

JEREMIAH OVERVIEW – Philip Jensen - 09.03.2011

1. INTRODUCTION

Overall summary:

- What to do when the whole of society is collapsing?
- Because of his response, Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet.

Structure:

- The longest book (52 chapters) except for Psalms
- No sequential chronology – unlike Genesis and the historical books.
- Greek version is 1/7th shorter – our Hebrew has it in full! Qumran had it in both versions.
- No clear structure or headings
- Complex editing (e.g. Ch. 36). Jeremiah's writing is chopped up by Jeremiah, Baruch, his scribes and others.

Study techniques:

- Advise concentrate on the final received version of the text which is acknowledged as Holy Scripture.
- Robert P. Carroll (writer on Jeremiah): “If you are not confused by Jeremiah you haven't understood it!”

Jeremiah for Today:

- Realism and hope in a time of crisis (e.g. as Israel was when being attacked)
- How to be religious and hopeful as well as realistic.
- The potency of lament – it is a book for Lent, (very Jewish like the Psalms)
- The power of promise – (e.g. the New Covenant)

Overall effect:

- Jeremiah is a master communicator
- It is a complex book and a complex portrait of a prophet - can't do it in one reading!
- It is about Jeremiah, but also about how God speaks through him.

Visual aid:

- Rembrandt's C16 portrait of Jeremiah
Blinded King Zedekiah is on the left. Jeremiah's left elbow is on the Bible (possibly open at Jeremiah or Lamentations) – and he is weeping over the state of Jerusalem.

2. THE SETTING OF JEREMIAH

Geographical and Political:

- Jeremiah's home was Anathoth, 7m NE of Jerusalem
- N Kingdom of Israel had been in exile for 100 years
- Judah is in the midst of a game of empires – as a minnow among sharks
 - North – Assyria – decreasing in power
 - East – Babylon – increasing in power
 - South – Egypt – uncertain future
- Babylonia beats Assyria and moves on Judah. What will Egypt do?

Historical:

- Jer 1:1-1:3 [1] The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiyah, 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 Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign.
[3] It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.
- It mentions the three main kings – but there were two others with too short a reign to be mentioned in the introduction!

Chronology:

- 609BC Josiah killed at Megiddo by unwisely fighting Neco II, king of Egypt, who had entered Palestine while trying to bring help to Assyria in its last stand against Babylon. Josiah saw him as a threat to Judah even though Neco promised otherwise (2 Chr. 35).
- 609BC Jehoahaz – reigned 3 months.
- 609BC Jehoiakim.
- 605BC Egypt defeated by Babylonia at Carchemish.
- 598BC Judah attacked by Babylonia
- 597BC Jehoiakim dies
- 597BC Jehoiachin – reigned 3 months and taken into exile in Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. Ezekiel went with him in this first exile.
- 588BC Jerusalem besieged
- 587BC Fall of Jerusalem – second exile.

Terrible time to be prophesying!

3. THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Structure:

- **Ch 1** His call
- **Ch 2-45** His life and message during reigns of Judah's last 5 kings
 - 2-25 The sayings of Jeremiah – largely undated
 - 26-45 Reports about Jeremiah
- **Ch 46-51** Oracles against the nations: even though they had been used by God to discipline Judah.
- **Ch 52** Appendix: the fall of Jerusalem (like the end of Kings).

Chronology:

- **627BC** 1 Jeremiah's call
- **609BC** 7, 26 His Temple sermon – not approved of by Jehoiakim or the priests
- **604BC** 36 Jehoiakim burns Jeremiah's first scroll
- **597BC** 22 Prophecies Jehoiachin will not return. The prophecy of the false prophets
- 28 Hananiah prophesies the return of the exiles – Jeremiah contradicts
- 29 Jeremiah writes to the exiles telling them to stay there and surrender. This makes him very unpopular. (Like suggesting England surrender to the Nazis).
- **588/7BC** 32 Jeremiah buys a field. There is sin and there will be exile but he buys a field as a symbolic act to show that God will bring them back in 70 years.
- 37 Arrested for desertion and put in a water cistern hole
- 38 Helped by Ebed-melech who rescues him.
Tells Zedekiah to surrender
- 39 Jerusalem falls.
- 40 Babylon entrusts Jerusalem to Gedaliah
- 41 Gedaliah murdered.
- 42 Jeremiah taken to Egypt

Kinds of writing in Jeremiah:

- **Oracles** poetry
- **Sermons** prose (e.g. Ch 7). Rather preachy form.
- **Symbolic acts** prose (e.g. Ch 18). The potter.
- **Conflicts** prose. Conflicts with prophets or kings
- **Laments** poetry (e.g. Ch 11-20). Confessional in first person.

