

A Course

In

**JEREMIAH,
STUDIES IN**

Prepared by the
Committee on Religious Education
of the
American Bible College

Pineland, Florida 33945

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INTRODUCTION

As you study the Scriptures you will find that it is of the greatest importance to approach the Bible in a reverent attitude of mind, looking upon it as the inspired Word of God, and not just an ordinary piece of literature. If the Bible is studied in the same manner as one studies Shakespeare, Milton or some historical work, it may be found interesting and profitable. But by this approach, the Bible student, persistent though he may be, will never find its rich treasures. The Apostle Paul says: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (I Cor. 2:14) For the profitable study of the Word of God, the right spiritual attitude is indispensable.

The Scriptures should be studied as eagerly as a hungry person seeks for food. The formal reading of a portion of the Bible may have some worth as a religious exercise, but in order that the complete benefit may be obtained from its truths, they must be appropriated to personal needs. A milkman may deliver thousands of quarts of milk each day and yet go home thirsty. The Bible student may read large portions of the Bible with little benefit, unless he makes it his own by personal appropriation and feeds upon it.

In your studies of the Bible will you appropriate the riches thereof to your own personal use, or will you read as you would read a book of fiction, a mystery, etc? In order to make full use of the pearls of wisdom contained in the Bible readings, it is suggested you reread them. Go into its wonderful fields of truth; go down into its valleys; climb its mountain peaks of vision; follow its streams of inspiration; enter its halls of learning. Many Bible truths do not appear on the surface; they must be dug up and be brought into the light by toil and effort.

There are various methods of Bible study, such as the topical method, the study of books, the study by chapters, the study of important passages, and the biographical method. In our approach we are following the first method, the topical method, or the study of the central topics. In this way Jeremiah will be explaining God's inspiration and purpose and his own thinking and motivation.

Although the American Bible College believes the King James Version is the preserved Word of God, this method of study allows the writer to occasionally condense a passage in his own paraphrase. This should not be construed to imply that A. B. C. is correcting God's Word.

"Jeremiah began his ministry in the 13th year of Josiah, about 60 years after Isaiah's death. Zephaniah

and Habakkuk were contemporaries of his earlier ministry, Daniel of his later. After the death of Josiah, the kingdom of Judah hastened to its end in the Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah remained in the land ministering to the poor Remnant (2 Ki. 24.14) until they went into Egypt, whither he followed them, and where he died, early in the 70 years' captivity. Jeremiah prophesying before and during the exile of Judah, connects the pre-exile prophets with Ezekiel and Daniel, prophets of the exile."¹

Jeremiah's theme is God's Judgment. The book does not follow a chronological, but rather a topical format. It can be chapter outlined as follows: 1, an introduction; 2-25, God's judgment on Judah; 26-29, message in the Temple court; 30-33, the future restoration of Judah; 34-45, Judah's present disaster; 46-51, prophecies against the surrounding nations; 52, the concluding fate of Jerusalem, the people and its leaders.

During this course the student is required to read through the entire Book of Jeremiah.

Permission for quotes from Dr. Charles L. Feinberg's articles in *The Chosen People*, 177-1980 were graciously given by the Chosen People Ministries, 241 East 51st Street, New York, NY., 10022. The quotes are marked by the star sign — "*".

¹ The Scofield Reference Bible New York Oxford University Press, p. 772.

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CHAPTER I

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The Book and Its Author

NO BOOK OF THE OLD TESTAMENT is more dependent upon a knowledge of its times for its interpretation than the book of Jeremiah. During Jeremiah's ministry the Jewish nation passed through many phases in a remarkably brief period. From the time he was called in 627 B.C. until the destruction of Jerusalem in 586, he saw his beloved people fall from the pinnacle of confident hope to the depths of despair (His ministry in Jerusalem lasted 41 years). First Judah was subject to Assyria, then to Egypt and Babylon. Five kings reigned in Jerusalem during that span. One was killed in battle, another taken as prisoner to Egypt, and two exiled in Babylon. The best of the people were deported, and in the end the city was completely destroyed. Such a debacle needs careful consideration lest it happen again.

I. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A study of the discoveries of modern archaeology and the biblical records provides an accurate and comprehensive picture of what was happening in this momentous crisis in human history .

1. *The Reforms of Josiah*

The good king Hezekiah had been succeeded by one of Judah's worst, Manasseh. During his long reign the Hebrew nation drifted away from the high purpose of Isaiah, and foreign cults and practices were encouraged. Temple worship was de-emphasized, and the building itself was allowed to deteriorate. Manasseh was branded by the author of the books of Kings as possibly the worst king ever to sit on David's throne (cf. 2 Kings 21: 9-15; 24: 3 f.).

