

Jeremiah

Jeremiah is the autobiography of one of Judah's greatest prophets during the nation's darkest days. An avalanche of judgment is coming, and Jeremiah is called to proclaim that message faithfully for forty years. In response to his sermons, the tender prophet of God experiences opposition, beatings, isolation, and even imprisonment. Jeremiah eventually sees many of his prophecies come true, though it breaks his heart. The Babylonian army arrives; vengeance falls; and God's holiness and justice are vindicated.

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Jeremiah is the prophecy of a man divinely called in his youth from the priest-city of Anathoth. A heartbroken prophet with a heart-breaking message, Jeremiah labors for more than forty years proclaiming a message of doom to the defiant people of Judah. Despised and persecuted by his countrymen, Jeremiah bathes his harsh prophecies in tears of compassion. His broken heart causes him to write a broken book, which is difficult to arrange chronologically or topically. But through his sermons and signs he faithfully declares that surrender to God's will is the only way to escape calamity.

The name *Jeremiah* literally means "Yahweh Throws," perhaps in the sense of laying a foundation. It could be translated to mean "Yahweh establishes, appoints, or sends."

AUTHOR

The book clearly states that Jeremiah is its author (1:1). Jeremiah dictated all his prophecies to his secretary Baruch from the beginning of his ministry until the fourth year of Jehoiakim.

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah the priest and lived just over two miles north of Jerusalem in Anathoth. As an object lesson to Judah, Jeremiah was not allowed to marry (16:2). Because of his radical message of God's judgment through the coming Babylonian invasion, he led a life of conflict. He was threatened in his hometown of Anathoth, tried for his life by the priests and prophets of Jerusalem, put in stocks, forced to flee from king Jehoiakim, publicly humiliated by the false prophet Hananiah, and thrown into a well.

DATE & SETTING

There were three stages in Jeremiah's ministry:

1. From 627 to 605 b.c. : he prophesied while Judah was threatened by Assyria and Egypt.
2. From 605 to 586 b.c. : he proclaimed God's judgment while Judah was threatened and besieged by Babylon.
3. From 586 to about 580 b.c. : he ministered in Jerusalem and Egypt after Judah's downfall.

Jeremiah was a contemporary of Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel, and Ezekiel. His ministry stretched from 627 to about 580 b.c. Josiah, Judah's last good king (640-609 b.c.) instituted spiritual reforms when the Book of the Law was discovered in 622 b.c. Jeremiah was on good terms with Josiah and lamented when he was killed in 609 b.c. by Pharaoh Necho of Egypt. Jehoahaz replaced Josiah as king of Judah but reigned only three months before he was deposed and taken to Egypt by Necho. Jehoiakim (609-597 b.c.) was Judah's next king and reigned until 605 b.c., when Egypt was defeated by Babylon at Carchemish. Nebuchadnezzar took Palestine and deported key people like Daniel to Babylon. Judah's King Jehoiakim was now under command of Babylon, but he rejected Jeremiah's warnings in 601 b.c. and rebelled against Babylon. Jehoiachin became Judah's next king in 597 b.c. but was replaced by Zedekiah three months later when Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and deported Jehoiachin to Babylon. Zedekiah was the last king of Judah; his attempted alliance with Egypt led to Nebuchadnezzar's occupation and overthrow of Jerusalem in 586 b.c.