

Synthetic Bible Studies

Containing an outline study of every book of the Bible
with suggestions for Sermons, Addresses and
Bible Expositions

By

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LESSON THIRTY-ONE

JEREMIAH

The next of the Major Prophets after Isaiah is Jeremiah, for the history of whose times we must refer to II Kings, chapters 21-25.

The last of the kings of Judah in Isaiah's time was Hezekiah, one of the very best kings Judah ever had, but he was succeeded by his son Manasseh and his grandson Amon, both of whom were men of a different stamp and in whose reigns idolatry flourished.

The great world-power Assyria, which had just subjugated the sister kingdom of Israel and carried the people away into captivity, had menaced Judah for a long while, depriving her of many of her cities, and is only prevented from destroying Jerusalem itself, as we have seen, by the intercession of Hezekiah before the Lord.

When Josiah, who succeeded Amon, came to the throne, and who was a faithful and righteous monarch, Judah was already tributary to Assyria and remained so practically, until Assyria herself succumbed to her rival Babylon, when her rights in Judah reverted to her great successor.

In the meantime, Josiah, who reigned 31 years, and whose period was marked by a great revival of religion, was succeeded by his son Jehoahaz, and later by another son, Jehoiakim, the first reigning but three months and the latter eleven years. The brief reign of the former is accounted for by the fact that at the close of Josiah's reign the nation of Judah had temporarily, through the fortunes of war, slipped out of the hands of Assyria into those of Egypt, to which latter power

Jehoahaz was not acceptable for some reason. It was during the time of Jehoiakim that the suzerainty returned to Assyria, and that the final transfer of power from Assyria to Babylon was made.

While Jehoiakim was king therefore, the nation paid tribute first to one foreign power and then another. At length, however, Jehoiakim refused to wear the yoke of Babylon, when the latter executed punishment upon her recalcitrant vassal by carrying some of her people into captivity and among the young princes thus dealt with at the time was Daniel of whom we shall learn more later.

Jehoiachin succeeded his father in the kingdom, but was set aside by Babylon in favor of his uncle Zedekiah, who reigned eleven years, but who was always restless under the yoke of Babylon, and whose schemes and conspiracies against his master finally led to the overthrow of himself and his kingdom, and what we have come to call distinctively the captivity. This was about 588 B. C.

Jeremiah was called to the prophetic office in the days of Josiah and continued to prophesy down to the captivity, and indeed for some little time thereafter. His particular mission to Judah was to notify that nation of her rejection on the part of the Lord (for the present at least), and of the divine purpose to transfer earthly dominion into the hands of the Gentiles.

Now was to begin what is commonly known afterwards as "**the times of the Gentiles,**" the meaning and significance of which will be treated of in the study of Daniel. Suffice for the present to say, that GOD's will for Judah was to submit to her enemy, in which event it would go well with her, but otherwise ill.

Jeremiah was commissioned to make this will known, but in doing so was obliged to face a nation angrily opposed to such a conception.

Kings, princes, priests and people were opposed to it. And there were false prophets among them that taught the very contrary to Jeremiah. As he pleaded with them to submit that they might abide in peace, or warned them that conspiracy against Babylon meant certain destruction and captivity, these others said, "**Nay, enter into confederacy with Egypt and other nations, and you will overcome Babylon and break her yoke from off your neck.**"

To the false prophets they hearkened with the results we know. But the hatred thus engendered against Jeremiah was intense in the extreme, and made his life the unhappiest of all the prophets.

The Personal History of the Prophet

From the first chapter of the book we learn not a little of the personal history of the prophet.

His father, Hilkiyah, was a priest, hence he himself was in the order of Aaron and of the tribe of Levi, though he seems never to have exercised the office of the priesthood.

His birthplace was the small town of Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, and his call seems to have been settled upon him even before his birth.

He entered upon his life work at a very tender age, suggesting the history of Samuel, but reminding us that youth reached the period of maturity in the far East much earlier than with us. He was never married, for reasons given in chapter 16.

His general experience was one of persecution and trial, but he remained among his countrymen until the blow fell, and even then stayed in Jerusalem with the remnant left by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, until, for reasons clearly stated in chapters 40-45, he was forcibly carried away by them into the land of Egypt where, presumably, he died. Jeremiah appears to have been naturally diffident and weak.