All this was reversed after Josiah came to the throne at the tender age of eight. Nothing is known of the years immediately following his coronation, but by 628 B.C. he was beginning to recover the territory lost to Assyria when Samaria fell a century before. Repairs

upon the Temple were begun in preparation for the renewal of the ancient faith of Israel. In 622 an electrifying discovery was made. The Book of the Covenant (this was a name for the code of laws given to Moses in Exodus 20:22–23:33, as an expansion and exposition of the Ten Commandments.) was rediscovered in the Temple. By this time it probably included the other parts of Exodus and Deuteronomy. This book was substantially the present book of Deuteronomy, which became the basis for the most sweeping reform in Israel's history. Both Judah and the territory of Northern Israel were purged of all alien practices and the public worship of *Yahweh* (Heb. for Jehovah) was confined to the Jerusalem Temple. Plainly this reformation was political as well as religious. It amounted to a complete break with Assyria.

Such a maneuver was made possible by the fact that Assyria's empire was crumbling. Her kings were too busy securing the throne at home to be able to bother with the affairs of Palestine. Babylon and Media were applying increasing pressure upon Assyria. Surprisingly enough the latter found an unexpected ally in Egypt, which had been her deadly enemy for over a hundred years. It seems that Egypt had a remarkable facility for choosing the losing side.

In 612 B.C. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, fell before Cyaxares, king of Media, and Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, although the Assyrian army continued the fight as it retreated west toward its allies in Egypt. In 609 Pharaoh Neco set out to join the Assyrians in a desperate attempt to push, back the on-rushing tide from the East. Perceiving the Egyptian purpose, Josiah, apparently hoping that he would fare better in face of a Babylonian victory, attempted to stop Neco. Instead, Josiah was killed and great consternation struck Judah (II Chr. 35:20-25). The mourning of the grieving nation became proverbial (cf. Zech. 12:11).

2. *The Tyranny of Egypt*

When Josiah was killed, his son Jehoahaz (Shallum) was made king in Jerusalem. Fearing further trouble from that direction, Neco, who was in Syria at the time, summoned Jehoahaz after only three months upon the throne, and deported him to Egypt. In his place Neco put Jehoahaz' brother Eliakim, whose name was changed to Jehoiakim, and made sure that he would remain an Egyptian vassal. Heavy tribute was placed upon Judah. She had only changed a distant master for one closer home.

Jehoiakim turned out to be a dismal failure. Concerned only for his own comfort and security, he cared little for the desperate plight of his subjects. The old pagan cults of the Manasseh era crept in again, amid the accompanying immorality. However, the impetus of the Josianic reforms kept the worship at the Temple in full swing, since it remained the center of Israel's nationalistic hopes. Yet this worship was merely form without the moral and ethical consciousness of the historic Mosaic faith. Large crowds brought many offerings, but the worshipers saw no necessity to examine their injustice to their neighbors, or their own lack of surrender to the redemptive purpose of Israel's God.

3. *The Rule of Babylon*

Events were hastening toward a climax. In 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar completely routed the Egyptians at Carchemish, and Jehoiakim was forced to shift his allegiance to Babylon. Yet there remained a strong pro-Egyptian group in Jerusalem, which was always insisting that Judah attempt to align itself with Egypt in an effort to throw off the Babylonian yoke. Jehoiakim himself favored this policy, which turned out to be ill advised. Nebuchadnezzar, after battling Pharaoh Neco to an apparent standstill in 601, retired to lick his wounds. This occasion encouraged Judah to rebel against him. Immediately Babylonia sent contingents to Palestine, and by 598 the main army arrived in Judah. Jehoiakim's mysterious death occurred at this time, and occasioned the crowning of his son Jehoiachin (Coniah). This unfortunate lad ruled only three months and was taken captive to Babylon in 597. Along with him were taken the leading citizens of Judah, numbering at least ten thousand, as well as priceless vessels from the Temple. Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah (Mattaniah), was placed upon the throne by Nebuchadnezzar.

*The reign of Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin was succeeded by his young son, Jehoiachin (also called Jechoniah and Coniah, 22:24, 28; 24:1), who reigned only three months (cf. 2 Kings 24:8). But this teenage king ruled long enough to reveal himself as a wicked monarch, whom Jeremiah denounced in emphatic terms (22:24-30). His father's rebellion against Babylon forced Nebuchadnezzar to besiege Jerusalem in 597 B.C., when Jehoiachin capitulated (2 Kings 24:12).

He was exiled to Babylon with many of Judah's upper class (among them the prophet Ezekiel, (Ezek. 1:2); the temple was plundered (2 Kings 24:10-16).

The king was a prisoner in Babylon for 37 years (52:31-34). He was released by Evil-merodach, son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:27-30). Strangely, the Jews long held a hope of his restoration to the Davidic throne, and Ezekiel the prophet refers to him as king, not Zedekiah, his successor.

The reign of Zedekiah. Among the many accomplishments of the great King Nebuchadnezzar were king-making and name-changing. Upon the exile of Jehoiachin he set on the Judean throne a son of Josiah and uncle of Jehoiachin, whose name Mattaniah he changed to Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17; 2 Chron. 36:10), a fact confirmed by the Babylonian Chronicle. Indeed, archaeological confirmation for this period is abundant both from the Babylonian Chronicles and the Lachish Letters.

