



Jeremiah 19:11

JEREMIAH

Background File

Jeremiah was “only a boy” (1:6) when God called him to be a prophet in 626 B.C.E. About twenty years later he started to put his earlier and current sermons in writing. When Jeremiah died about 586 B.C.E., his secretary, Baruch, retold some of Jeremiah’s sermons. Baruch also wrote some biographical information (chapters 26–45). Someone else wrote the oracles (messages from God) against the nations found in chapters 46–51. Yet another person wrote the final chapter.

What’s the Story?

The first three verses of the book set the historical stage for Jeremiah’s prophecy. Jeremiah was “only a boy” (no one knows exactly how old he was) when God called him to be a prophet, to speak God’s messages. Throughout his life, much of the Middle East (an area that included Egypt, Israel/Judah, Syria, Assyria, and Babylonia) was at war (see Map 9, p. 2106). In 640 B.C.E., Josiah became king of Judah. Josiah was only eight years old. He ruled until Neco II (the pharaoh of Egypt) killed him in 609 B.C.E. Pharaoh Neco had come north to help the Assyrians fight against the Babylonians.

Then Josiah’s son, Jehoahaz, became king. He lasted only three months. Pharaoh Neco took him to Egypt and installed as king another son of Josiah, named Jehoiakim. While Jehoiakim was king, Babylon defeated Egypt and Assyria in the Battle at Carchemish in Syria. This battle took place in 605 B.C.E. Babylon’s victory ended Assyrian and Egyptian power. Control over the little country of Judah changed from Egypt to Babylon.

Eventually the Babylonian king Nebuchadrezzar made Jehoiachin king. Jehoiachin was Jehoiakim’s son. Only a few months later (597 B.C.E.), Nebuchadrezzar forced Jehoiachin and some of Jerusalem’s leading citizens to leave Judah and live in exile in Babylonia. Nebuchadrezzar named a new king. He chose Jehoiachin’s uncle Mattaniah (another son of Josiah). Nebuchadrezzar gave him a new name, Zedekiah. Ten years later, in 587, Zedekiah rebelled. Nebuchadrezzar responded by destroying Jerusalem and the temple of the LORD. He also sent more people into exile.

In ten years (597–587 B.C.E.) the Babylonian king had destroyed three traditions that helped the people of Jerusalem believe God was with them. First, Nebuchadrezzar destroyed the kingly succession that God had promised to David four hundred years earlier (2 Sam 7:1–14). Second, Nebuchadrezzar

destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, the center of Israel's worship life that Solomon had built in 960 B.C.E. Third, Nebuchadrezzar destroyed the belief that Jerusalem was invincible. Ever since the time of David (about 1000) the people believed no one could conquer Jerusalem. Now the people wondered if God was as faithful and powerful as they had thought.

What's the Message?

The situation in which Jeremiah prophesied—that is, spoke God's messages—was one of disaster and uncertainty. God called Jeremiah “to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow” (1:10). Most of Jeremiah's sermons announce the destruction as God's doing—on the people of Jerusalem (chapters 2-29) and on the other nations around Israel and Judah (46-51). His prophecies explain that this chaos was God's divine judgment on the people of Judah because they were unfaithful to God. Most of Jeremiah's listeners thought he was a heretic who opposed the popular religious understandings and practices of the day. Some people thought he was insane. His friends and family stayed away. Religious leaders called for his death. Jeremiah was depressed, angry, and insecure. But he endured all of the persecution and rejection. From “only a boy” through adulthood—about forty years—Jeremiah faithfully preached God's word.

The word of God is why we study the book of Jeremiah. We might feel sorry for the conflicted prophet and even empathize with him. Jeremiah would have us listen to God's word. That word shows the LORD's heartbreak over the unfaithfulness of the chosen people. Jeremiah often called the people God's spouse and children and threatened divorce and disinheritance. He delivered this message in hopes of bringing people back to the waiting arms of God. The people's refusal led to divine judgment. By accomplishing the promised judgment, God's word revealed the power to deliver another promise: to restore the people. The God who judges is the only one who can save.

Christians find comfort in this word. The impact of God's word on us is perhaps not so globally evident as the fates and fortunes of biblical Israel. God's people, the church, are not the citizens of any particular nation. We are a family of baptized children residing in many countries around the globe. Yet God knows heartbreak over our sin and separation. At the same time, God continually welcomes us into his loving presence. In that word, the gospel of Jesus Christ, God gives us hope.



1:2 to whom the word of the LORD

came: God spoke words of judgment and comfort through people called prophets. The word *prophet* comes from a Greek word meaning “speak on behalf of.” The Hebrew word for a prophet means “one who is called [for a task].” The call to speak on God's behalf always occurs in specific situations in the life of the people of Israel and Judah.

1 The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin,² to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign.³ It came also in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

Jeremiah's Call and Commission

- 4 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,
5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,