GOD is several times obliged to stimulate him, not more with comfort than with sharpened threatening. But Jeremiah is loyal. He is thus kept loyal. No matter how weak and pleading he appears when in the presence of GOD alone, nevertheless, standing before the leaders of the nation, for the time his enemies as well as the enemies of GOD, he is brave as a lion, and commanding as a general in the field.

It is the study of these changing conditions in the prophet's life that to many gives the keenest interest in the book.

Jeremiah is very human, very much like one of us, and GOD's gracious and kindly dealings with him are a wonderful revelation of His love and power to us that believe.

The Outline of the Book

You will have discovered by your reading of Jeremiah that the chapters are not arranged chronologically, some of the earlier ones chronicling events which transpired years after other events which are referred to in later chapters, so that it will be difficult to make an orderly classification of the book unless we take the chapters just as they come, ignoring the time feature except as it is mentioned in each case.

Chapter 1 gives us the prophet's genealogy and call, upon which we have dwelt sufficiently in the introduction.

Chapters 2-10, inclusive, are composed of discourses of the usual character illustrative of Judah's degeneracy and GOD's loving-kindness, in terms as vivid in the one case and tender in the other as are to be found in any part of the prophet's writings.

Chapters 11, 12 are interesting as revealing an inner page of the prophet's own life in the persecution he underwent at the hands of his neighbors and kinsmen doubtless, in his native town. There is reason to believe also that the occasion marked a crisis not only in the life of the prophet, but in that of the nation as well.

Chapter 13 affords an illustration of prophecies in symbol, with which Jeremiah's writings abound, and which usually tell their own story and explain themselves, as in this case. We have given an exposition of this use of symbolism in our lesson on Hosea.

Chapters 14, 15 reveal the prophet as interceding for his people, suggesting the supplications of Abraham for Lot, Moses for Israel at Mount Sinai, Nehemiah for suffering Jerusalem, and Daniel for his captive countrymen.

Chapters 16, 17 refer to the prophet's separation from the people for the Lord's sake and for their sake as well, if only they will be influenced by his example to eschew sin and follow after righteousness. Attention is called to the fact that throughout all these discourses, long or short, there is every now and then intimation of the Lord's purpose to have mercy upon His people Judah, in the end, and after they have learned the lessons of their suffering to awaken repentance in them and restore them to Himself. See, for example, in the present case, 16:14, 15.

Chapters 18-20 lead up to another trying and critical episode in the prophet's life where we find him, as a consequence, sitting in the stocks at Jerusalem. It is not his neighbors and kinsfolk who are plotting against him now, but those who have the highest power in the kingdom.

The provincial town of Anathoth is exchanged for the court city of Jerusalem, the rustics of his native village for the priests and the princes of the capital. But he is as brave and uncompromising in the latter situation as the former, and meets the harder trial here as it had been met with the same fortitude and the same faith in GOD. But when he has been discharged by the court officers, and in turn has discharged his own commission to them from the throne of GOD, behold the reaction which comes upon his spirits as indicated in the language of his private closet recorded in the latter half of chapter 20!

To quote our language on another occasion, we have here a striking illustration of the way in which GOD maintained Jeremiah's faithfulness.

He placed him between two "cannots," or, if you please, between two fires. There was the fire of persecution without, and that of the HOLY SPIRIT within, the latter being the hotter of the two. To avoid being consumed by the one, he was more than willing to walk through the other. He could not speak any more in GOD's name, we see at one time, and then he could not refrain from speaking. How many prophets in our own day have known a similar experience to that in verse 9!

We have to thank GOD, however, that He did not leave His servant in this gloomy despair, and that Jeremiah was able to testify of his deliverance (vv. 11-13).

Discourses in Zedekiah's Reign, Chapters 21-24

The first of these is that of the siege, or preferably, the Chaldean supremacy (21:1-10), in which it will be noticed the prophet urges submission to Babylon on the part of Judah in compliance with GOD's will, but as the sequel shows, without effect (vv. 8-10).

The second is in the nature of judgments upon the disobedient kings of Judah, alive and dead (21:11-22:30).

The third is on the theme so dear to the prophets, rather should I say so dear to GOD, the future redemption of Judah through the work of the Messiah (chap. 23). This is very beautiful.