What was the situation in Judah at the outset of Zedekiah's reign? Without controversy it is clear that a series of sieges and deportations with changes in rulers depleted the small kingdom of some of its best minds. Zedekiah, weak, vacillating, deficient in power of personality and stability of purpose, found it beyond him to claim proper political leadership. A puppet of Babylon, to whose king he had sworn fealty in the name of the God of Israel, he was checkmated in every decision by the pro-Egyptian policy of his officials.

His relationship with Jeremiah was closer than with any previous Judean king with the probable exception of godly Josiah. But he was powerless to protect the prophet from the vicious designs of the nobles and equally impotent to follow the God-given counsel which Jeremiah ceaselessly reiterated relative to submission to the rule of Nebuchadnezzar.

In the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign he had plotted rebellion against Babylon with a confederacy of the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Zidon (27:1 ff.). This was their object in sending representatives to Jerusalem. The plot was denounced by Jeremiah and ultimately came to nothing. Perhaps the visit of Zedekiah to Babylon in that same year is to be understood as his move to assure Nebuchadnezzar of his loyalty (51:59).

But the end was not many years away. In the ninth year of his reign (588 B.C.) Zedekiah conspired with Pharaoh Hophra (Apries) against Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon responded with an invasion of Judah, which lasted until 586 B.C., when the city fell in the summer of that year (2 Kings 24:20-25:7; 2 Chron. 36:17; Jer. 38:28-39:10).

Throughout the siege Jeremiah counseled Zedekiah to surrender (21:1-10; 34:1-5, 17-22; 37:3-10, 16, 17; 38:14-23). At one time during the siege the approach of the Egyptian army compelled the withdrawal of Babylon's forces, but the siege was resumed (37:1-10). Because of the cowardly attitude of Zedekiah, it was during this period that Jeremiah was mistreated by his enemies in Judah (37:11-21; Ch. 38).

The destruction of Jerusalem at this time, annually observed in mourning among Jews the world over on the ninth of Ab, was the greatest judgment of God on Israel in the Old Testament. Zedekiah, captured as he attempted to escape, his sons slain before him, his eyes blinded, was carried to Babylon with a company of his subjects.

After the destruction of the city and temple, Gedaliah was appointed by Babylon as governor of Judah. After a brief period (suggestions range from three months to a few years, but dogmatism here is impossible for lack of evidence) Gedaliah was murdered by a scion of the Davidic house, possibly at the instigation of pro-Egyptian sympathizers. The survivors of this added tragedy fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah and Baruch by force with them, claiming their fear of reprisal from Babylon.

Thus was completed a cycle begun with deliverance from Pharaoh by Moses centuries before. Strange, too, his ministry against confidence in Egypt, should end his earthly days there against his will. And thus closed an important era in the theocracy among Israel. The destruction of the sanctuary at Shiloh had demarcated the age of the Judges. The destruction of Solomon's Temple marked the termination of the period of the monarchy in Israel. The fall of the Second Temple by Titus (A.D. 70) indicated the catastrophic close of Israel's occupation of their land until modern times.¹

4. *The Fall of Jerusalem*

The folly of Jehoiakim left Judah in dire straits. Many of her cities lay in ruins, with her population depleted. From an estimated population in the eighth century of 250,000, the nation had now shrunk to half that size, the Babylonian Captivity of 597 B.C. culminating the process. Zedekiah did nothing but

¹ Charles L. Feinberg, *THE CHOSEN PEOPLE, "STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH: THE JUDGMENT OF THE LORD,"* VOL. LXXXII, NO. 11, (June 1977), p. 14. (Permission received from Chosen People Ministries, 241 East 51st Street, New York, NY., 10022, 4/26/05)

accelerate this downward rush. He appears to be the sort of monarch who had the best of intentions but lacked the courage of conviction (Jer. 37:17 to 38:28). Some of this was due to uncertainty about his authority. Apparently Jehoiachin was still regarded as the rightful king, although he was in exile (Ezek. 1:2). Many Jews expected his early return to reassume the throne (Jer. 27-29). In the face of this Zedekiah on the one hand was hesitant to arouse the opposition of his lords and on the other hand was anxious to prove his own prowess. Both inclinations pointed toward a rebellion against Babylon, which turned out to be the most futile move of all.

Once more Nebuchadnezzar made his way to Judah in January, 588, and was soon encamped before Jerusalem. News of the approach of Pharaoh Hophra led him to lift the siege momentarily, but he was soon back after quickly disposing of Egypt. When Jerusalem finally fell in July, 586, Nebuchadnezzar, infuriated by Judah's constant provocations, killed most of the people and took comparatively few prisoners. Among these, however, was Zedekiah, who was blinded and taken to Babylon in chains, where he died. Even as Northern Israel had perished in 722 B.C., just so the monarchy of Judah disintegrated in the blast of the wrath of God.

II. THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

In the trying times that marked the end of Judah as a nation, God called to speak for Him a man who felt that of all men he was the most unlikely for the task, but who turned out to be the very one to declare what was in the mind of God.

1. *Personal Characteristics*

In Jeremiah it can be seen vividly that the greatest success is often found in apparent failure.

"When he tried to arrest the course of a nation, only to be thrown down and trampled underfoot, when he cried out in bitterness of heart against the inexorable Will that compelled a poet to become a prophet, and a lover of men to be counted their enemy, he little knew that the development and record of his own lonely experience of failure was to be a success of the highest rank and influence."²

Because Jeremiah grieved constantly over the sins of Judah and cried out to God in his own trouble, the

prophet is described the "weeping prophet." However, Jeremiah was no spineless weakling who idled away his days in wringing his hands over the sad plight of man. His strong character allowed him to endure much persecution by his own people.

"He called himself one born to be at odds with and in opposition to the whole world; and, while he lamented the necessity, he never flinched from the task. Wherever his figure emerges into distinctness, it is militant."³

Jeremiah's words were so stinging, so provocative that it was inevitable that those whom he criticized would attempt to destroy him. The situation was so serious, however, that he could only hope that by sacrificing himself he could save the nation. The ideal that some people have for a pastor, that he first of all be a "good mixer" or one who keeps everybody happy and content, is hardly applicable when impending destruction is hanging heavy over his people's heads. They must be warned whatever the cost to himself or to the harmony of the fellowship. People are prone to praise Jeremiah and criticize present-day prophets. When will men learn to heed their prophets rather than silence them?

Indeed, the time-honored words of Milton in *Paradise Lost* well describe the prophet Jeremiah:

Servant of God, well done! well hast thou fought
The better fight, who single hast maintained
Against revolted multitudes the cause
Of truth, in word mightier than they in arms.

2. *Jeremiah the Poet*

Much of the book of Jeremiah is in poetry. This is difficult for the English reader to grasp, for Hebrew poetry is not marked by rhyme, but by a regularity of rhythm. It resembles modern free verse and is likewise unhampered by artificial attempts to devise a rhyming scheme. The poet is free to express himself naturally.

When the King James Version was made, Old Testament scholars lacked the knowledge necessary to distinguish Hebrew prose from poetry. More recent discoveries now make this possible in most places. Some modern translations incorporate the literary character of Jeremiah's oracles. Many scholars have contended that he used poetry exclusively, and that the prose sections have been added by later editors, but such a claim is without proper proof. At times

² H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Cross in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press), p. 121).

³ Adam C. Welch, *Jeremiah, His Time and His Work* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 1.

Jeremiah's lyric poetry characterizes his most stirring passages.

3. *The Life of Jeremiah*

Jeremiah was firmly rooted in the times in which he lived. Born in Anathoth of the priestly line of Abiathar (of the priestly clan of Eli from Shiloh, 1 Sam. 22:20), who had been removed from authority in Judah by Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 1:28 to 2:26) due to his disloyalty to David, he was not likely to have escaped seeing every flaw in the Zadokite form of worship in Jerusalem. His home town was only three miles from the capital city, yet it was in northern Israelite territory, and decidedly rural in its way of life. The lad grew up loving the simple ways of life, in an atmosphere of culture and devotion.

In 626 B.C. he was called to preach. How old he was at the time is not known. The descriptive word he uses for himself ("a child") can be used of anyone from age one to age forty, but properly means a youth. A safe estimate would be that he was around twenty years old. Thus he would have been approximately sixty when Jerusalem fell in 587. His earlier preaching, found in chapters 1-6, seems to have culminated in a preaching tour urging the people to heed the word of God found in the rediscovered book of Deuteronomy (11:1 ff.). This book, which emphasized exclusive public worship at the Jerusalem Temple, must have been received with hostility in Anathoth, where the Abiathar priests continued to function independently of Jerusalem. This probably explains the attempt of the men of Anathoth to kill Jeremiah (11:18-23). They considered him a traitor to the family traditions. Their attack upon him was Jeremiah's first taste of persecution. He was reminded that this was only a prelude to the coming struggles (12:5).

Strangely, there are no prophecies from Jeremiah that can be placed with certainty in the period from the rediscovery of the law to the death of Josiah (622-609). No doubt he was preaching and some of his oracles were preserved, but they cannot be isolated. In fact, it must be admitted that he was at least in semiretirement. Evidently this was due to the nature of Josiah's reforms. The great king had been busy bringing about changes in the direction desired by the prophet. There was little for him to criticize in Josiah, in contrast to the kings that followed. In one place Jeremiah implied, however, that he had doubts about the sincerity of the people as they carried out Josiah's proclamations: "And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly"

(Jer. 3:10). Here Jeremiah admitted that there had been a turning to God, but more in outward form than inward consecration. The dubious nature of the reform in Judah was such that apparently Jeremiah took a cautious attitude toward the entire situation. He would wait and see, but what he saw now was not encouraging.

