

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today we introduce the book of JEREMIAH - PART 2. We will learn about the history of the text of the book of Jeremiah, the person and character of the prophet Jeremiah and the main messages which the prophet Jeremiah prophesied.

POINT 2. THE HISTORY OF THE TEXT OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

There is good evidence to believe that the book of Jeremiah had several editions that preceded the final form of the text as we have it in the Hebrew tradition today.

The First Edition of the book of Jeremiah consisted of chapters 1:4 to 7:15 and chapter 45.

In the 4th year of the reign of king Jehoiakim, before September 605 B.C., the Lord commanded Jeremiah to record on a scroll all the words that the Lord had spoken to him from the days of king Josiah to the 4th year of king Jehoiakim (36:1-4). This edition must have contained a chronological summary of Jeremiah's prophecies from his calling to the beginning years of king Jehoiakim. This scroll was cut in pieces and burned by king Jehoiakim in 605 B.C. (36:23).

The Second Edition of the book of Jeremiah added chapters 7:16 to 39, 46-51 and 1:1-3.

This edition had three stages:

The first stage consisted of chapter 7:16 to 10:25.

According to chapter 36 (28,32), in the 4th year of the reign of king Jehoiakim, that is, in December 605 B.C., the Lord commanded Jeremiah to produce a second scroll. Jeremiah dictated to Baruch all the words of the first scroll and "added many similar words" to them. These additions were of similar content and must also have been in chronological order. However, they were made over a period of time. At several occasions prophecies from different periods were added in chronological order to the scroll.

The second stage consisted of chapter 11-17.

In the light of chapter 36:32, it is reasonable to assume that Jeremiah kept adding to these earlier prophecies new messages, which the Lord gave him after the 4th year of Jehoiakim's reign. Jeremiah 10 to 17 is meant to be a continuation of the scroll written in the 4th year of Jehoiakim. In chapters 11 to 17 it is always Jeremiah himself who speaks, prophesying the Lord's word, relating what happened to himself because of his preaching, and sharing the struggles of his soul. Except for 7:1 and 11:1, which were added when Baruch finally edited the book of Jeremiah.

The third stage consisted of chapter 18 to 39, 46 to 51 and 1:1-3.

The governing principle of this part of the book is the co-operation between the prophet Jeremiah and his friend and helper, Baruch. The Holy Spirit inspired and guided both men in directing, writing and editing this section. Parts were written by Jeremiah himself, for example, chapter 23, 30 and 31. Parts were dictated by Jeremiah and Baruch added some biographical details to it, for example, chapter 18 to 20. And parts were written in the historical relating form, for example chapter 36 to 45. An introduction was written (1:1-3) that covers the period from Josiah's reign to only the fall of Jerusalem. This indicates that the Second Edition of the book of Jeremiah was published soon after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.

The Third Edition of the book of Jeremiah added chapters 40 to 44.

Chapter 40 to 44 was obviously recorded after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. (40:1), but before Nebuchadnezzar's invasion into Egypt in 568 B.C. (44:29-30). Chapter 43:8-44 was most likely written by Baruch in Egypt. Chapter 45 was originally written in the 4th year of Jehoiakim's reign, that is, in 605 B.C., and formed the appendix to Jeremiah's First Edition. Baruch later moved it to the end of the historical section of the book. The book of Jeremiah is about one eighth shorter in the Greek translation than the Hebrew text. It would seem that this Third Edition of the book of Jeremiah has been preserved in the Greek translation. It was published in Jeremiah's lifetime and first disseminated in Egypt.

The Fourth Edition of the book of Jeremiah was the final edition and added chapter 52.

It had two stages:

The first stage consisted of chapter 1-51.

Probably after Jeremiah's death, it appears that Baruch made a more comprehensive collection of his master's sermons and re-arranged the material in a somewhat logical order. Jeremiah 51:64 says, "The words of Jeremiah ends here."

The final stage consisted of chapter 1-52.

