

Jeremiah

A Character Study of God's Prophet

Introduction:

The prophet Jeremiah began prophesying during the thirteenth year of Josiah, king of Judah (Jer. 1:1-2; 25:1-3) and continued through the governorship of Gedaliah (Jer. 40) (a total of ~ 42 years). He was the son of Hilkiah (Jer. 1:1) and had an uncle named Shallum and cousin named Hanamel (Jer. 32:6). As a prophet of God, he served as the Lord's spokesman (Jer. 1:7-10). Jeremiah has been referred by some as the 'weeping prophet' in relationship to his deep emotional feelings over his brethren's fall from God's grace (Jer. 14:17; Lam. 2:11; 3:48-49). There were times in Jeremiah's life that he felt despondent and unable to continue God's work (Jer. 15:10) yet over all he was a man of God who could not hold the Lord's words within (Jer. 20:7-9). The book of Jeremiah is a historical account of Judah's state of sin and a prophet who exposes those sins that they may return unto the Lord. To change the people's minds from a state of sin to repentance involved many heartaches on the part of the prophet and the people. The book of Lamentations illustrates the success of Jeremiah's fiery preaching and condemnation in that in the end the people acknowledge their sins and repent (cf. Lam. 1:18, 20; 3:42; 5:16).

I. The work of Jeremiah:

A. Change the state of Judah's sinful thinking:

1. Judah considered themselves innocent in relation to violating the Lord's commandments (Jer. 2:33-35; 16:10).
2. Judah considered their worship acceptable (Jer. 6:19-20; 11:15; 14:11-12; 26:2).
3. Thought of themselves as wise (Jer. 8:8; 18:12).
4. Do you see a correlation today? We live in the same type of times!

B. Judah's sin:

1. Did not fear God (Jer. 5:22-24)
2. Rebellion (Jer. 5:31; 6:16)
3. No knowledge of God's word (Jer. 8:7)
4. Given to covetousness and false teaching (Jer. 8:10; 9:3; 13:25).
5. Liars (Jer. 9:1-3)
6. Deceitful (9:4-6)
7. unwilling to repent (Jer. 8:6)
8. Practiced idolatry (16:10-11)
9. Did not keep the Sabbath day holy (Jer. 17:19ff)
10. Offered their sons as sacrifices to Baal (Jer. 19:5)
11. Violated the Hebrew slave laws (Jer. 34:18ff).

C. God's work for Jeremiah:

1. Cause Judah to "acknowledge" their sins (Jer. 3:13, 25; 13:16).
2. Cause Judah to hear, seek, stand, and obey divine truth (Jer. 5:1; 6:16; 7:21-24; 13:10, 17; 26:13).
3. Cause Judah to "amend" and "repent" of their sinful ways (Jer. 18:8, 11; 25:5; 26:13).
4. God desired His people to be happy (Jer. 33:10-13); however, this would only come through much sorrow and seventy years of Babylonian servitude (Jer. 25:10-11).

II. Jeremiah does the work of God:

- #### A. The Lord tells Jeremiah to preach (Jer. 2:1; 7:1-2; 11:1ff) and not hold back a word of condemnation against Judah (Jer. 26:2).

- B. Jehovah would make Jeremiah's words like a fire and the people as fuel to consume (Jer. 5:14).
- C. Jeremiah illustrated great courage in that he continued to preach the message of divine doom even though he knew the awful consequences (Jer. 26:12-15).
- D. Jeremiah illustrated the spirit of Jesus by preaching without fear or favor of men. Jeremiah publicly denounced the false doctrines of both the world's prophets and the prophets of Judah as lies (Jer. 27:9-10, 15, 16). Jesus was seen as a modern day Jeremiah for this same reason (cf. Matt. 16:13ff). When the Lord preached, he exposed man's sins (Jn. 7:7). The world hated him for doing so (Jn. 17:17) and the Lord said that the same would be the fate of every man and woman who so preached (Jn. 15:18ff).