With the death of Josiah, however, Jeremiah returned to an active ministry. He saw nothing in Jehoiakim to admire and became quite certain that his policies would lead to the ruin of Judah. He began openly to attack the sins of the people. In his famous Temple Sermon (chap. 7) he ridiculed their superstitious trust in the Temple and predicted its destruction as well as captivity for the whole nation. Chapter 26 tells the story of the people's reaction to the sermon. Jeremiah narrowly escaped with his life. Perhaps Pashur's putting Jeremiah in the stocks followed soon after (chap. 20).

After this, the prophet was forbidden by Jehoiakim to preach in public. He was "shut up," he told Baruch, whom he had summoned to be his scribe. Apparently this does not mean that he was physically restrained but rather that he was forbidden access to the Temple area (36:1 ff.). Baruch was called in because Jeremiah wanted all his prophecies of the preceding years written down and read before all the people. Perhaps when they heard the warning of God, they would repent before it was too late. The reading of the prophecies caused great concern among the people and certain of the nobles. In an unforgettable scene, however, Jehoiakim burned the prophet's writings in an open fire. Promptly Jeremiah re-dictated the words to Baruch.

It was during this period that Jeremiah went through devastating personal agony. It seemed that he was one against a whole world. He was forbidden to marry (16:1 ff.). No one would heed his message, particularly the king. Hate was returned for his love (18:18 ff.). He was tempted to quit trying, but could not escape his responsibility (20:9).

When Zedekiah came to the throne, he had an ear for the prophet and secretly respected him (38:14 ff.). Yet Jeremiah fared worse during his reign than at any previous time. This was due to Zedekiah's inability to stand by his convictions. He felt powerless to keep his nobles from persecuting Jeremiah for what they believed to be treason. In the hour of crisis, when the country was trying to make its last stand, Jeremiah was openly advocating surrender to Nebuchadnezzar as the only possible hope. He was weakening the defenders'

will to fight. When Jeremiah, certain that his word was rejected, attempted to leave the doomed city of Jerusalem, he was falsely accused of deserting to the Babylonians (37:11 ff.). This was a natural suspicion, since he had been advocating turning Jerusalem over to them. Beaten and disheartened, he was thrown into a dungeon to die. Zedekiah intervened and took him out of prison and saved him. Allowed to spend his confinement in the court of the guard, he was guaranteed bread as long as the supply lasted.

Jeremiah's enemies would have none of this. The sight of him still alive was a reminder of his counsel of surrender. They demanded of Zedekiah that he turn Jeremiah over to them. Reluctantly he acceded to their demand (38:5). When they came upon Jeremiah, he was lowered into a dungeon whose floor was filthy mire. Given no food or water, he was doomed. This time, however, an Ethiopian eunuch pleaded with Zedekiah for Jeremiah, and strengthened the king's own will (Jer. 38:7-13). Tenderly the eunuch raised Jeremiah to safety and returned him to the court of the prison, where he remained until Jerusalem fell. God moves in mysterious ways to protect his own.

Nebuchadnezzar's general, Nebuzaradan, took Jeremiah along with other prisoners in chains as far as Ramah. When Jeremiah was recognized, the Chaldean offered him his choice of going to Babylon to enjoy the bounty of the king or remaining in Judah. Before Jeremiah could answer, the Chaldean saw at once that the prophet had no love for the Babylonians. He could read in Jeremiah's eyes that he was no traitor: "Go back also to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon hath made governor over the, cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people" (40:5).

It is apparent that Jeremiah was so grief-stricken over the tragic fulfilment of his prophecies that he was incapable of making a decision. Nebuzaradan made it for him, as he perceived Jeremiah's basic inclination. The great prophet had found no satisfaction in the verification of his predictions. There was nothing of the "I told you so" in his attitude. What he had dreaded had come upon them, and it was more dreadful than even he had imagined.

The quiet days with Gedaliah, who was of the family that had befriended Jeremiah (26:24), were the most peaceful ones of his life. It was during this period that he dreamed of the future glory of the people of God (chaps. 30-31). All too soon, however, the peace was over. How long Gedaliah ruled, we do not know, but probably not more than a few months. Being an honest

man, Gedaliah could not believe in the intricacies of court intrigue. He was slain by a trusted friend, Ishmael, who in turn was routed by Johanan. The little remnant of the Jews who gathered about him were in a strait. Should they remain in Judah and risk the ire of Babylon, who might misinterpret the whole affair and execute one and all over this new act of violence? Or should they flee to Egypt and leave the land without a responsible remnant of true believers?

