

OUTLINE STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

Prof. William G. Moorehead

Copyright © 1893

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

JEREMIAH

The books of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah are as different as they can well be. The divergence between them is not simply one of style, but one of aim and contents. Isaiah clearly foresaw the defection and apostasy of the people of Judah, and their captivity; but he was removed from the final catastrophe by a hundred years or more. Jeremiah lived and prophesied at the time of the end. He saw the fall of the throne of David, the spoliation of the city and the temple by the strong and pitiless arms of the Babylonians, and the exile of the greater part of the chosen people.

It seemed as if irreparable ruin had come, that God Himself had forsaken the children of the covenant, ignored His own promises, and given over His heritage to the **“boar of the forest and to the beast of the field.”** This, mainly, constitutes the burden of Jeremiah’s prophecies and distinguishes them. His ministry was exercised amid deepening apostasy, judgment and disaster.

Jeremiah was by birth a priest, and dwelt at the priestly town of Anathoth, I Chronicles 6:60, a few miles north of Jerusalem in the territory of Benjamin. His father’s name was Hilkiah, who is not to be identified with the high priest of that name. It seems, however, that the prophet belonged to an influential family from the respect shown him by successive rulers, as Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, Ahikam and Gedaliah, the viceroys of the king of Babylon. His uncle Shallum was the husband of Huldah the prophetess. His friend and cousin, Hanameel, was their son. Baruch was his constant companion and scribe or amanuensis.

His call to the office of prophet was as distinct and as remarkable as that of Isaiah, 1:5.

We learn from this striking verse that his designation to the office by the Lord antedated his birth. No event or exigency in the life of the individual and of the nation finds God unprepared. He had His chosen instruments ready to meet every emergency in the history of His people Israel. The fall was not a surprise to God, nor was redemption an afterthought.

“He never is before His time,
He never is too late.”

Jeremiah's qualifications for the office of prophet, like those of all the other prophets, were directly from God. He received both the message and the gift from Him, 1:5-10. By the touch of the divine hand there was imparted to him the revelation from the Lord and the power to deliver it to others. The action symbolized the communication of a message and the power of speech.

Like Moses, like Isaiah, like all truly great and noble souls, Jeremiah was distinguished for his humility and native modesty. Very great ability, genius, is unaffected, is childlike. The highest attainment of Christianity is a glorified childhood (Tholuck). In simple, childlike ingenuousness Jeremiah made answer to God's call, "**Ah! Lord God! behold, I cannot speak; for I am a child.**"

The time of his ministry is distinctly stated in chap, 1:1-3. These verses are not an introduction to the first chapter, but to the entire book, and they are also the authentication of all that follows. They are the great seal which the Spirit of God has set upon the words which He has given us through the mouth of His servant Jeremiah. His ministry began in the reign of Josiah, and continued for some time after the revolt of Zedekiah and the disasters which followed. The estimates as to its length vary by about ten years: Plumptre, B. C. 638-588; Home, B. C. 628-586; Angus, B. C. 629-585. Something over forty years he exercised the office of prophet.

Three events of worldwide importance transpired during the life time of Jeremiah.

The first was the battle between the armies of Judah and of Pharaoh-Necho at Carchemish at which Josiah lost his life, II Chronicles 35:20-25.

Never perhaps has there been such profound and universal mourning for the death of a ruler. The sorrow of our country for the death of President Lincoln, the sorrow of England for the Prince Consort, or that of Germany for Frederick, was deep, but not so deep nor so lasting as that for Josiah. The penitential mourning of Israel at their conversion is compared to this sorrow, Zechariah 12:11.

One of the most pathetic elegies ever uttered was pronounced over the dead monarch by the most plaintive of prophets, Jeremiah. With the death of Josiah the noblest and most faithful spirit of the kings of Judah likewise expired. From that period the degeneracy of the kingdom was rapid.

It was Jeremiah's lot to prophesy at a time when all things in Judah were rushing down to the final and mournful catastrophe; when political excitement was at its height; when the worst passions swayed the various parties and the most fatal counsels prevailed. It was his to stand in the way over which his nation was rushing headlong to destruction; to make a heroic effort to arrest it and to turn it back; and to fail, and be compelled to step to one side and see his own people whom he loved with the tenderness of a woman plunge over the precipice into the wide, weltering ruin.

