

What Seest Thou, Jeremiah?

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH

I. WHO WAS HE?

A. THE NAME, **JEREMIAH** – “Jehovah hurls” or “Jehovah founds.”

B. HIS ORIGIN:

1. From the town of Anathoth, a village about three or four miles northeast of Jerusalem. Of a priestly family.
2. The prophet is called "the son of Hilkiah" (**Jer. 1:1**), who is, however, not the high priest mentioned in **2 Kings 22** and **23**, as it is merely stated that he was "of the priests that were in Anathoth" in the land of Benjamin. In Anathoth lived a class of priests who belonged to a side line, not to the line of Zadok (compare **1 Kings 2:26**) (**ISBE**).

C. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MAN.

1. Apparently timid, a man who shrank from his calling, but one who had a high regard for God's use for him, and so he always responded (**20:9**). Of an emotional temperament: buoyed up by success, and depressed by failure; but always conscious of the heavy burden placed on him by Jehovah. His life was one of continuous martyrdom. But always he was a man of faith and courage.
2. The Book of Jeremiah gives us not only a fuller account of the life ... of its author than do the books of the other prophets, but we also learn more about his ... personal life and feelings ... of ... any other prophet. He was, by nature, gentle and tender in his feelings, and sympathetic. A decided contrast to this is found in the hard and unmerciful judgment which it was his mission to announce. God made him strong and firm and immovable like iron for his mission (**Jer 1:18; 15:20**). This contrast between his naturally warm personal feelings and his strict Divine mission not rarely appears in the heart-utterances found in his prophecies. At first he rejoiced when God spoke to him (**15:16**); but soon these words of God were to his heart a source of pain and of suffering (**15:17 ff**). He would have preferred not to utter them; and then they burned in his breast as a fire (**20:7 ff; 23:9**).

... Not permitted to marry (**Jer 16:1 f**), he was compelled to forego the pleasures of youth (**15:17**). He loved his people as nobody else, and yet was always compelled to prophesy evil for it, and seemed to be the enemy of his nation. This often caused him to despair. The enmity to which he fell a victim, on account of his declaration of nothing but the truth, he deeply felt (**9:1 ff; 12:5 f; 15:10; 17:14-18; 18:23**, and often). In this sad antagonism between his heart and the commands of the Lord, he would perhaps wish that God had not spoken to him; he even cursed the day of his birth (**15:10; 20:14-18**). Such complaints are to be carefully distinguished from that which the Lord through His Spirit communicated to the prophet. God rebukes him for these complaints, and demands of him to repent and to trust and obey Him (**Jer 15:19**). This discipline makes him all the more unconquerable. Even his bitter denunciations of his enemies (**11:20 ff; 15:15; 17:18; 18:21-23**) originated in part in his passionate and deep nature, and show how great is the difference between him and that perfect Sufferer, who prayed even for His deadly enemies. ... He, as a priest, prayed for his people, until God forbade him to do so (**7:16; 11:14; 14:11; 18:20**). He was compelled more than all the others to suffer through the anger of God, which was to afflict his people. (**ISBE**.)

D. HISTORICAL SETTING.

1. GENERAL: The Book of Jeremiah belongs to a chaotic time in the history of God's Covenant People. Jeremiah's native land, the southern kingdom of Judah, was caught in a power squeeze between three great powers of the ancient world: **Egypt**, **Assyria**, and **Babylon**. As these empires struggled for dominance with one another, the noose grew tighter around Judah's neck.

To protect its borders, Judah entered into an **alliance with Egypt against the Babylonians**. But Jeremiah realized the alliance was too little and too late. For years his beloved nation had risked disaster as it rejected worship of the one true God and turned to pagan gods instead. Immorality, injustice, graft, and corruption prevailed throughout the land. God revealed to the prophet that he intended to punish His Covenant People by sending the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and carry the people into captivity. Jeremiah preached this message of judgment faithfully for about 40 years.