- observe the charge against the false shepherds, the priests and prophets of Jeremiah's day, and yet one cannot hesitate to class with them the scribes and Pharisees of CHRIST's day (vv. 1, 2).
- observe the two distinct promises in verses 4 and 5, that of the restoration and that of the faithful shepherds, the true teachers of the coming age.
- Observe how the allusion to the faithful shepherds in general, leads up to the specification of the one true Shepherd in particular, JESUS CHRIST (vv. 5, 6).
- observe the name here given Him.
- observe how verses 7 and 8 establish the point that it is not an immediate return from Babylon that is here referred to, but an ultimate return from all countries, hence the restoration at the beginning of the millennial age.

The fourth and last of this series of discourses is based upon the type of the good figs and the bad, and seems to apply particularly to the prophet's own time. Those who were carried away by Babylon in the earlier reign would return to their own land after the seventy years spoken of in a later prophecy, while those who would be taken in Zedekiah's time would not so return (chap. 24). The language of verses 6 and 7 indicates, however, that this prophecy was only partially fulfilled in the restoration from Babylon, and anti-typically and fully to be fulfilled hereafter.

Discourses in Jehoiakim's Reign, Chapters 25, 26

The next division of chapters illustrates what was said at the beginning about the lack of chronological sequence in the book, as we are now to deal with events preceding those in our last division, since, as you know, Jehoiakim reigned prior to Zedekiah.

The first discourse of importance here is that of the seventy years' captivity (25:1-14), which is the first time in which that memorable period is distinctly stated.

Then follows a discourse on the Gentile nations (25:15-38), in which the point is again emphasized that GOD has given the dominion of the world for the time being into the hands of one of them, Babylon, to whom not only Judah but all the other nations of the earth must submit.

This division concludes (chap. 26), with an account of the prophet's second arrest followed happily, by his subsequent release.

A few questions may be judiciously employed here in the analysis or exposition of this interesting chapter.

- in whose reign did the events in this chapter occur?
- in what public place was the prophecy delivered?
- what effect did it produce (vv. 8, 9)?
- who were the instigators against Jeremiah at this time (v. 11)?
- who were his defenders (v. 16)?
- what precedent was quoted in his favor (vv. 17-19)?
- what contemporaneous event emphasizes his narrow escape (vv. 20-23)?
- who was raised up of GOD as his deliverer (v. 24)?
- how does this escape of Jeremiah bear out the promise in 1:18, 19?

Second Series of Discourses in Zedekiah's Reign, Chapters 27-34

The first discourse in that which we call the second series in Zedekiah's reign may be entitled the Babylonian supremacy (chap. 27). The theme has been dealt with before but never at the length, or perhaps with the plainness it here receives.

You will observe that it involves the subjugation of all the nations, Gentile as well as Jew.

You will observe further that the prophecy seems to have been delivered at a time when these nations were in conference with Judah looking towards a coalition against Babylon probably (vv. 1-3).

GOD is exercising His absolute sovereignty in the matter and not giving account of His ways (vv. 4-6).

It is noticeable, too, that while He is using Babylon for His purposes at this time, her own time of punishment will come when the situation for her will in a great degree be reversed (v. 7). The command is absolute, and has a penalty attached to it (v. 8). It is to the advantage of Judah to submit, but she has false teachers who are persuading her against that policy (vv. 9-11).

The second discourse in this series is really more of a personal controversy (chap. 28).

It has been evident as you read this book that one of the most trying experiences of Jeremiah was the contentions engendered by false prophets.

- what is the name of the false prophet mentioned in this case?
- how did he seek to make the most of his opportunity?
- does he attack GOD's servant privately or publicly?
- how does he contradict his teaching (vv. 2-4)?
- how does Jeremiah reply (vv. 5-9)?
- how does Hananiah seek to further emphasize his false prophecy (vv. 10, 11)?
- how does GOD assure Jeremiah (vv. 12-14)?
- in what way does Jeremiah, thus assured, return to the battle (v. 15)?
- what infliction upon the false prophet (vv. 16, 17)?

The third discourse should more properly be characterized as a letter dictated to those who had already been taken captive, the occasion for and nature of which are plainly stated in the text. It covers chapter 29.

The fourth discourse is on the ever blessed theme of Judah's future redemption through CHRIST, chapters 30, 31.

- what is the first fact which distinguishes it from some other discourses (30:2)?
- why is its divine Author so particular about its form (v. 3)?
- what experience for Israel must precede the restoration spoken of (vv. 5-9)?
- how is Israel distinguished from the Gentile nations in this respect (v. 11)?

