

OT 501--Old Testament Introduction

Lecture Notes—Jeremiah and Ezekiel

Jeremiah

I. Who was Jeremiah?

- The son of a priest. His father, Hilkiah, was a priest.
- From Anathoth—He probably descended from Abiathar, the priest who was banished to Anathoth by Solomon for supporting Adonijah's attempt to take the throne of Israel after David's death.

II. Where did Jeremiah preach?

- We know that he preached in Jerusalem, because he is there much of the time, preaching to kings, prophets, and priests. His messages may have taken him as far away as the Euphrates River (Jer. 13), although may be a reference to the village of Parah, near Anathoth, chosen because of its similarity to Hebrew for Euphrates.

III. When did Jeremiah preach?

- Jeremiah's prophetic ministry is precisely dated from the 13th year of Josiah (627 BC) until the 5th month of the 11th year of Zedekiah (586 BC). Thus he preached from before Josiah's reform until the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586.
- Jeremiah's are placed in the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. Jehoiachin is also mentioned in the text.

IV. Structure, Text, & Canon

--Outline

- Jeremiah does not outline well. In fact, the book appears to be chronologically jumbled, and the oracles are collected by themes, although even this scheme is less than satisfactory at times as well. A brief outline follows:
 - I. Jeremiah 1-25—Collection of Prophetic Oracle, most dated 627-605 BC. This section also includes a few narrative accounts of Jeremiah's actions, usually associated with some prophetic word.
 - II. Jeremiah 26-29—Narrative accounts of events in Jeremiah's life, along with prophetic words, but they are not in poetry.
 - III. Jeremiah 30-33—"Book of Consolation." These are words of hope and comfort to Judah & Israel. God will restore His people after exile.
 - IV. Jeremiah 34-45—Narrative accounts of events in Jeremiah's life & Judah's last days, as well as various prophetic words, once again not in poetry.
 - V. Jeremiah 46-51—Foreign Prophecies. These are prophecies against Egypt, the Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Hazor, Elam, & Babylon.
 - VI. Jeremiah 52—Appendix. This chapter contains the account of the fall of Jerusalem (repeated in Jeremiah 39:1-10) and the release of Jehoiachin by Evil-Merodach, king of Babylon. This material is essentially identical to much of 2 Kings 24-25.

--Text

--Masoretic Text is approximately 15% shorter than LXX. Much of the repetitious narrative (i.e. Jeremiah 7 & 26) is omitted in LXX. This fact, and the Dead Sea Scrolls evidence of Hebrew texts containing both traditions, points to a complicated textual history for the Book of Jeremiah.

--There were apparently multiple editions of the book in existence before the finalization of the OT canon in the post-exilic period.

--Canon

--The LXX and MT also differ in regard to canon. The most obvious discrepancy is the placement of the foreign prophecies (MT Jer. 46-51) after Jeremiah 25:13. All of this serves to remind of us how little we truly know about the development of the OT text and canon!

V. Message of Jeremiah

--Personal Faith

--Jeremiah 1:4-5

--Yahweh's call to Jeremiah is very personal, even before birth. This signifies a very special relationship between Jeremiah and Yahweh. God chose Jeremiah for an important task. This task would bring hardship & pain to Jeremiah, which is the backdrop for some very personal moments.

--Jeremiah 20:7-12

--Jeremiah cries out to Yahweh with unprecedented honesty, blaming Him for his troubles and asking Him to bring vengeance against his enemies. While we may not want to emulate Jeremiah's words, his relationship with God would be worth following, one marked by personal call, direct and personal words, and obedience to those words.

--Sovereignty of Yahweh

--Jeremiah 6:22-23

—Yahweh himself is bringing Judah's enemies against her. He can "build up" or "tear down" nations as He desires (1:9-10). The "enemy from the north" is a common theme in OT prophecy, esp. in Jeremiah.

--Jeremiah 18:1-10

—Jeremiah's visit to the potter's house underscores Yahweh's control of all things. He can mold the peoples and nations of the world as easily as a potter molds a lump of clay. He can also destroy and remake a flawed piece of pottery. [Also note that Jeremiah is fond of this type of lesson, where his actions, or something visual, is used as an object lesson & delivers a message.]

--Jeremiah 46-51—Foreign prophecies declare loudly Yahweh's control of all the earth.

--Judgment for Sin

--Jeremiah 1:11-16

--Yahweh is “watching” to see that His word of judgment will be fulfilled. [The word for “almond branch” is שֶׁקֶד (*shaqed*) while the word for “watching” is שֹׁקֵד (*shoqed*).

The only difference is one vowel. This similarity in pronunciation is the point of the visual image.]

--The word to be fulfilled is the "boiling pot" of judgment, poured out because of their two-fold sin, forsaking Yahweh and worshiping false gods.