Poetry is difficult for modern readers to understand properly
The prose is easier to follow

4. JEREMIAH THE PROPHET

Jer. 1:4-5

[4] Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

[5] "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;

I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

There were different kinds of OT Prophets depending on the times:

- **Early** e.g. Elijah & Elisha – only known by reports of their doings
- **Classical (8C BC)** e.g. Hosea, Amos, Micah – writing prophets
- **Exilic** e.g. Jeremiah (in Jerusalem) and Ezekiel (in Babylon)
- **Post-exilic** e.g. Haggai, Zechariah

Each type faced differing issues:

But all refer to the past, discuss the present and look to the future.

What does a prophet do?:

- **Past** recalls the covenant foundation with God
treats everyone in the nation as within that covenant
- **Present** prophets are preachers and are condemning them for their –
 1. Idolatry (vertical relationship with God)
 2. Social injustice (horizontal relationship with people)Like the balance of the 10 commandments – love for God and for neighbour are inextricably linked.
- **Future** they preach, in light of the visions they have received
 1. of future judgement
 2. of God returning to them if they repent

There is much realism in all this: there will be judgement; there is a hope of return and salvation; times will be bad; there will be deaths; only a remnant will return.

It is a difficult tension because they can't assume that Israel will repent.

Examples from Jeremiah:

- **Past**

Jer 2:5-8

[5] Thus says the LORD: "What wrong did your fathers find in me
that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless?"

[6] They did not say, 'Where is the LORD who brought us up from the land of
Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of
drought and deep darkness, in a land that none passes through, where no man
dwells?' [7] And I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good
things. But when you came in you defiled my land, and made my heritage an
abomination.

Jeremiah wanted the people to call to mind what God had done in the past to get
them to respond to Him with thanks and gratefulness for his grace towards them:
like in Communion when we look back on God's provision and return in
repentance.

[8] The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' Those who handle the law did not know me; the rulers transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after things that do not profit.

In verse 8 he then deals with what specifically went wrong in the past – bad lawyers, rulers and prophets.

- **Present**

Jer 7:3-7

[3] Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will let you dwell in this place. [4] Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.' [5] "For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly execute justice one with another, [6] if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, [7] then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers for ever.

“Thus says the LORD of hosts” is the messenger formula of the prophets
“Amend your ways and your doings” is the vertical relationship/idolatry aspect, but this failure of the religious dimension has led to horizontal problems of social injustice.

- **Future**

Jer 1: 9-10

[9] Then the LORD put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. [10] See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

The proportions here are 66% negative (pluck up, break down, destroy, overthrow) and 33% positive (build, plant). In Jeremiah there are lots of woes, but some positivity!

- a) **Future judgement**

Jer 13:23-27

[23] Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil. [24] I will scatter you like chaff driven by the wind from the desert. [25] This is your lot, the portion I have measured out to you, says the LORD, because you have forgotten me and trusted in lies. [26] I myself will lift up your skirts over your face, and your shame will be seen. [27] I have seen your abominations, your adulteries and neighings, your lewd harlotries, on the hills in the field. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! How long will it be before you are made clean?"

13:23 says that they are very bad and 13:24 is full of pessimism and judgement: but he is a master of images and messages.

- b) **Future salvation**

Jer 23:5-8

[5] "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. [6] In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.' [7] "Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when men shall no longer say, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' [8] but 'As the LORD lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.' Then they shall dwell in their own land."

Jeremiah says that the current kings are useless but God will raise up a righteous branch –this is a shaft of light in the gloom facing Israel.

Lack of chronology in Jeremiah:

- These messages of past, present and future are **not presented chronologically** and are all interwoven – so how are they connected?
- **Jeremiah wants to get repentance** – chronology is not necessarily the key to this
- **Example from Genesis 4.** The story of Cain and Abel is told out of chronological sequence but are used in the message of the growth of sin: the writer uses brotherly sin as a hook to make sin real to the readers.
- **Jeremiah wants to tell us how to live our lives** – in whichever way seems best, which may not be chronologically.

Who wrote Jeremiah?

Opinions vary between some say Jeremiah wrote only a few verses, others he wrote almost all of it but there has been much subsequent editing.

Lack of chronology and concerns over who wrote what are interesting questions – but advise just rely on what we now have is Holy Scripture!

