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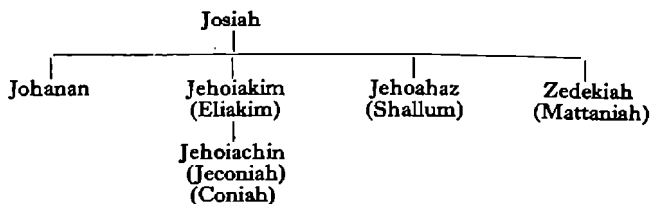
THE PROPHECY OF JEREMIAH

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(Concluding study.)

The last kings of Judah

The following genealogical tree will show the relationship of the last kings of Judah:



On the death of Josiah, Jehoahaz was placed on the throne of Judah by the people but, after three months, was deposed by the king of Egypt and taken to Egypt where he died.

The king of Egypt replaced him by his elder brother Eliakim whose name he changed to Jehoiakim. He reigned for eleven years and was killed by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Jehoiakim was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin but, after three months, was taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. He remained a prisoner for 37 years until released by Evil Merodach and allowed to eat at the king's table.

Zedekiah who succeeded Jehoiachin was the youngest son of Josiah and the uncle of Jehoiachin. He reigned eleven years and was the last reigning monarch of Judah. Jerusalem was besieged during the last eighteen months of his reign when it was eventually captured and destroyed.

Of Johanan nothing is known beyond the reference in 1 Chron. 3:15. He must either have died in infancy or before Josiah's death at the battle of Megiddo.

It is of interest that the Lord Jesus Christ was descended through Josiah, Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin. The middle of these three is not named in Matt., ch.1 where the Lord's genealogy is given in classified form and the captivities are referred to.

What Jeremiah's Messages meant to the People

Jeremiah's messages meant everything to the people of his own time. He warned the people and foretold what would happen in the matter of prospective invasion, and the siege, capture and destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the people. In the early days of his ministry the likelihood of fulfilment must have seemed remote but, as time went on, it became increasingly clear that these things were bound to happen. Then he sent letters to the captives who were already in Babylon exhorting them to remain true to the Lord, to settle down for they would stay in that land for seventy years.

Jeremiah's messages meant everything to the people of the later generation. Daniel (ch. 9) read the prophecy of 70 years captivity and enquired of God whether the end of the captivity were really coming. In the days of Zerubbabel they read his prophecy with new interest and Cyrus, king of Persia, issued his decree allowing the people to return to Jerusalem 'that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished' (Ezra. 1:1) (Jer. 25:12, 13; 29:10).

Jeremiah's messages meant everything concerning the Lord. Daniel (ch. 9:2) read and rejoiced in Jeremiah's ministry and found it to be vital concerning the people. His prayer and enquiry of God resulted in a further revelation to him that God had purposes beyond the immediate return to Jerusalem and opened up to Daniel visions of long distance purposes. All the hopes of the people were to be centred in the person of Christ who should come at a later date and the seventy years were seen to have significance of seventy 'weeks' of years pointing to the Messiah Himself.

Jeremiah's messages concern men and women throughout the whole of this age in the church (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:8-12). The opening out of the Spirit's life and fulness was found by the writer of the Epistle to be best expressed by Jeremiah's promise concerning the new covenant. The writer needed Jeremiah in order to present and explain the glories of the dispensation in which we

find ourselves. The blessings of the whole church were foreshadowed in Jeremiah's ministry. This is the secret of blessing, an inward experience of new life, with the laws of God written in the heart and the knowledge of God filling the life. Thus his message was of universal application.

Connection with other Books of Scripture

The book of Jeremiah is interesting for its connection with other books of Scriptures.

First there is the reminder that God brought the people out of Egypt (ch. 2:2) giving a connection with Exodus. As the story proceeds there is the claim that the people have forsaken God persistently. Moses had pointed out the consequences of spiritual defection and Deut. 28:47-52 would be an instance of several in that book which warned them of the way God would deal with deliberate departure from His ways.

