

1. What explanation is given here?
2. Do these two explanations conflict? If not, can you explain why not?
3. What do we learn here about how God works out his purposes in history?

Pray: It is often easier to see what God is doing in the world when you look back, particularly in the history of Israel with her unique position as God's people. The conflicts and power struggles going on in the world today may make little sense. Pray for the trouble-spots which are in the news at the moment in the light of what you have learnt from this passage.

Weekend

In this series of studies, we are concentrating on the history of the times in which Jeremiah lived. The book, however, also contains fascinating glimpses of him as a person, particularly his prayers, as he struggles with the task God has given him. Already you have learnt a bit about Jeremiah from chapter 1 - see what else you can learn about him from 11:14 - 12:6 and 20:7-18. (Some other passages you could look at: 7:16-20, 27-34; 8:18 - 9:1; 10:23-25; 14:13-18; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23.)

Notes



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Meeting With God Bible Reading Notes

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4th November 2013

Week 10: The Book of Jeremiah, 1 (A historical study)

Jeremiah was called to be a prophet - someone who spoke God's word at a time when his country, Judah, was relatively prosperous. However, during the forty or so years of his career he saw all that change, and he had the unenviable task of warning the people that God's judgment was going to come in a series of disasters, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem. The book gives us much of his preaching, and also accounts of what happened to the prophet, and his reactions to the events taking place around him.

The Book of Jeremiah can seem confusing, as some of it is arranged topically and some chronologically. Broadly speaking chapters 1-25 are messages from the Lord for Judah and her rulers; 26-45 are events in Jeremiah's life, probably recorded by his secretary, Baruch; 46-51 are prophecies against other nations; and chapter 52 is a postscript describing the fall of Jerusalem.

Day 1. The prophet's call

Jeremiah 1

Read the chapter (preferably more than once), looking out for details of the job Jeremiah was being given.

1:1-3 is the heading of the book, summarizing the extent of Jeremiah's career. Take a sheet of paper and start a time-chart (to which you can add other dates as we go along), so you will be able to see how the events of Jeremiah's life fit together. The 13th year of Josiah's reign was 627 BC and he died in 608 BC. Jehoiakim was king until 597 BC, and the people were taken into exile (verse 3) in 587 BC. (NB - There were two other kings during this time, but they reigned for only three months each - more on this in Study 5.)

The rest of the chapter tells of the events which made Jeremiah realize the Lord was calling him to be a prophet.

1. What can you find out about Jeremiah's character?
2. In what ways does God equip him for his job? What reassurance does he give Jeremiah that he can accomplish the job he is being called to do?
3. How do you think the visions (verses 11-16) helped Jeremiah to understand his job better?

Note: Verses 11-12. The Hebrew has a play on words - the word for 'almond' sounds like the word for 'watching'.

Consider: Jeremiah was reluctant to accept God's call. Was his reluctance justified? Have you ever been in the position of not wanting to do what God has asked you to? What help can you find here for such a situation?

Day 2. National renewal?

2 Kings 22:1-20; 23:1-4, 21-30

When Josiah became king things in Judah were in a sorry state - idol worship and social injustice were common. No doubt this was partly an attempt to win favour with their foreign oppressors, Assyria, by worshipping their gods as well as the Lord. However Assyria was no longer powerful, and Josiah was able to take steps to put things right.

The book which was found in the temple was probably Deuteronomy, or the bulk of it.

1. What practical steps did Josiah take to implement its teaching? (The verses omitted, 23:5-20, contain a detailed description of the destruction of idol worship.)
2. What does the passage say about the results of disobeying God?

Note: 23:26 Manasseh - Josiah's grandfather, an idolater.

3. What are the results of obeying God for Josiah?
4. In what sense are these results of obedience or disobedience true for Christians? (You might find Galatians 6:7-10 helpful.)

Consider: What changes of attitude or action have you made in response to things you have read in the Bible? (You may find it helpful to look back over previous notes, and think about what you learnt.) Pray that you will be able to take God's word as seriously as Josiah did.

Day 3. The temple sermon

Jeremiah 7:1-15

Jeremiah 26 gives an account of how this sermon was preached, and the reactions it provoked (read that too if you have time). It was delivered early in the reign of Jehoiakim (26:1) and so not long after the death of Josiah.

Notes: 7:12. Shiloh was a place where God was worshipped before the temple was built in Jerusalem. It had been destroyed by the Philistines.

7:15. A reference to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, Israel, in the previous century.

From this chapter, and what you read in 2 Kings 22 and 23, think about the effects of Josiah's reforms:

1. What had been achieved?
2. From Jeremiah's denunciations here, where had the reforms fallen short?

It was popularly thought that God would not allow his temple and those who worshipped in it to be destroyed, because of his reputation - if the temple were

destroyed it would be assumed that the god of the conquering nation was more powerful than the Lord. However this reasoning was false - God's reputation could also be damaged by the conduct of his worshippers, as we see here.

Day 4. The potter

Jeremiah 18:1-17

This must be one of the most famous incidents in the book! Like the temple sermon, it comes from the early years of Jehoiakim's reign. A potter at work must have been a familiar sight, and the image here is of a pot which doesn't come out quite as intended, so the potter squashes it back down into a lump of clay, and then makes it into something different.

Read: the passage - more than once - trying to work out how the analogy works. In what sense is the house of Israel like the clay?

1. What are God's plans for his people at that moment? Which alternative applies to them (verses 7-10)?
2. What attitude did the people of Israel take? What specific things mentioned here show their lack of repentance?
3. If the people do not repent, what will be the result? There is a sense in which even in this case Jeremiah sees a future for the nation – God can remake the pot. But how far is this a message of hope, how much is it a solemn warning?
4. The temple sermon showed the dilemma between God's plan of blessing his people and their response (or lack of it) to him. How does this passage help us to understand this problem?

Consider: Israel did not repent, so for them this message was a solemn warning. What would you say to someone in the opposite situation, who feels they have failed God, and there is no hope for them? Pray for any who might be in this state.

Day 5. The international scene

2 Kings 23:29 – 25:12

Read the passage, and fill in the remaining kings on your time-chart.

The international power-struggles described here are amazingly complex! Assyria had been the dominant power, with Egypt as her nearest rival. Her power had waned, however, and Babylon had come on the scene as a strong contender. 23:29 describes an alliance between the former rivals, Egypt and Assyria, against Babylon. Babylon, however, eventually came out on top, leaving Egypt with still a little influence, and Assyria's power virtually non-existent. Judah, as a tiny state caught in the middle of this, was at Babylon's mercy.

We might attribute Judah's downfall to the power struggle going on around her, and to unwise political decisions at home (e.g. 24:1).