The second event was a second battle at Carchemish between the Egyptian and Babylonian forces, the latter led by Nebuchadnezzar. In this engagement the Egyptians were totally defeated, and Syria and Palestine fell under the power of Babylon.

The battle took place in the third year of Jehoiakim, according to Daniel 1:1, and was followed by the first deportation of Jews to Babylon. Jeremiah prophesied of the disastrous consequences of this battle to Egypt, 66:1-12. In B. C. 609 Babylon had two powerful rivals, Assyria and Egypt. In 604 B. C. it had the undisputed mastery of the East.

The third event of Jeremiah's time was the capture of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the exile of the major part of the people to Babylon.

The fall of a great state is an epoch in the history of the world. The fall of Babylon and Egypt and Rome was of immense significance. But the fall of Jerusalem and the Jewish state, both the first and the second time—the one time by the Chaldeans, and the other by the Romans—affected the whole race of man as no other national disaster ever has.

The ministry of Jeremiah is one of extraordinary interest from the fact that he was associated most intimately with the close of the kingdom of Judah. He is the connecting link and the bond between the old and the new, the monarchy and the dependency into which Judah sank after the captivity. What Jerome Savonarola was to the Roman Catholic church when sinking to the lowest point of infamy under Alexander VI., that, and much more, Jeremiah was to Judah in the closing years of the monarchy. His task was hard, thankless; his life one of contention and strife; but faithfully he finished his work and received his reward.

It happens always that when a state becomes involved in difficulties, when its affairs are entangled and ruin threatens, the people range themselves into contending and hostile parties. So it transpired in the closing days of the kingdom of Judah; much more so was it in the last years of Jerusalem in the first century of the Christian era. The nation split into fierce factions; each denounced the other as the chief cause of all their woes. Mutual distrust broke up families, divided friends, made a man's enemies those of his own household. Everyone had to take heed to his neighbor and suspect his brother, Jeremiah 9:4; 12:6.

Amid such contending factions Jeremiah's life was spent. We do not know that he ever saw a day of true rest, of peaceful quiet. He knew not but that he should seal his testimony with his blood at any time. Yet he never quailed before the factions that clamored for his life, nor faltered in duty when to announce the tremendous judgments of God maddened his countrymen to desperation.

It is strange that so many writers of modern times regard Jeremiah as weak, feeble-minded, almost cowardly. We have no sympathy with such unworthy and inadequate opinions of him. His ministry was one of admonition and antagonism, 1:17, 18. Against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes, against the priests, against the prophets he was to stand. He was to gird up his loins and arise and speak all that God commanded him. He was to be the solitary fortress, the column of iron, the wall of brass, fearless, undismayed in any presence; the one grand, immovable figure who pursued the apostatizing people and rulers, delivering his message in the temple court or the royal chamber or the street, whether they would hear or forbear. In consequence he was the prophet of unwelcome truths, hated of all, but feared as well by all. It was a mission requiring courage, faith, strength, will; a mission no weakling could fill, no coward would undertake. Jeremiah is one of the very great men of the world.

His prevailing tone is that of sadness. The song he sings is keyed in the minor. He is the dirge-poet of Israel. He composed the national requiem of his people, and his own also. His style is not so lofty as that of Isaiah; he does not rise so high, nor is his flight so sustained. Isaiah is the royal poet who sails aloft on powerful wing into the azure deeps above; Jeremiah wings a lower flight, with measured beat and slow, the very movement indicating the mournful nature of his theme.

Another thing to be noted is the personal character of his writing.

No writer of the Old Testament enters so largely into his own composition as this prophet. His personal affairs are not meant. He never alludes to his private history except where the nature of a given narrative requires it. Nevertheless, his inner and outer life is woven into his prophecies.

The man himself with his sorrows and woes, with his sensibilities always bleeding, with his disappointments and his blasted affections weeping out their life in silent injury, is ever before us as we read. The causes of his profound grief are not hard to find. His love for his people was one source. This is very striking; it reminds one of Moses and Paul. The prophet stands ready to make any sacrifice, to endure any pain, if thereby the people, his people, are reformed and restored. The lamentations are a proof of it. But then it is hopeless, as he well knows.