In their perplexity they called upon Jeremiah, secretly hoping that he would confirm their inclination, which was to flee into Egypt. Word from God was long in coming; in fact, it was ten days before Jeremiah was sure: They should remain in Judah. God would protect them from Babylon (42:7 ff.). This was not what the people wanted to hear. They accused Jeremiah of getting his word from Baruch, not from the Lord. By force he was taken with them into Egypt, for although they did not heed him, they still valued his counsel. Perhaps like some moderns, they felt they had paid some penance already when they listened to his condemnation of their behavior.

When Jeremiah arrived in Egypt, with Baruch still by his side, we have our last glimpse of him, still boldly condemning the exiles for their worship of heathen gods and their faithlessness to the God of their fathers. Tradition says he died in Egypt, among the nations to whom he was called to preach, faithful to the end.

III. THE BOOK

The date and place of the writing has been in question, however, Jeremiah is mostly unquestioned as to its author. Most of Jeremiah's prophecies were given in Jerusalem during the reign of Judah's last five kings. The remaining part of Jeremiah was recorded by his secretary, Baruch, at Mizpah during the first five years of Nebuchadnezzar's captivity, then at his concluding years in Taphanhes, Egypt. It is probable that Baruch survived Jeremiah and wrote chapter 52 as a conclusion after the restoration of Jehoiachin in 563 B.C.

The times in which Jeremiah lived and the kind of man whom God called to preach to the crisis, have been examined. Now we can gain some insight into the nature of the book in which is preserved what is known about the prophet. Only as a person knows something of the book can he interpret properly what it has to say about Jeremiah.

1. *The Seemingly Chaos of the Chronology*

Although more is known about Jeremiah than any other prophet because of the faithfulness of the scribe Baruch, yet upon a cursory reading, the book seems almost a hopeless jumble of unrelated prophecies. For instance, chapter 21 is dated during the reign of Zedekiah, while chapter 25 is dated during the reign of Jehoiakim. Chapters 27 and 28 are also from Zedekiah's reign, while 35 and 36 belong to the reign of Jehoiakim. The Hebrew exiles in Babylonia are comforted in a passage (31:10 ff.) that appears long before the one where the prediction of the exile is made to Jehoiakim (chap. 36). These are but a few examples of the chronological confusion that confronts the English reader.

What is the explanation of this strange state of affairs? Other prophets such as Ezekiel write in a chronological presentation. Jeremiah was the only one of the prophets who had a personal secretary. One would therefore expect that of all the prophets his career would be the most carefully recorded. Yet the opposite seems true. Several attempts have been made to answer this condition:

Some have suggested this was Baruch's contribution to the Biblical record.

Dr. Fred M. Wood suggests the materials found in the book of Jeremiah must have circulated in the form of separate scrolls, each of which contained his teachings upon certain subjects. The arrangement, therefore, is not chronological, but topical. These various scrolls have been combined to form the present book. Between the various scrolls have been inserted a number of stories from the life of Jeremiah. Proceeding upon this premise, seven major collections are found in the book.

I. The Earlier Prophecies of Jeremiah (chaps. 1-6, delivered primarily before 622 B.C.)

II. False and True Wisdom (8:4 to 10:25)

III. Pessimistic Messages (chaps. 11-20)

IV. Polemics Against Kings and Prophets (chaps. 22-29)

V. Passages of Hope (chaps. 30-33)

VI. Historical Section (chronologically arranged from the siege of Jerusalem through the flight into Egypt, chaps. 37-44)

VII. Foreign Prophecies (chaps. 46-51)

Between the first and second scrolls, Jeremiah's famous Temple Sermon has been inserted (chap. 7), and between scrolls three and four a story of Jeremiah's advice during the siege of Jerusalem appears (chap. 21). Connecting collections five and six are three

narratives dealing with Israel's reception of the word of God (chaps. 34-36). The story of Jeremiah's personal counsel to Baruch joins the historical section to the foreign prophecies (chap. 45), and a historical appendix is added as the last chapter (chap. 52). Seen in this light, the book of Jeremiah is definitely carefully put together. It is the attempt to arrange it chronologically that produces confusion.⁴

Dr. Charles H. Dyer of Dallas Theological Seminary, gives the following assessment and chart (at the end of the chapter) which shows his placement of the prophecies in their proper chronological order:

A major difficulty is trying to determine how the various prophecies in the Book of Jeremiah were compiled. Many scholars feel that the book is an anthology of selected sayings from Jeremiah (or his disciples) that were later collected and arranged, often rather haphazardly. Some deny that a purposeful order can be (or should be) determined in the text.

The chart "The Dating of Jeremiah's Prophecies" shows how his prophecies are arranged chronologically. Three observations may be made.

(1). Obviously there is no chronological consistency. Unlike Ezekiel, whose prophecies are arranged in chronological order, Jeremiah often placed prophecies together that are dated years apart.

