

## Jeremiah's Message

As a prophet, Jeremiah came onto the scene at about ca. 626 B.C. His work spanned the reigns of Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, and he was present at the destruction of

Jerusalem in 586. His work continued when the governor, Gedaliah, was then appointed. When Gedaliah was assassinated, Jeremiah was taken, against his will, to Egypt into exile. The times in which Jeremiah lived and prophesied were the most difficult, and his message was quite unpopular. It is not difficult to see why Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet. He endured much persecution and affliction, which itself foreshadows the suffering Messiah.

Jeremiah speaks directly to Judah during a time that should have been marked by renewed faithfulness. Josiah had initiated great reforms, but they did not last much past Josiah himself. Jeremiah, therefore, called upon the people to repent. They were guilty of being in violation of God's covenant, and if they failed to repent they would suffer the promised judgment, just as Israel in the north had to face so many years before. Even so, Jeremiah still looked ahead to the hope that would be found in the Messiah. In that way, his message matches the other prophets who focused on the same issues. Further, as is typical of the other prophets, Jeremiah looks back to the book of Deuteronomy as



the primary text of the covenant. "Return, O faithless sons," declares the Lord; For I am a master to you..." (3:14). Sadly, they did not return during Jeremiah's lifetime.

One of the unique aspects of Jeremiah is that the book "provides more insight into the prophet himself than does any other prophetic book."\* It is clear that Jeremiah had many fears and suffered much for his work. God tells him up front (1:8-10):

"Do not be afraid of them, For I am with you to deliver you," declares the Lord.

Then the Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me,

"Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.

"See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, To pluck up and to break down, To destroy and to overthrow, To build and to plant." (NASB)

Jeremiah had to be ready to suffer at the hands of those who were unwilling to hear the message of repentance. He is filled with lament over the sins of the people, and his emotional anguish is evident:

"Oh that my head were waters  
And my eyes a fountain of tears,  
That I might weep day and night

For the slain of the daughter of my people!” (9:1)

For all of the indictments laid out against Judah, Jeremiah still looked forward to the days of the Messiah. In one of the most well known messianic passages, Jeremiah points to the New Covenant:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (31:31-34)

The writer of Hebrews quotes from this passage and shows how the new covenant under Christ was in fulfillment of this (Heb. 8:7-13). In the same chapter of Jeremiah, God provides hope:

“Thus says the Lord,  
‘Restrain your voice from weeping  
And your eyes from tears;  
For your work will be rewarded,’ declares the Lord,  
‘And they will return from the land of the enemy.

There is hope for your future,’ declares the Lord,  
‘And your children will return to their own territory’” (vv. 16-17).

Jeremiah thusly looked ahead to the restoration in the land, but even further to the restoration under the Messiah. That said, the book does focus a great deal on the judgment that would first take place. Before they would see any of the restoration promises, they would first experience the loss of the land and their loss of God’s fellowship. Then they would be restored: “For thus says the Lord, ‘When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place’” (29:10). God also promised that Babylon would be judged for her wickedness.

Much more needs to be said about Jeremiah, of course. Through his own personal suffering he preached a message of judgment and repentance. His lessons are still needed today.

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\*Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 147.