--Jeremiah 2:9-13

--Do people change gods? Not usually, rather nations live & die for their own gods. This is the great sin of Judah.

--They have left Yahweh, “the spring of living water,” and served other gods, digging “their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” When we serve what we make, we are doomed to failure because only Yahweh can be our source of refreshment, strength, and nourishment.

--Jeremiah 6:13-15

--The leadership are especially chastised, for greed and deceit, for failure to preach the truth about the people’s sin, and for showing no shame concerning their sin. The leaders were expected to lead the people to Yahweh, instead they have allowed them to move away from Him, and at times they have led them away from Yahweh.

--They preach, “Peace, peace,” but there is no peace. God’s leaders must look sin in the face and call it sin, regardless of the consequences, as Jeremiah did, or face God’s wrath!

--Jeremiah 7:1-11

--Judah was trusting in God’s presence at the temple rather than in their own faith in Him. They believed that the temple itself, “God’s house,” would save them. After all, would God allow His temple to be destroyed? They thought not, but they were wrong.

--The temple was a place for praying and seeking Yahweh, not a place of refuge from justice! (Jesus quoted this verse in Matthew 21:13 with reference to the merchants in the temple compound.)

--Note that their sins included both ritual and ethical sins. They had committed idolatry, but they were also guilty of the same ethical violations against which the 8th century prophets preached.

--Covenant and Law—Much of Jeremiah’s message revolves around the Torah, which Judah has broken, and the need for something new.

--Jeremiah 6:16-17

--The “ancient paths” in which they were to walk were certainly the laws of the Mosaic covenant. The Torah was given for life and rest (remember Dt. 30). But they had neglected that path and chosen another road, one that would lead to destruction. [This brings to mind Jesus’ words in Mt. 7:13-14.]

--Jeremiah 11:1-8

--Perhaps during Josiah's reforms, or shortly thereafter, Jeremiah refers to the broken covenant. Because they had not obeyed the words of the covenant, they have faced & will continue to experience the curses of that covenant.

--Jeremiah 23:5-6

--In contrast to the present king, Zedekiah (*zidqiyahu*=יְהוָה צְדִיקָהּ="Yahweh my Righteousness"), a new king will arise. He will reign in justice and righteousness (like Isaiah's Branch!) and will be called "Yahweh Our Righteousness" (*Yahweh zidqenu*=יְהוָה צְדִיקֵנוּ | יְהוָה). This is an obvious contrast between past failures and future glory, thus it is a word of hope for the future.

--Jeremiah 31:31-34

--The "New Covenant" signals something completely new. Unlike the promises of kings and leaders, this is the promise of a different kind of relationship altogether. This covenant will be:

--Internal, on their hearts and minds;

--Personal, each one will know Him; and

--Successful, bringing about the removal of sin. Thus the issue of sin will not enter into the new covenant because the covenant will bring total eradication of those sins.

--The author of Hebrews quotes this passage twice (8:8-12, 10:16-17) to describe the work of Jesus. Thus Jesus is the basis of a new covenant, bringing complete forgiveness and a new internal relationship with His people. This was the goal of Yahwistic religion from the beginning (i.e. marriage imagery), but only in Jesus is it finally brought about.

VI. Other Selected Texts

--Jeremiah 31:28

--Verse 28 would appear to be an important verse in the Book of Jeremiah, returning to the call narrative and incorporating much of that commission into this verse. As such, it may function as a summary of Jeremiah's work.

--First, the words of Jeremiah's commission in Jer. 1 are repeated here: "uproot," "tear down," "overthrow," "destroy," "build," and "plant." The term, "bring disaster," is added to these. This extra word is related to a (the?) favorite word of Jeremiah, *ra`ah* (רָעָה).

--Second, the wordplay on the Hebrew term *shaqad* (שָׁקַד, "to watch") returns. In the call narrative, the wordplay involved the words for almond tree and "watch," with the LORD promising to "watch" His people in order to bring judgment upon them for their sins. Here, the LORD promises that, just as He "watched" over them for judgment, He will now "watch" over them for deliverance. The judgment oracle is reversed. Unfortunately, as in the previous oracle, the reversal comes only after exile!

--Jeremiah 29:11—The most misused verse in the Bible? Contrast of "disaster" (*ra`ah* רָעָה) and "well-being" or "peace" (*shalom* שְׁלוֹמִים).

Ezekiel

I. Who was Ezekiel?

--He was a priest during the exile. The elders of Judah in the exile apparently came to him for counsel (8:1).

--He was married and lived in a house in the exile. His circumstances show that the exiles did as Jeremiah (29:4ff) had advised, building houses and carrying out business as usual.