Every effort to lead them back to God and to set them in the right place before Him, he saw was vain. They rejected the divine testimony, they would none of his counsel. God no longer hearkened to prayer for Judah. The end was drawing on apace. Jeremiah prophesies under this impression. A sorrowful task, a hopeless love. No wonder he longed for **“a lodge in some vast wilderness”** that he might leave his people and go from them, 9:2. No wonder that he never married, that he would ask no woman to share the intolerable burden that weighed on his heart.

Like Job he poured bitter imprecations on the day of his birth, 20:14-18; was tortured with doubt as to the word of the Lord to himself, 21:7, 8. He is the “prophet of the broken heart.” Who can forget the exquisite pathos with which he weeps over Judah, 8:21, 22; 9:1, 2. How much of genuine patriotism breathes in those tender words, **“Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country,”** 22:10.

One cannot but see in Jeremiah something of the Spirit of Christ. Indeed, it is not too much to say that on a small scale that Life which is above all other lives is reproduced in this prophet. Jeremiah’s love for his people, his anxiety to do them good and naught but good, his tears at the defeat of his efforts to reclaim them, and the hopefulness with which he looks forward to their final recovery and blessing, are but a dim reflection of what was perfect in the heart of the Lord Jesus. Grace and the Spirit of God will make any one like Christ.

It is no easy task to give anything like a satisfactory analysis of these prophecies. It is well known that the order in the Septuagint version differs considerably from that found in the Hebrew Bible, chaps, 46-52, being inserted after chap, 25:13, as also other changes. At any rate in no other book is there so great variation.

Two things should be borne in mind in reading Jeremiah:

First, that the arrangement does not follow chronological order. This is evident from the introduction of the names of the kings (see 37 and 35, etc.). But this is not uncommon in Scripture. God often sets aside the natural sequence of events in favor of a moral sequence.

Second, the arrangement seems to follow subjects. The prophecies are collated according to the themes and classed by thoughts rather than by time.

A very general division is the following:

Part I, chaps, 1-24, prophecies with reference to Judah, with historical matter.

Part II, chaps, 25-45, prophecies of judgment and of comfort.

Part III, prophecies respecting various nations, chaps 46-51.

Chapter fifty-two is a historical appendix, added by another hand, cf. II Kings 24:18-25.

A more particular analysis is submitted for the reader's aid:

I. Chaps, 1-38: Prophecies and historical passages regarding Judah and its kings to the capture of Jerusalem. This section falls into two parts:

(1) 1-24, wherein are pleadings with the people; sins rebuked, backsliding and apostasy exposed and denounced; repentance urged, with the sorrowful conviction on the part of the prophet that every appeal is vain;

(2) 25-38, announcements of approaching judgments and promises of assured blessing for the last days,—chaps, 31:32.

II. Chaps, 39-44: Narrative, mingled with prophecies, after the fall of Jerusalem.

III. Chapter forty-five stands by itself, and is a special word of comfort from the Lord to Baruch, Jeremiah's friend and scribe. In the midst of Judah's ruin and the crashing down of Jewish hopes, God turns aside to assuage the sorrow and dry the tears of Baruch. That is very precious. The individual, no matter how obscure, is not forgotten by the great God of heaven and earth, even in the midst of stupendous providences and overwhelming judgments. A word of admonition is addressed to him to which all may well give earnest heed: "**And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not,**" vs. 5. A mighty word which Mr. Spurgeon tells us kept him in the ambitions of his youth.

IV. Chaps, 46-51: Prophecies against certain Gentile nations.

The doom of the following is pronounced: Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Elam, Babylon. All these predictions have been fulfilled. They were made when some of the nations against which they were spoken were at the zenith of their power. The majority of them were overrun and subjugated by Babylon, which in its turn was totally overthrown.

Under five different kings Jeremiah carried on his difficult ministry.

(1) During eighteen years or more (1:2) of Josiah's reign he bore his testimony often with tears, always with anxious forebodings. It was a time of distress and anguish for the prophet. For although Josiah was one of the best kings that ever sat on the throne of David, nevertheless the great reformation which he promoted was largely an outward one. Hardly was the king's sad funeral over when the people hastened to revive the abominations which he had so nobly suppressed, II Kings 23:30-37. And so Jeremiah utters that despairing cry which reveals how hopeless was any reform, the sins were so inveterate: "**Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?**" 13:23.

(2) During the reign of Jehoahaz, or Shallum as he is sometimes called (Jeremiah 22:11), which was very short. He was set up in opposition to Egypt, and was soon deposed by that power.

