had transpired. Various reasons are given for this defeat, all revolving around the issue of disobedience to God's revealed will for the nation and its leaders. The Rechabites are held up as an example of obedience under hardship in contrast to Judah's refusal to release slaves according to the covenant into which they had entered (34:8—35:19). This disregard for Torah was nowhere more clearly illustrated than in the case of King Jehoiakim who, nearly twenty years earlier, had disdainfully destroyed a scroll containing the

Word of the Lord against the nation for which he was responsible (36:1—32). Likewise, Zedekiah had refused to submit to the Chaldeans as commanded by God through Jeremiah, casting the prophet into a dungeon instead (37:1—38:28). These incidents summarized well the nation's response to the Word of Yahweh, past and present.

The report of Jerusalem's fall emphasizes the fulfillment of all that Jeremiah had foretold (39:1—18). The disobedient are slain or taken captive to Babylon, including Zedekiah; Jeremiah is set free; Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian is rewarded with his life for trusting in Yahweh. The whole of the book is encapsulated in this one chapter.

Jeremiah's description of the aftermath of Jerusalem's fall served to demonstrate that in many respects all would continue as before. Some, like Gedaliah, would submit to Yahweh's rule (40:1—16). Many others would rebel as illustrated by Ishmael, Azariah, and Johanan (41:1—43:7) causing sorrow, suffering, and even death to those who sought to remain faithful (cf. 41:2; 43:1—7). To this state of affairs Jeremiah delivers two more messages for Yahweh. The Israelites who had fled to Egypt would not escape judgment. They would meet their demise under the Lord's final devastation of Egypt (44:1—30). On the other hand Baruch had survived it all as Jeremiah's faithful partner (45:1—5). Judgment alone could not cure Israel of its rebellion. Ultimately it would take a change of heart (cf. 31:33).

V. Jeremiah delivers prophecies of judgment against the nations (46:1—51:64).

If Israel was to be restored to the land and blessed in accord with the promises made to the patriarchs, Yahweh would have to exercise His sovereignty over the nations on her behalf. The concluding prophecies against the nations, some of which had already taken place and some of which were yet to come, were designed to demonstrate that the

Lord would continue to use the nations to further His purposes for His people (cf. 1:10). While Egypt's demise would be complete and permanent, Israel still had a future (46:1–28). All the nations would receive from the Lord their just punishment (47:1—49:39), and especially Babylon (50:1—51:64). Israel's return to the land would be tied to Babylon's fall and utter destruction. In this way the rest of Israel's history is adumbrated (cf. Rev 18:2). Israel had come under the dominion of the Gentiles but not under their authority; Yahweh is still the Sovereign of the nations for His people's ultimate benefit.

VI. Epilogue: The essence of Jeremiah's prophecies is reviewed as a historical supplement (52:1–34).

This chapter, which parallels nearly word for word 2 Kings 24:18—25:30, may or may not be from the hand of Jeremiah. He is not mentioned in the chapter, though this may simply be to cast all attention on the Lord. It serves as an appropriate summary of the essence of Jeremiah's literary activity: since all things have happened just as Yahweh had announced through His prophet expect all the rest to occur in like manner and be encouraged. The one new piece of information concerns Jehoiachin's release from prison and elevation to the table of Evil-Merodach, king of Babylon (52:31–34), which happened in 560 B.C. Though it had been prophesied that none of Jehoiachin's descendants would sit on the throne of David, the fact that the king had been remembered would have been an encouragement to the nation that Yahweh had not forgotten them in captivity. He could be trusted to work out the details of His promise to bless the world through the restored nation of Israel.⁶

⁶ Constable makes an insightful conclusion: "However, Jeremiah had prophesied that none of Jehoiachin's sons would rule over Judah (22:24-30). So while Evilmerodach's treatment of Jehoiachin was encouraging, the future would require a supernatural act of God to perpetuate the Davidic dynasty and produce Messiah" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Jeremiah," 2000 Edition (www.soniclight.com, 2000), 244.

Conclusion

When God blesses His people everyone around them is enriched, whether deserving or not. Conversely, when God must judge His people the innocent also will suffer. Jeremiah, the prophet who wept over Jerusalem's plight and for his own pain, learned to trust God in his life of obedience as a divine messenger. Though few responded to his warnings and joined him in a faithful walk, he chose to continue steadfastly in his calling, no matter what the personal cost. Thus, he left an example for all servants, an example that was supremely perfected in Jesus' life and ministry and which can, thereby, be effected in us as well.

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