Chapter 52 was copied from 2 Kings 24:18 to 25:30 with some modifications. It records the fall of Jerusalem from a Babylonian perspective and it relates the clemency granted to king Jehoiachin in 561 B.C. It must have been added to the book of Jeremiah by someone living in Babylon during the exile. Because it does not mention the return from exile in 537 B.C., we conclude that the final edition of the book Jeremiah was completed around 550 B.C. in Babylon. It constitutes the present Hebrew text of the book of Jeremiah, which we possess today. Note that this Final Edition of the book of Jeremiah retained the introduction of the Second Edition unaltered (1:1-3).

POINT 3. THE PERSON AND CHARACTER OF JEREMIAH

First. Jeremiah's life.

Jeremiah was the son of a certain priest called Hilkiyah. He came from the town of Anathot, which was in the tribe of Benjamin. His family was not poor, because even during the siege of Jerusalem, Jeremiah could buy a piece of land from one of his relatives (32). During the 13th year of the reign of king Josiah of the southern kingdom of Judah, that is, in 627 B.C., the Lord called Jeremiah to be a prophet. He was still young, maybe about 20 years old (1:6). The Lord revealed to him not to marry (16:2). During his whole life, he dedicated himself to his calling as a prophet. He was the most important prophet during the last period of the southern kingdom of Judah, from 627 B.C. to well after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.

Second. Jeremiah's character. The book of Jeremiah reveals the soul and struggles of the prophet Jeremiah.

One. Jeremiah had a sensitive nature.

He had affection for the people of Judah. However, their hardness of heart and his consequent prophesying God's judgement over them caused him unending pain. For example, in Jeremiah 13:17 he says, "If you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the Lord's flock will be taken captive."

Two. Jeremiah was lonely.

Jeremiah 16:2 says that he was not married. In Jeremiah 9:4-5 he probably experienced how his former friends deceived him. In Jeremiah 15:17 he says, "I never sat in the company of revellers, never made merry with them; I sat alone, because your hand was on me and filled me with indignation."

Three. Jeremiah was a man of prayer.

Praying was a very discouraging task for Jeremiah, because God sometimes said to him, "Do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you" (7:16).

Four. Jeremiah was rejected by his own people.

They often misjudged him. They could not understand that he was called to prophesy judgement on them. The Jews failed to acknowledge their corruption and sin. They regarded Jeremiah's preaching of the word of the Lord as offensive and they could find no pleasure in it. As a consequence, they closed their ears to his preaching (6:10).

Five. Jeremiah was persecuted.

His enemies plotted to attack him with their tongues and paid no attention to anything he said (18:18). The priests and prophets and people seized him to sentence him to death (26:8). The book he wrote was cut up and burned (36). He was arrested, beaten and imprisoned in a dungeon (37). He was thrown into a cistern full of mud and nearly drowned in the mud (38). And he was even forced to go along with the refugees to Egypt (43:6).

Six. Sometimes, Jeremiah despaired about God's presence.

Jeremiah 15:18 relates how he was tired of struggling and began to despair about God's presence and help. He said that his pain was unending and that God had become like a deceptive brook or like a spring that failed to give water to him. He even cursed the day he was born (20:14).

Seven. Jeremiah even contemplated to give up.

Jeremiah 20:9 shows that he even contemplated to stop prophesying God's words of judgement. But then he experienced that God's words became like fire in his heart and he could not keep it for himself. He experienced that prophesying is not merely a human task, because then he would not have been able to fulfil his task. He experienced that prophesying is God himself who accomplishes part of his glorious and powerful work through a weak and sinful instrument.

POINT 4. THE MAIN MESSAGES WHICH JEREMIAH PROPHESED

First. Jeremiah prophesied God's judgement against the rebellious people of God.