At the beginning of his prophetic ministry, it appeared briefly that conditions might improve. **King Josiah** (ruled 641/40-609 B.C.) began reforms based on God's Law, but at his death the dark days of paganism returned. Josiah's successors continued their reckless

pursuit of idolatry and foolish alliances with Egypt against the Babylonians. At the decisive **battle of Carchemish in 605 BC**, the Egyptians were soundly defeated. About 18 years later the Babylonians completed their conquest of Judah by destroying the capital city of Jerusalem. Just as Jeremiah had predicted, the leading citizens of Judah were carried to Babylon, where they remained in captivity for half a century. (**Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary**)

The Scythians swept down the Mediterranean coast as far as Egypt. Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, revolted against Ninevah in the year **625 B.C.** The Chaldeans now became a threat to Judah. Nabopolassar and the Medes overthrew and destroyed Ninevah **612 B.C.** War between Chaldea and Egypt followed. Jerusalem paid tribute, being brought under Babylon 606/605. That year the first group was carried into Babylon from Judah. Judah revolted, Nebuchadnezzar carried a second group into captivity, 597. Again Judah revolted, and Nebuchadnezzar sacked the city; the final captivity, **586**. However, Wright sets the date at **587**. (**Ernest Wright, Biblical Archaeology, p. 177, 1957**).

2. JUDAH: (Read **2 Kings 22-25; 2 Chron. 34-36**). Moral reform was undertaken by Josiah, but it lacked permanency; it was outward. He destroyed altars and high places. Jeremiah was his contemporary; he worked on the hearts. Both moral and religious conditions were at a low ebb. From a human point of view the prophet was fighting a losing battle throughout his forty to fifty years of work.

3. THE KINGS OF JUDAH during the period of Jeremiah's period:

Josiah, 640-608 – Reformer, a good king. Killed by Pharaoh-necho at Megiddo. (**2 Kings 22:1 – 23:30; 2 Chron. 34-35**).

Jehoahaz, 608 – Ruled 3 months. Taken to Egypt by Pharaoh-necho. (**2 Kings 23:31-33; 2 Chron. 36:1-4**).

Jehoiakim, 608-597 – **Eliakim** (God establishes), son of Josiah, whose name Pharaoh-necho changed to Jehoiakim (Jehovah establishes). Served Nebuchadnezzar three years, rebelled. Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah, took a large group into Babylon. (**2 Kings 23:34-24:7; 2 Chron. 36:5-8**).

Jehoiachin, 597 – Ruled 3 months. Wicked, the last of his particular lineage. Political captive in Babylon 37 years; released by Evil-Merodach; ration tablet found. (**2 Kings 24:8-17; 2 Chron. 36:9-10**).

Zedekiah, 597-586 – Uncle of Jehoiachin. Wicked. Judah fell, **Babylonian Captivity, 586**. (**2 Kings 24:17 – 25:7; 2 Chron. 36:11f.**).

4. THE MESSAGE AND TEACHING of Jeremiah.

- a. **A message of doom.** Jeremiah was the prophet of the fall; therefore, in the main, his message was one of doom.
 - 1) Israel, by divine choice, was a people peculiar to Jehovah.
 - 2) Israel had proved faithless. Religious and moral apostasy.
 - 3) Complacency and blind trust in externals avail nothing.
 - 4) In view of this condition, the book is one of lamentation and tears.
- b. **A message of hope.** Beyond the night of calamity and distress the prophet saw a brighter day.
 - 1) Preservation of the remnant.
 - 2) Restoration from exile.
 - 3) New Jerusalem built on the ashes of the old.
 - 4) The ideal king, on the throne of David.
 - 5) The New Covenant, with the shortcomings of the Old removed.
- c. Jeremiah reemphasized the individuality of religion.
 - 1) Personal responsibility.
 - 2) The destiny of foreign nations.
 - 3) Disappearance of external symbols.