Are there modern prophets?

- **Was Martin Luther King a real prophet?** Could he have truly said, "Thus says the Lord."?
- **OT prophets were speaking to God's people – not to the world.** Notwithstanding the fact that God said to Jeremiah that he had appointed him a prophet to the nations, Jeremiah spoke to God's people (like Jesus being sent for the whole world, but saying he was not sent to the Gentiles).
- **Paul advised testing the spirit of prophecy!**
- **Jeremiah has entered the divine courts and been spoken to by God** – unlike us today.
- **Illumination of already-received scripture for today** could be said to be a prophet's work today. But they are not proclaiming new words from God.

5. JEREMIAH THE PREACHER/COMMUNICATOR

Techniques:

- **Wordplay**

Jer 1:11-12

[11] And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" And I said, "I see a rod of almond. (Heb *shaqed*)" [12] Then the LORD said to me, "You have seen well, for I am watching (Heb *shoqed*)" over my word to perform it."

Similar to Amos's wordplay technique.

- **Repetition**

Jer 50:35-38

[35] "A **sword** (Heb *hereb*)" upon the Chaldeans, says the LORD, and upon the inhabitants of Babylon, and upon her princes and her wise men! [36] A **sword** upon the diviners, that they may become fools! A **sword** upon her warriors, that they may be destroyed! [37] A **sword** upon her horses and upon her chariots, and upon all the foreign troops in her midst, that they may become women! A **sword** upon all her treasures, that they may be plundered! [38] A drought (Heb *horeb*)" upon her waters, that they may be dried up! For it is a land of images, and they are mad over idols.

This is a rhetorical example of repetition with additional wordplay on sword and drought.

- **Chiasmus**

Jer 2:27-28

[27] who say to a tree, 'You are my father,' and to a stone, 'You gave me birth.' For they have turned their back to me, and not their face. But in the **time of their trouble** they say, 'Arise and save us!' [28] But where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them **arise**, if they can **save** you, in your **time of trouble**; for as many as your cities are your gods, O Judah.

Time of trouble, arise and save – repeated in a different order (abc-bca).

- **Hyperbole**

Jer 2:28

[28] But where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you, in your time of trouble; **for as many as your cities are your gods, O Judah.**

Literary exaggeration!

- **Rhetorical questions**

Jer 8:4-5

[4] "You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD: When men fall, do they not rise again? If one **turns away**, does he not **return**? [5] Why then has this people **turned away** in perpetual **backsliding**? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to **return**.

Turn away, return and backsliding are also all derived from the same word – to repent

- **Lists**

Jer 1:18

[18] And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land.

Here we have God making a list of 3 things against 4 things. Repetition rule is the more repetitions, the more important. This is especially true when oral – which Jeremiah's preaching was. Seems OTT in writing – but not in sermons!

- **Metaphor**

Jer 4:30-31

[30] And you, O desolate one, what do you mean that you dress in scarlet, that you deck yourself with ornaments of gold, that you enlarge your eyes with paint? In vain you beautify yourself. Your lovers despise you; they seek your life. [31] For I heard a cry as of a woman in travail, anguish as of one bringing forth her first child, the cry of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands, "Woe is me! I am fainting before murderers."

Here the people and the city are seen as a woman. Metaphor is usually negative, but occasionally is used positively. In Hebrew the word city is feminine: the metaphor is a comment on Zion's behaviour, rather than a comment on women. Israel is going after other gods by dolling herself up. The prophesied end is also realistic – attackers always kill the pregnant women. This is very difficult to take in England when we haven't been invaded in 1,000 years – but it is life. Jeremiah was so into reality – which makes him very hard to take.

- **Sarcasm**

Jer 4:22

[22] "For my people are foolish, they know me not; they are stupid children, they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil, but how to do good they know not."

- **Symbolic acts**

e.g. Jer 18 & 19 – Jeremiah at the potter's house.

6. JEREMIAH AND THE NEW COVENANT

The new covenant:

Jer 31:31-34

[31] "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, [32] not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. [33] But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. [34] And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

- It is not a brand new covenant making the other covenant obsolete
- Covenant is a singular word in the OT – there is only one covenant
- What is new is that it will be written in their hearts
- This is a brand new way of establishing God's covenant with man
- The OT command of "Love God and thy neighbour" is made real and possible with the new covenant of the NT.

STUDY SUGGESTION FOR LENT.

- **A different kind of writing each week**
 - **One chapter maximum!**