Solomon, in his prayer in 1 Kings 8:46-53 specifically mentions the situation found in Jeremiah's days, as though anticipating a failure to continue walking in the ways of God.

Even more interesting is the word to Hezekiah when the king of Babylon sent messengers to congratulate him on his recovery of health and he showed him all his treasures. When they had returned to their own land, Isaiah took him the message that all his treasures and the treasures of the house of the Lord would be taken to Babylon (2 Kings 20:14-19).

The historical books of 2 Kings chs. 22-24 and 2 Chronicles (chs. 34-36) provide the background for the story of Jeremiah. It is specifically pointed out that the judgment upon the nation would come because of the sin of Manasseh. (Jer. 15:4).

The Lamentations flow naturally from the fall and destruction of Jerusalem and, in the light of the history of that event, the feelings of Jeremiah can be more readily understood.

The book of Ezekiel finds its start from the captivity of Jehoiachin and, as pointed out above, the events which are dated, refer to the occasion of that captivity. Ezekiel provides the counterpart in Babylon to Jeremiah in Jerusalem and his visions of what was happening in the temple in Jerusalem are a graphic

commentary of the circumstances in which Jeremiah was living and the abuses against which he was protesting.

Daniel was taken captive during Jehoiakim's reign (1:1-3). The vessels taken from Jerusalem were used at Belshazzar's feast (ch. 5). Perhaps the greatest interest was the discovery by Daniel of Jeremiah's mention of a time limit of 70 years for the period of the captivity and the unique prayer which he uttered in consequence—only to find that, while the literal return from captivity would take place, God had greater purposes in view for the nation as centred in the Messiah who was to come.

The return from captivity brings in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 1:1, with Jer. 25:12, 13 and 29:10). Mordecai is mentioned in Esther 2:5, 6 in this connection. See also Neh. 7:6.

The genealogy of the Lord in Matt. 1 makes clear reference to Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) and the times of the captivity.

The most outstanding connection in the New Testament is in Heb. 8 where one of the longest quotations from the Old Testament is to be found—from Jer. 31:31-34. Jeremiah anticipated, not only the coming of the Messiah but also the fulness of blessing of the Gospel of Christ—the result of the death and resurrection of the Lord Himself and the gift of the Holy Spirit to bring men and women into the fulness of blessing in Christ.

Reading the Book of Jeremiah

Some chapters in the book of Jeremiah are clearly dated, so that there is no doubt as to the king in whose reign a given incident took place. But not all chapters can be so easily identified. The following suggestions for the grouping of chapters are made so that the book can be read as far as possible in chronological order.

I. BEFORE THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

(a) During the reign of Josiah. Chapters 1-12.

(b) During the reign of Jehoahaz. Ch. 22:10-12.

(c) During the reign of Jehoiakim (Eliakim). Chapters 13 to 20 cover the period.

Ch. 26 is dated for the first year.

Ch. 25, 35, 36 and 45 for the fourth year.

(d) During the reign of Jehoiachin (Caniah: Jeconiah).

Ch. 22 and 23; 52:31-34.

(e) During the reign of Zedekiah (Mattaniah).

1st year. Ch. 27.

4th year. Chs. 28, 29.

9th year. Chs. 21, 24, 34.

10th year. Chs. 30-33, 35, 38.

11th year. Chs. 39, 52:1-30.

II. HISTORY OF THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM. Chs. 37-39; 52.

III. AFTER THE FALL OF JERUSALEM. Chs. 40-45.

IV. PROPHECIES CONCERNING OTHER NATIONS. Chs. 46-51.

Egypt, Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Arabians,
Elam, Babylon.

It is significant that, when the Lord was here, people saw in Him the same features which characterised Jeremiah. When the Lord asked the disciples at Caesarea Philippi whom men thought Him to be, they said that, among others, people thought he might be Jeremiah. (Matt. 16:14).