(3) During the reign of Jehoiakim whom Pharaoh substituted for Jehoahaz, II Kings 23:34, for ten years the prophet pursued his difficult work. Opposed by false prophets who pretended to have a "word from Jehovah," with the court and the nobles following Egypt's policy, Jeremiah contended for the reforms inaugurated by Josiah; pleaded, warned, entreated, wept, but to no purpose. Judah was bent on having her own way, and nothing could turn her from it.

(4) During the brief reign of Jehoiakim, called also Coniah, Jeremiah 22:24, he witnessed for God, but the danger so long foretold at length came nigh. First the king and queen-mother, then nobles, artisans, princes, the worth and strength of the nation, were carried away into captivity, II Kings 24:15, 16.

(5) During the eleven years of Zedekiah whom Nebuchadnezzar had placed upon the throne, and who rebelled against his master in spite of all the threats and predictions of the prophet, the final crushing blow fell, and Zedekiah lost his sons, his own eyes, the holy city and the state.

After the destruction of Jerusalem the party adverse to Babylon determined to cast in their fortunes with Egypt. Jeremiah, who had remained in Judea after the final catastrophe, protested against the movement, and predicted its calamitous issue. But the obstinate party, blind to everything save what appeared to them their only safety, would not hear. They fled to Egypt, and carried Jeremiah with them. Tradition has it that he died there; one form of it narrating that for his faithfulness in prophesying against the idolatry of his countrymen he was stoned to death; another that he repaired finally to Babylon where he died. But all is uncertain.

The question may very properly be asked, Why did the prophet advocate submission to the Gentile king, and urge the opening of the city to him? 17:12, 13, 17; 38:17-23. Does it not look like treason, at least like disloyalty to Jewish interests? It is quite evident throughout the later prophecies of Jeremiah that God had conferred universal power on Nebuchadnezzar, and he was to subdue all kingdoms to his rule. He is even called "**God's servant,**" 25:9; 27:6. To resist him was to resist God. It was in virtue of Israel's failure that power passed into the hand of the king of Babylon; and from this point in human history, the "**times of the Gentiles**" begin their course. But of this we shall have occasion to speak more at length when we reach the book of Daniel.

It was because a new order of things was now to be inaugurated that the prophet exhorted his people to submit to Nebuchadnezzar. According to Deuteronomy 32:8, the nations were originally distributed with reference to Israel as the center. All were grouped about the center, cf. Ezekiel 5:5. Now this arrangement was to be broken up. Gentile supremacy, so long held in check, is to assert itself. It was God's doings. Hence submission to Nebuchadnezzar meant submission to the will of God.

The vast majority of the predictions in the book of Jeremiah related to his own times, to the kings and people of Judah and of Babylon, and to the captivity and its attendant scenes. But there are some that belong to the distant future—the future not only of Jeremiah, but also of us, for they are not yet fulfilled.

Of some of these, mention is now to be made.

1. *The Messiah.*

Jeremiah has not so much to announce of Him as Isaiah has, but he is not deficient touching this great hope. What he does disclose concerning Him is of the deepest importance and very instructive. In chap. 23:5, 6, we read, "**Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a king shall reign and prosper and he shall be called The Lord our righteousness.**" In every way this is a very notable prediction.

The King will be of the house of David, and prosperity shall attend His administration, judgment and justice He shall execute in the earth. Just at the time of this prophecy the throne of David was imperiled, justice and equity were almost unknown, and wickedness was in the ascendant.

But a better day approaches.

The name of the King is a wonderful one, *Jehovah Tsidkenu*—the Lord our righteousness. The name in this case, as in the similar instances, is in reality a sentence expressing a great truth: The Lord (is) our righteousness. *Jehovah-Nissi* (Exodus 17:15); *Jehovah-Shammah* (Ezekiel 48:35); *Jehovah-Jireh* (Genesis 12:14), and this name in Jeremiah, are all promises and also revelations of the character and fidelity of God.

Here we have the humanity of the Saviour predicted as the descendent of David, and His Godhead likewise in the majestic name given Him. Christ our Righteousness is an all-sufficient answer to the claims of law and justice upon us, and to our deep need.