(2). Jeremiah's messages were given during times of stress, upheaval, and need. Chapters 1-6 and 11-12 correspond roughly to the time of King Josiah's reforms. The next major burst of prophetic activity (chaps. 7-10; 14-20; 22:1-19; 26) came when Nebuchadnezzar rose to power. The rest of Jeremiah's prophecies came at the time of the first deportation to Babylon, the second deportation to Babylon, the secret plot to rebel against Babylon, and the final siege and deportation to Babylon. Chapter 52 was written at a later date.

(3). The book itself gives evidence of multiple stages of growth. That is, Jeremiah, at different stages of his ministry, collected his prophecies and rearranged them in a definite pattern (cf. 25:13; 30:2; 36:2, 32). Jeremiah could have completed the final form of chapters 1-51 after he was taken hostage to Egypt (cf. 51:64). But what about chapter 52? Jeremiah 52, nearly identical to 2 Kings 24:18-25:30, was written sometime after 561 B.C. when King

⁴ Fred M. Wood, "A Chronological Reconstruction of the Life and Prophecies of Jeremiah." Unpublished doctoral thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1948.

Jehoiachin was released from prison in Babylon Jer. 52:31). Apparently this last chapter was appended to Jeremiah's prophecies by the same writer who compiled the Book of Kings. The chapter was added to show that Jeremiah's words of judgment had been fulfilled and that Jehoiachin's release foreshadowed God's promises of restoration and blessing.⁵

2. *The History of the Book*

From chapter 36 it must be concluded that the previous messages of Jeremiah remained in oral form from 626 until 605 B.C. With chapter 36 we have the first actual recording of Jeremiah's prophecy. It is due to the Holy Spirit's inspiration that Jeremiah could reproduce from memory what he had said during this period. Likely, as he recorded he also reinterpreted some of his older sayings. When this copy was burned by Jehoiakim, it was a simple matter to record the words again, but to them were added "many like words" (36:32). Chapters 1-25 are the result of this second recording, although they have been editorially rearranged. Within them have been inserted the "Confessions of Jeremiah," passages which reveal the inner life of the prophet, preserved by his faithful biographer, Baruch. Possibly, the other sections of the book were added later as the result of the Jerusalem scribe's constant attendance upon the prophet. After Jeremiah died, the book went through its final editing, as did most of the Old Testament books.

Evidence of the difficulties of translation of the text is to be found in a comparison of the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. The Greek Septuagint (translated between 250-100 B.C.) differs considerably from the traditional Hebrew Massoretic text. In fact, one eighth of the Hebrew text does not appear in the Septuagint. Even where the same passages occur, the sense is often different. These differences are variously explained: The Greek Septuagint does not attempt to translate the received Hebrew text literally; the manuscripts were often illegible; many errors were unconscious mistakes of the copyists; and some changes were intentional. The absence of so many passages in the Septuagint that appear in the Hebrew is presumed ably due to the fact that the Septuagint translators did not have access to the full text as found in the Massoretic text.

Regardless of the seemingly chronological problems, the many quotes of Jeremiah by Jesus and the New

Testament writers is ample proof that what we have from the Massoretic text is God preserved.

Considerable light may have been thrown upon these mysterious and seemingly un-edifying passages of the prophets by recent discoveries in Egypt and elsewhere. The Execration Texts "illustrate how the Pharaoh sought to bring magical powers to bear on his enemies, actual or potential. In the first series, imprecations against various foes were inscribed on jars and bowls, which were then smashed-thus making the imprecation effective."⁶ Although the Hebrew prophets did not employ the art of black magic, it is likely that there was some regular place in their sacred festival where a prophet would pronounce the wrath of Yahweh upon the enemies of Israel. This may have been accompanied by some symbolic act. Jeremiah's breaking of the vessel, which represented Judah (chap. 19), strongly resembles the practice revealed in the Execration Texts. Indeed, the inaugural sermon of Amos (Amos 1-2) takes on more meaning if he was expected to deliver such tirades against the heathen for the occasion (1:5), and then suddenly broke the pattern as he included Israel among the objects of divine wrath.

Such oracles of wrath upon Israel's enemies may bring little edification to a modern reader, since he has not felt the brunt of the hostilities of such foes. Yet they formed a continuing part of the Hebrew view of history. Their God would triumph over all the enemies of his people. The Christian of today finds his comfort as he reads these ancient prophecies in the reassurance that the present enemies of the true faith will meet a like fate. It is popular today to preach concerning the divine wrath upon the sins of America, but it should not be forgotten that nations that openly defy God are due an even worse fate.

The foreign prophecies of Jeremiah, which appear in the English texts as chapters 46-51, in the Septuagint are found after verse 13 of chapter 25. How could this have happened? The only sensible explanation is that the translators of the Septuagint were using a Hebrew text that was different from the Massoretic that is used today. Apparently the present Massoretic Hebrew text has been derived from still earlier manuscripts than the Septuagint. Which is more faithful to the original? Comparative studies of the two basic versions outside of the book of Jeremiah, as well as the evidence of the

⁵ Charles H. Dyer, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* Colorado Springs, CO.: Chariot Victor Publishing., O.T. Comm., pp. 1123-1124.