II. Where did Ezekiel preach?

--Ezekiel preached to the exiled Jews in Babylon. He lived near the Kebar River and prophesied at Tel Abib.

--He was “transported” to Jerusalem several times and reported on what he saw. Did he actually go bodily to Jerusalem, or were these visionary travels? Most scholars would probably argue that they were visionary & not actual bodily travels, but either interpretation is possible.

III. When did Ezekiel preach?

--Ezekiel’s prophecies are often dated with great precision, from 593 BC until 571 BC (5th year to the 27th year of Jehoiachin’s exile). Note the chart of dated prophecies in Lasor, Hubbard, Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, p. 359. Most of the prophecies took place in the last years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem.

IV. Structure

I. Ezekiel 1-24--Oracles of Judgment against Judah & Israel

--Ezekiel 1:1-3:21—Ezekiel’s Call as Prophet

--Ezekiel 3:22-5:17—Signs of Judgment

--Ezekiel 6-7—Oracles of Judgment

--Ezekiel 8-11—Visions of Judgment

--Ezekiel 12-24—Signs and Oracles of Judgment

II. Ezekiel 25-32—Foreign Prophecies against Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, & Egypt.

III. Ezekiel 33-48—Restoration of Judah & Israel

--Ezekiel 33-39--Restoration of Israel

--Ezekiel 40-48--A New Temple & A New Land

V. Message of Ezekiel

--Signs of Judgment (Ezekiel 5)

--5:1-3, 8-13

--Ezekiel uses signs & visions more often than just oracles alone. Here he acts out the judgment against Jerusalem.

--The hair symbolizes the people: 1/3 of the people will die in the siege, 1/3 will die in battle outside the city walls, and 1/3 will be scattered to the winds & die there.

--Only the remnant tucked away in the prophet’s belt will survive the judgment. This is not specified, but the survival of the remnant would seem to be the implication of tucking away the small bit of hair, although it could represent a judgment after the initial destruction of Jerusalem.

--The Glory Departs the Temple (Ezekiel 8-11)

--8:1-6, 12-15

--Ezekiel is taken by vision to Jerusalem, where he witnessed the blatant sins of the people, primarily idolatry. These sins were driving Yahweh away from His own sanctuary. Was he physically taken or just spiritually? I believe this was a vision, not an actual travel, even "soul travel."

--9:3-6

--God's glory, apparently in the form of the initial vision from Ezek. 1, was in the temple, but now moved to the threshold. Thus God's glory is beginning to move out of the Holy of Holies, & thus out of the temple.

--Those still faithful to Yahweh are marked and saved from the death of judgment, in a type of 2nd Passover. Everyone else is slaughtered.

--10:18-19

--The glory of the Lord, along with the cherubim from the Holy of Holy, moved from the threshold of the temple to the gate of the temple. The glory of the Lord is slowly removing itself from the temple.

--11:22-24

--The glory of the Lord, along with the cherubim, left the city, and Ezekiel was returned to his home on the Kebar River. The presence of God was now gone from the city. This was a categorical rejection of the theology that God would not allow Jerusalem to be destroyed. On the contrary, He was now leaving it open to attack and destruction.

--Allegory of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 16)

--God found Israel as a child, helpless, naked, and bloody. He washed her, clothed her, and entered into covenant with her. She was given greatness and wealth.

--But that wealth was used to commit prostitution. The people of Jerusalem rejected their God (husband/lover) and forgot what He had done for her. They broke their covenant with God.

--Now God says that He will allow the lovers to strip her, steal her riches, and kill her, leaving her in an even worse place than where God found her. Now God would not be there to protect her.

--However, God will remember His covenant and establish an "everlasting covenant" with His people, which will result in knowledge of God and atonement for sin.

--Words of Restoration

--37:21-28--God makes several promises in these verses:

--He will gather them from exile & make Israel a unified nation in their homeland again.

--He will give them a new ruler, a new David, to rule them.

--He will make an everlasting "covenant of peace" with them.

--He will dwell with them as their God, & they will be His people once again in their land.

--36:24-27—Here Ezekiel describes the “New Covenant” of the restoration:

--It will bring about cleansing. This is a “sprinkling” with clean water. Thus God does the cleansing, not the people themselves.

--God will change them internally so that they can keep the covenant. The new heart will be soft and warm, in contrast to the former cold & stony heart that constantly rebelled against Him. He will place His Spirit in them. (cf. John 3:5.)

--37:1-14—Dry Bones Made Alive

--The dry bones are dead, with no hope for the future, just like Judah was dead and without hope. But God tells Ezekiel to breathe new life into them through the word of the Lord.

--The same hope of God is offered to any today who will turn to God for hope and life. We must be faithful in offering the word of hope and life to those dead and dry bones around us—killed by many things. Jesus brings life and hope!