Luther once said, "Your menaces and terrors, domine Satan, trouble me not; for there is one whose name is called the Lord our Righteousness on whom I believe. He it is who hath abrogated the law, condemned sin, abolished death, destroyed hell, and is a satan to thee, O satan."

John Trapp thinks this sentence of Luther's is of so much worth that rather than be without it one should "fetch it on his knees from Rome to Jerusalem."

2. *Restoration of Israel, 31.*

This is repeatedly promised in Jeremiah and secured by the most solemn asseverations which can be used, but it is minutely described in this and the following chapter. The reason of their restoration is disclosed, vs. 3, viz., the unalterable love of God.

The extent of the regathering is foretold, vss. 8:31; from every quarter of the earth both the house of Israel and the house of Judah will be brought back again. With deep penitence and supplications for their sins will they come, the Lord Himself leading them, vs. 9.

Scarcely anything can exceed the pathos, the exquisite tenderness with which the penitents and their Redeemer talk together, as it is foretold in vss. 18-20. Of course this is true of all genuine repentance, but it will most emphatically be true in restored Israel, Zechariah 12:11-14. A new covenant is made with them in the day they return to God, vss. 31-37. That we may be assured that the covenant was not fulfilled at the return from the Babylonian exile, it is quoted once and again in the New Testament and distinctly applied to the Jews of the future, Romans 11:26, 27; Hebrews 8:8-13; 10:16, 17.

A still more convincing proof of the restoration is given in chap. 32:6-15,—the account of the purchase of Hanameel's land by Jeremiah. The Chaldeans were laying siege to the city; and that they would capture it the prophet very well knew. And yet he is bidden buy his cousin's field, pay the money for it, for God gave him the assurance that in due time the people would be restored to their inheritance. Abraham bought a field for his dead; Jeremiah bought one for a nation yet unborn. God led him to commit himself openly to the faith of Israel's final restoration.

3. *Symbolic acts.*

Jeremiah indulges in many such and each of them has a significant prophetic meaning. Ezekiel is fonder of them than Jeremiah.

Instruction by symbolic action is common in Oriental countries, however strange and even childish it may appear to the matter-of-fact dwellers in western lands. Southern Italians often will carry on a conversation by pantomime, not an audible word being spoken. Much more does such method of communication prevail in the Levant.

One of these striking acts of the prophet is recorded in chapter thirteen of our book. It is the account of his hiding by divine command a linen girdle in a cleft of a rock by the river Euphrates.

The narrative tells us that the prophet did so, twice making the journey to the designated point. Considerable discussion has arisen among interpreters as to the reality of this transaction. From several considerations we believe that he actually performed what is here described. The only question of difficulty is as to the word rendered Euphrates (*P'rath*). Almost invariably it means the ancient river on which the Chaldean capital was situated. Some, however, contend that the word indicates some place near Jerusalem.

It should be borne in mind that after Jehoiakim cut the prophetic roll into strips with his penknife and burnt the strips in the brazier at his feet, the prophet disappeared from Jerusalem, and for a period of nearly seven years his whereabouts is unknown. It is altogether probable that during that time he may have been once and again in the region of Babylon, at least of the Euphrates.

Another most significant act of his was that of breaking the earthen bottle in the valley of Hinnom in the presence of the priest and elders, chap. 19.

Most impressive must have been the lesson the prophet intended to enforce, when he dashed the jar to the ground in their sight, thereby intimating how the Lord would break “**the people in the city,**” so that the ears of the hearer of such awful tidings should tingle.

It was done in the valley of the Hinnom, the place, it would seem, which had witnessed the dreadful spectacle of human sacrifices to the brutal Moloch. His temptation of the Rechabites, chap. 35, must also have conveyed a very solemn lesson to the people, had they had ears to hear and hearts to feel. Jeremiah bade these ancient teetotalers to drink wine, offered them the cup; but they flatly refused. The prophet then pointed the moral and pressed home the application; but Israel would not heed nor repent nor obey.

God, we may well say, exhausted all means, tried every agency, employed every kind of appeal, to move His people and to lead them back to their allegiance to Him. Obdurate, hard hearted, stiff of neck, rebellious, they were insensible to every effort and dumb to every entreaty. And so at length the judgment which could no longer be delayed, broke down upon them in all its appalling fury. Grace despised, mercy rejected, love spurned and goodness outraged, become at length whips in the hands of offended justice.

~ end of chapter 25 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