There were certainly features which were common to them both.

As to the Temple, both accused their generation of making it a 'den of robbers'. 'Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes. Behold, I, even I, have seen it, saith the Lord' (Jer. 7:11). The Lord, quoting this said, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer but ye have made it a den of robbers' (Matt. 21:13).

Jeremiah had said concerning the Temple 'This house shall become a desolation' (Jer. 22:5). And the Lord, foreseeing the destruction of the temple by the Romans said 'Your house is left unto you desolate'. 'Not one stone will be left upon another'. (Matt. 23:38; 24:2).

As to the city, Jeremiah had prophesied that a mound would be cast up against Jerusalem (Jer. 6:6). And the Lord said 'If thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace. . . . The days shall come when thine enemies shall cast up a bank against thee and compass thee round and keep thee in on every side' (Luke 19:43).

Jeremiah and Christ

Speaking of the destruction which would befall the city Jeremiah said 'I will break this city and this people as one breaketh a potter's vessel that cannot be made whole again' (Jer. 19:9). And the Lord in His day said 'They shall not leave in thee one stone upon another' (Luke 19:44).

Jeremiah wept over his people as Christ wept over them in a later day (Jer. 9:1; Luke 19:14). His fearless rebuking of sin brought him reproach rejection and suffering as it brought the Lord. Jeremiah compares himself to a lamb or an ox brought to the slaughter (Jer. 11:19).

There are 41 references or allusions to Jeremiah in the New Testament and of these 26 are in the book of Revelation. It is evident that John was familiar with the great prophet whose ministry so closely preceded the fall of Jerusalem.

The Lamentations of Jeremiah

Although Jeremiah was called upon to testify against the princes, priests, prophets and people for many years and to warn them of the impending doom of the nation and destruction of Jerusalem, the events themselves were tragic in his eyes. He could never say 'I told you so'. He protested against the sin but could not prevent the judgment. He confessed the sin of the people as his own. He grieved over the departure from God and, when the judgment fell, he regarded it as a personal as well as a national tragedy. Having outlined the judgment which overtook the city and the nation he leads up to the point when he says 'I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath . . . He hath brought me into darkness and not into light. . . .'

The Septuagint version starts with a preface—'And it came to pass, after Israel was taken captive and Jerusalem devastated, that Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said. . .'

There is here no 'Word of the Lord', no direct message to a sinful people. The man speaks out of a full heart and, although the Spirit of God helps him to give utterance to his sorrows, it is yet the language of a sufferer rather than a teacher.

The book of Lamentations is an acrostic in five elegies, over the fall of Jerusalem. Elegies 1, 2, 4 and 5 have each 22 verses corresponding to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet; and elegy 3 has three times 22. In elegies 1, 2 and 4 each verse begins with a letter of the alphabet; in elegy 3, each three verses begin with a letter and in order.

'Zion's miseries are reflected in things outward and inward, secular and sacred, civil and religious. A city once populous is now depopulated; it once had dominion but is now in subjection; it used to be joyful but now is full of grief; those who were separated from the heathen now dwell among them; those who used to conquer are now conquered; those once held in honour are now brought into contempt; those who dwelt in a land of plenty are now ready to perish. But there were other and worse troubles—unobserved feasts, dispirited priests, profaned places, departed treasures: in short her glory had departed. . . . what was the cause of all this misery? Zion's sins. Sins many and heinous bring troubles many and grievous. The oppressors are oppressed; those who degraded themselves are degraded; and those who dwelt in carnal security are taken captive. Zion, which forsook God, is forsaken by her friends and now in her misery she cries to God for help. It is a sad story, but alas, one oft repeated in the experience of God's people, both individual and collective. The lot of the backslider is always hard and lamentation does not always carry with it repentance. Even where it does, the consequences of previous sinning must be endured'. (*W. G. Scroggie*).