

Studies From The Book Of Jeremiah (Part I.)

LESSON 3: Jeremiah, The Man

Readings: Jer 9:1-6; 11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; ch. 20

These passages all relate to the man and his experiences during the reign of Josiah. The lesson will take a different form than normal. During the class we will read as many of these passages as possible. With the reading I might draw attention to the passage context or some specific points that may not be immediately apparent. Please think about the three questions at the bottom and be ready to contribute to the answers at the close of the reading.

R1: 9:1-6

1. Overview: Jeremiah first laments over the coming judgement (1), then anguishes over the wickedness of his nation (2-6).
2. "Oh, that my head were waters, And my eyes a fountain of tears..." (1). A wish on the part of the prophet that his head might become a reservoir of water that he might weep abundantly. He wants to get away from them all and yearns: "Oh, that I had in the wilderness A lodging place for travelers; That I might leave my people, And go from them!" (2)
3. Their tongues are metaphorically spoken of as "bows" ready to shoot lies (3).

R2: 11:18-12:6

Context.

1. It is set against the background of a general conspiracy in which the people deliberately rejected their covenantal obligations (11:9-10).
2. The apostasy is explained in a couple of ways: Either the plotting was so widespread that it appeared to be of an organised character or that those hostile to Josiah's reformation had entered into a formal pact.

A Plot Against Jeremiah's Life (11:18-23).

1. But for the Lord's intervention Jeremiah would not have realised that the open threats had coalesced into schemes to kill him (18-19; cf. 21).
2. Jeremiah takes his cause to Jehovah (20-23).
3. Chapter 12 deals with a complaint against the prosperity of the wicked.

Jeremiah's complaint (12:1-4)

1. He was perplexed to see the wicked prosper (1-2) and the innocent suffer (4). This bewilderment caused him to look to God for answers but not reject Him in despair.
2. Jeremiah does not doubt God's justice but wants it to be executed speedily. Barnes comments concerning "pull them out" that "the original is used (Jer 10:20) of the rending asunder of the cords of the tent."

Jehovah's Answer (12:5-17)

1. God begins in a surprising way - Things are only going to get worse (5-6). He corrects J's impatience using two proverbs:
 - The confrontation with prosperity in wickedness was an ordinary trial, a mere "running with the footmen."
 - "If you fall down in a land of peace, How will you do in the thicket of the Jordan? (NASV)"
 - A warning against treachery in his own family (6).

2. Judah given up to judgement (7-13).

- The reluctance with which this is done (7-9)
- the desolation and misery that will be brought upon the land by the plunderers (10-12).
- A conclusion to 7-12. All the peoples' labours will be ineffective (13).

3. God's plans (14-17).

- Judah's enemies as well as Judah to be uprooted from the land (14).
- After a period of time, they will be restored provided they learn God's ways (15-16). Some see in this the description of conversion to faith in Christ and the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham (Gen 12:3; 22:18).
- However, if they do not obey, they will be utterly destroyed (17).

R3: 15:10-21

Background of text

The passage continues a dialogue with Jehovah beginning 14:1 in which the emphasis shifts from the situation of the people to that of Jeremiah. The beleaguered prophet is here encouraged to continue his work.

Jeremiah's outburst of vexation (10)

He had not lent to or borrowed from any man, such transactions being a constant source of strife. His present situation arose from the faithful discharge of his office.

Jehovah's Answer: A Word of Encouragement (11-14)

1. "The LORD said, Surely I will set you free for [purposes of] good; Surely I will cause the enemy to make supplication to you In a time of disaster and a time of distress" (11 NASV). While the people would go into captivity, Jeremiah would be set free (39:11-14; 40:1-6).
2. Jeremiah was asked the question, "Can a man break iron?" And so, Judah would not be able to resist the overwhelming power from the north.
3. God would cause the wealth of the nation to pass into the hands of their conquerors (13-14).

Jeremiah's plea on his own behalf (15-18)

1. This is a man in bitter grief struggling to deal with the Divine will. He ask that when the time came he should not be carried away with the other captives (15).
2. After recounting his faithful service (16-17), Jeremiah's hopes seem not to have been realised (18).

God's response - an encouraging reply (19-21)

1. In the midst of these doubts J is assured that (19):
 - If he returned either to the Lord or perhaps to the work which he was sometimes tempted to forsake (9:2; 20:7-18) then God would restore him.
 - If he took out the precious from the vile, then he would be as God's mouth.
2. Assurance of protection provided Jeremiah acted as he was encouraged.

R4: 20:1-18

Setting

1. In Jeremiah's last speech, he had prophesied of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem that was to come (19:1-9), followed by a symbolic representation of the totality of this destruction by the smashing of a potter's earthen vessel (19:10-13). From the valley of the son of Hinnom, he returns to the Temple court where he pronounces judgement before the people of Jerusalem and Judah (14-15).

2. This chapter recounts its results. He was beaten and imprisoned. His enemies had previously plotted against him but to this point had done him little bodily harm.

Persecutions and the Message Against the Persecutor (1-6)

1. Pashhur, who was chief officer in the house of Jehovah “struck”, “beat (ESV)” Jeremiah or “had Jeremiah the prophet beaten (NASV)” (2) and put in the stocks.
2. “Magor-missabib. “That is Terror on every side” (ASV marg.)
3. He was among those who had “prophesied lies” (6).

Jeremiah's Bitter Complaint, Followed by an Expression of Confidence in Jehovah (7-13)

1. He felt that he had been “induced” or “deceived (NASV)” into a work that he had not wanted (7a) with the consequences which he then lists (7b-10).
 - He became an object of derision; his constant message being judgement to come (8).
 - Because of these bitter experiences he thought to cease testifying but he could not (9).
 - He was surrounded by people who whispered against him, eagerly waiting for any mistake they could use to his discredit and take their revenge upon him (10).
2. But then his confidence in ultimate victory is renewed as he recalls God’s promises and character (11-13).

His complaint Renewed (14-18)

1. This passage (14ff.), becomes more easily reconciled and reasonable if some time had passed between the feelings expressed here and those set out in 11-13. Jeremiah was torn by a great spiritual struggle and has now sunk into a deep depression.
2. Notice how the regrets concerning his birth have re-surfaced (15:10).

Questions

1. Describe the reaction to Jeremiah's message and the feelings of Jeremiah himself.
2. How was Jeremiah's faith greatly tested by his experiences?
3. How was Jeremiah able to endure? What help did he receive from God? What gave him courage?