- have we met with similar declarations to this in the former prophets? Name those prophets?
- the words of what other prophet especially are brought to mind by verses 18-22?
- when is this event to take place (v. 24)?
- does this glad promise apply only to Judah, or the twelve tribes generally (31:1)?
- what is the ground of this promised goodness (v. 3)?
- what will again be the center of worship in that day (v. 6)?
- what indicates that it is more than the return from Babylon that is referred to (v. 8)?
- what further substantiated the opinion that the time is still future (vv. 12-14)?
- what shows that it shall be preceded by the repentance of the people (vv. 18-20)?
- what shows that it will usher in a new dispensation (vv. 31-34)?
- with what oath does GOD confirm this promise (vv. 35-37)?
- how is the promise for the people identified with the land (vv. 38-40)?

All these facts are further impressed upon us by the proceeding recorded in the following chapter. I do not say that this chapter is a continuation of the preceding in matter of time, but it assuredly is in thought.

Observe the introductory incident in verses 6-15, paying particular attention to the care shown by the prophet in witnessing the transaction referred to (v. 12), and the reason for it all.

It might, at first, be thought that this "reason" had a bearing only on what took place after the return from Babylon, but the sequel points very markedly to the future.

Jeremiah, for example, does not comprehend what he has been called upon to do in this case.

Observe the surprise he expresses that, under all the circumstances, he should have been asked by GOD to purchase the field, and the inquiry he advances (vv. 16-25).

Study GOD's reply to His servant (vv. 26-44).

- what significant question does He raise (v. 27)?
- has He changed His purpose about punishing Judah (vv. 28-35)? Nevertheless, what will be the ultimate outcome of that purpose (vv. 36-38)?
- what language (v. 37) shows that more than a re-gathering from Babylon is contemplated?
- what shows their conversion previous to the later blessing (v. 39)?
- what shows the perpetuity of their final return to GOD (v. 40)?
- what shows that the blessing is associated with the land (v. 41)?
- what shows the pertinency of the purchase of the field as a prefigurement of that blessed day (vv. 43, 44)?

Closing Events of the Siege, Chapters 37-39

We must pass over the discourses in Jehoiakim's reign recorded in chapters 35, 36, which, although deeply interesting in themselves, and revealing still more of the prophet's personal history, do not carry us forward any distance in our present plan of study.

We come next, therefore, to the closing events of the siege, which, beginning at chapter 37,

present us with the distressing spectacle of the prophet's imprisonment in the dungeon.

Chapter 38 is interesting as describing the anxiety of the king for counsel from the imprisoned prophet which, however, he has no intention of acting upon. "Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad," a proverb which Zedekiah illustrates to the full.

At length in chapter 39 the city is overthrown, and the king himself and practically the whole of his people are carried away. The same chapter reveals the consideration granted to the prophet by the king of Babylon and his representatives, who are well aware of the character of his preaching and regard him as an ally and not an enemy. Of course, however, his influence has been thrown in favor of the Babylonians or Chaldeans, not because of his interest in them, for he is a loyal and patriotic Israelite, but because of his desire to execute the will of GOD, sad as its immediate outcome for his nation may be.

History of the Remnant, Chapters 40-45

After the assassination of Gedaliah (whom the king of Babylon had made governor of Judea following the captivity), the remnant of the Jews through fear, desired to flee into Egypt, and consulted the prophet about it (chaps. 40, 41).

- what was the revealed will of GOD in the matter (42:7-18)?
- were the people disposed to obedience or disobedience (43:1-7)?
- how did their conduct in Egypt compare with their previous history in Judah (44:1-10)?
- what affliction is now pronounced against them (vv. 11-14)?
- does this result in penitence (vv. 15-19)?
- what is the Lord's final word to them by the prophet (vv. 20-30)?

Discourses Against the Nations, Chapters 46-51

In the discourses concerning the Gentile nations with which the book closes, your attention is especially called to the prediction of the revival of Moab in the latter days (48:47), and Ammon (49:6).

Do you recall the origin of these peoples, and their relation to Israel? If forgotten, bring your concordance or Bible dictionary into use.

Note also that a similar prediction holds good for Elam (Persia) (49:39).

It is remarkable, however, that while these old nations are to be revived, nothing is said as to their forgiveness and future blessing as if the case of Israel.

The allusion to their revival brings to mind the teaching of Isaiah about Babylon. Note the particular attention Jeremiah gives to that city (chaps. 50, 51).

~ end of Lesson 31 ~