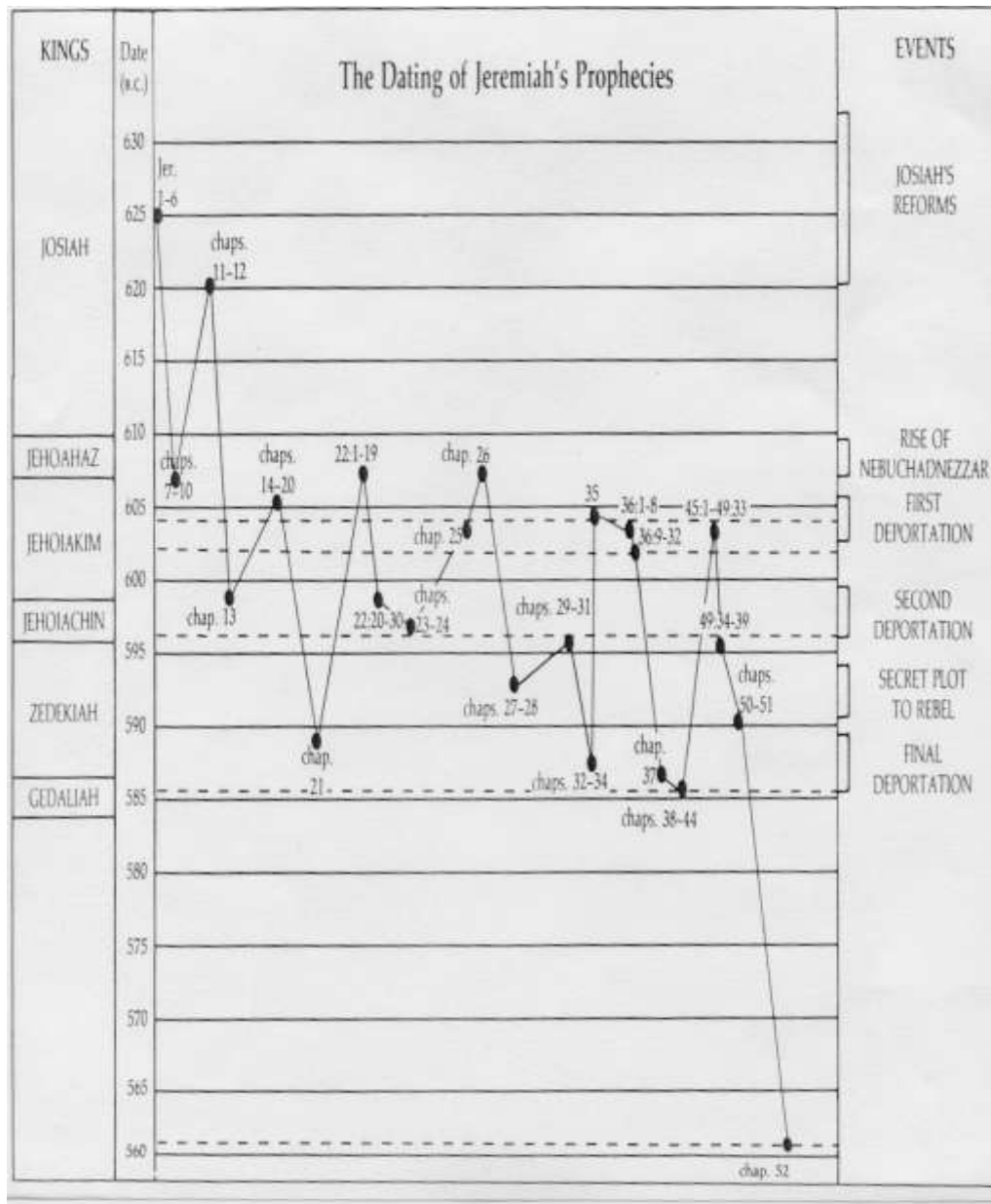
⁶ John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press. Copyright 1959 by W. L. Jenkins), pp. 47-48.

Dead Sea Scrolls, would favor the Massoretic text upon which our English translations are based.

When one realizes the many hands through which the book of Jeremiah has passed in its compilation and transmission, he marvels at the remarkable fidelity of its record. It could be only through the guidance of our Lord that the books of the Old Testament were preserved over long centuries of editing and copying. In the book of Jeremiah not only the faith of the pro-

phet himself is found, but also that of the devout community of saints who compiled and preserved it. Thus in every book of the Old Testament God has chosen to speak both through an individual and the continuing community to which he belonged, which in the infinite grace of God now includes ourselves. As the teachings of the book are applied today, the reader becomes a part of the prophet's lengthened shadow.

(Taken from THE BIBLE KNOWLEDGE COMMENTARY – NEW TESTAMENT, page 1120)



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