



Jeremiah: Torn Down to Build Up

A Bible Study with the Francis Asbury Society

SESSION 1

Introduction

Historical Setting

Date: ca. 628–585 BC

Situation:

- The northern kingdom (Israel) finally fell to Assyrian in 722 BC.
- Judah did not fall at the same time because of Yahweh's response to the revival led by the Judean king, Hezekiah (726 – 696)
- But Hezekiah was followed by Manasseh, his son, Judah's worst king (696–642). His sins, including the grosser forms of idolatry, became ingrained in Judah.
- Manasseh's son, Amon, reigned only two years before being assassinated. He was replaced by his seven-year-old son, Josiah 640 - 609.
- Josiah, deeply influenced by the book of Deuteronomy, which was found during a renovation of the Temple, purged the country of his grandfather's idols.
- But there is no evidence that the people were genuinely revived, for as soon as Josiah died, tragically, they went right back to Manasseh's sins.
- The people were encouraged in this by Josiah's three sons who ruled in succession after him:
 - Jehoahaz (609, three months)
 - Jehoiakim (609–598)
 - Jehoiachin (598, three months)
 - Zedekiah (597–586)

Political

- Assyria (northern Iraq) was dominant from about 930 until about 630 BC.
- But a coalition of Babylon (southern Iraq) and the Medes, a warrior tribe from the mountains of northwest Iran, began to cut Assyria down after 630. By 609, they had captured all the Assyrian cities and totally destroyed the once mighty Assyrian army.
- In 605, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, consolidated his hold on the southern (best) part of the former Assyrian empire, including Judah.
- Jehoiakim, who had been a vassal of Egypt since 609, changed horses and became subject to Babylon. But in 601, when Babylon suffered a setback on the border of Egypt, he revolted.
- Eventually Babylon recovered, besieged Jerusalem, and Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin surrendered and was taken captive to Babylon.
- Zedekiah was put on the throne by the Babylonians. He seems to have had no principles but was totally governed by popular opinion.
- He revolted in 588, and the city fell to the Babylonians after an 18-month siege. The temple was burned, and the city walls were dismantled.

- Rebels assassinated the Babylonian-appointed governor and fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them.

The Book

- The material is not arranged either chronologically or by content.
- Furthermore, the Septuagint version is about 1/7 shorter than the Hebrew version, and it shows some different ordering (especially the oracles against the nations: chapters 46–51 in Hebrew; 26–31 in Greek [and not in the same order]).
- This suggests that there may have been differing collections of Jeremiah’s words circulating around Jerusalem at the time of the city’s fall and that one collection was taken to Babylon and another to Egypt (where the Septuagint was ultimately produced).
- So we have several themes being repeated throughout the book, and this repetition is one aspect of the book’s power.
- Some of these themes¹ are:
 - The broken covenant
 - Idolatry
 - False prophecy
 - Persecution of the true prophet
 - Cowardly, arrogant kings
 - Oppression of the poor
 - Babylon as God’s Instrument
- We know more about Jeremiah’s experience than we do any other writing prophet—not only his outer experiences but his inner ones as well. We see a man who can hardly be called “well-balanced.” Very possibly today he would be judged to be emotionally ill. The point is that God can use anyone, *and* that serving God is not necessarily the way to what society calls emotional health.
- Roughly in the center of the book are four chapters (30–33) that speak of God’s redemptive purpose in the destruction that is going to befall Judah. He only tears down so that he can build up again. This suggests the idea of a wheel with the outer rim being the broken old covenant and the hub, the promised new covenant.
- We can think of the first part of the book in roughly ten-chapter segments, with the remainder in four-to-seven-chapter blocks.

1–10	Judah’s sins
11–20	Jeremiah’s suffering
21–29	Jeremiah’s confrontations
30–33	The New Covenant
34–38	Faithless kings
39–45	The Destruction of Jerusalem
46–51	Oracles against the nations
52	Excerpt from the Book of Kings on the destruction

¹ If you keep a notebook for the study, you might want to set aside a page for each of these themes, and additional ones, and record on each page the references where that material appears.