III. The people's response to Jeremiah's work:

- A. Gave no heed to God's warnings though Jeremiah (Jer. 19:14-15; 25:1-3).
- B. Plotted against by his own home town (Jer. 11:18ff) and those of Judah in general (Jer. 18:18).
- C. Jeremiah was rejected by those of his own house (Jer. 12:6).
- D. Beaten by the elders and chief priests (Jer. 20:1-2; 35:15).
- E. Captured and sentenced to death for his depressing words (Jer. 26:8ff).
- F. Thrown in prison (Jer. 32:1-5; 37:15)
- G. His message was one of doom that irritated the princes moving them to capture and toss him into a miry pit (Jer. 38:1-6).
- H. Lastly, the people respond to Jeremiah's words by referring to him as a false teacher (Jer. 43:1-3).

IV. A closer look at Jeremiah (Jeremiah's character):

- A. The Lord and His prophet were not always on the same page regarding the impending punishment of Judah. Time and time again the Lord had explained to Jeremiah that it was Judah's sins that had caused their calamity. Jeremiah; however, continued to pray and plead with the Lord to turn away his wrath from the people. Chapter's 14 and 15 is a conversation between Jeremiah and Jehovah that leads to the Lord calling upon Jeremiah to repent for his sinful attitude (Jer. 15:19).
 - 1. The Lord begins with the facts. Judah's land and people will be punished (14:1-6). Jeremiah responds by accusing God of not caring for His people and being as a sojourner in a land that only camps and leaves (Jer. 14:7ff). The Lord responds by telling Jeremiah not to pray for a people who worship Him in vain (Jer. 14:10ff). Again, Jeremiah tells the Lord that it is the prophet and priest's fault that the people are in the state of mind they are in (14:13ff). Jehovah's answer to this quibble of Jeremiah's teaches us much about individual accountability. The Lord tells Jeremiah that false prophet, priest, and deluded people will suffer calamity due to their rejection of His Word (Jer. 14:18).
 - 2. Again, Jeremiah responds to the Lord asking Him if He hates His people. The Lord's anger seems to be kindled as He is weary with Jeremiah's pleas for a sinful people. The Lord proclaims that even if "*Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind would not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth*" (Jer. 15:1). The time of God's longsuffering and patience with His people had ended for the sins of Manasseh (Jer. 15:4-6).
 - 3. Lastly, Jeremiah seems to show a lack of faith in the Lord when he complains about his suffering at the hands of evil men to the Lord (15:11, 15-18). The Lord replies that Jeremiah has sinned and calls upon the prophet to repent (15:19). Such repentance will restore their fellowship and the Lord promises to protect Jeremiah from his enemies.

- B. There were times when Jeremiah was sorely bothered by the consequences of his fiery preaching (Jer. 15:10).
- C. A metamorphosis occurs in the attitude of Jeremiah from chapters 15 to 18:18-23. The prophet now realizes that the only way to change Judah was to allow Jehovah God's fierce anger and wrath to be poured out upon them that some (a remnant) would come out of the ordeal with a more spiritual mind.
- D. The whole process of correction broke Jeremiah's heart; however, he now understood that it was necessary (Jer. 23:9).

Conclusion and application:

The Christian has a work to do today as did the prophets of old. Our work may best be summed up by the words of Jesus when asked what the greatest commandment is in Matthew 22:34-36 (i.e., love). We are a people of love yet that love is not always reciprocated. Neither is our love always understood by those who walk after their own council in this life. We must tell sinners what they need to hear rather than what they may want to hear (cf. Eph. 5:11). Like Jeremiah, we will suffer for doing so (cf. Jn. 7:7; 15:17ff) because this is the appointment every Christian has in life (I Thess. 3:3; II Tim. 3:12). We are caused to rejoice over the repentance because of our work with some yet we are filled with sorrow at the persecution of others. Jeremiah grew in strength because of his trials and so must you and I (cf. Heb. 5:8; 12:1-10).