God's task for Jeremiah was a very difficult task, because he was called mainly to proclaim God's judgements against the people of Judah. The Jews did not like to hear these messages of judgement. Jeremiah proclaimed God's holy anger against Judah's sins of gross idolatry and immense injustice (7:9-11). He proclaimed that God's wrath would be poured out over the land, the city of Jerusalem, the temple, on man and on beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground, and God's wrath would burn and not be quenched. God said, "Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name and say, 'We are safe to do all these detestable things? Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you?'" God commanded Jeremiah to proclaim to them that peoples from the north would conquer them, destroy their cities and land and take them into exile.

Second. Jeremiah prophesied against the evil kings and their officials, false prophets and corrupt priests.

The task of Jeremiah was made extremely difficult by the evil kings and their officials, the false prophets and the corrupt priests, who should have been servants of the Lord, but in fact were servants of their idols.

One. Jeremiah 23:1-2 calls the evil kings and their officials 'shepherds' who destroy and scatter the sheep of God's pasture. Especially during the time of king Zedekiah, the government officials regarded Jeremiah as one who opposed the nationalist party of Judah, as a deserter to the enemy (37:11-16) and as one who discouraged the Judean soldiers from fighting against the enemy (38:1-6).

Two. Jeremiah 23:9-40 says that the prophets were not sent by God and did not speak the words of God (23:21), but prophesied in the name of their idols (23:13) and prophesied the delusions of their own minds (23:26). They led God's people astray (23:13), strengthened the hands of the evildoers (23:14) and spread ungodliness and wickedness in the land (23:15,11). While Jeremiah proclaimed God's judgements, these false prophets proclaimed peace and prosperity for the land.

Three. Jeremiah 6:13-14 says that also the priests were corrupt, practised deceit and were greedy for financial gain. They ruled by their own authority and not by God's authority. The sad thing was that the people of Israel loved it that way. The Jews were as corrupt as their officials, prophets and priests.

Third. Jeremiah prophesied against religious formalism.

All these political and religious leaders stressed religious formalism or outward religious ceremonies. They said that no harm would come to the Jews, because they possessed the temple (7:4). But Jeremiah proclaimed *the uselessness of religious formalism or outward religious ceremonies*. God did not care about the incense they burned and did not accept the sacrifices they brought (6:20). The temple would be destroyed just like the first place where the tabernacle had stood in Shiloh (7:12). God would not listen to their prayers and fasting (14:11-12).

Fourth. Jeremiah prophesied against the heathen nations.

At his calling, God appointed Jeremiah not only as a prophet to the Jews, but as "a prophet to the nations" (1:5). His prophecies concerning God's judgement of Judah would also affect these nations. God would uproot, tear down, destroy and overthrow them (1:10). In Jeremiah chapter 27 God commanded Jeremiah to proclaim God's word to the envoys from the different nations who came to Judah during the time of king Zedekiah to induce Judah to join their rebellion against king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Jeremiah said that God made the earth and everything on it and that God gives it to whomever he wishes. He prophesied that God would give their countries to king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and they would serve under his yoke for at least three generations of kings in Babylon. Moreover, God warned these nations saying, "If any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadnezzar or bow its neck under his yoke, I will punish that nation with the sword, famine and plague, until I destroy it by his hand." God also warned these nations not to listen to their own false prophets, diviners, interpreters of dreams, mediums and sorcerers, who tell lies and say that they would not serve Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah chapters 46 to 51 contain all Jeremiah's prophecies against these nations. However, if these nations listened to God's word and bowed their necks under the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, then they would not be destroyed as a nation. Then God would let them live, built them and plant them again.

Fifth. Jeremiah prophesied repentance.

Jeremiah not only preached God's judgement, but also called people to repentance and reformation of their lives. In Jeremiah chapter 26 God commanded Jeremiah to proclaim to all the people in Judah to listen to God's words and to turn from their evil ways. Then God would relent and not bring on them the disaster he was planning to bring to them because of all the evil they did. In Jeremiah chapter 18:6-11, God said that all people and all nations were in his hand like clay in the hand of a potter. If God announced that a nation or kingdom be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and that nation or kingdom repented of its evil, then God would relent and not inflict this disaster on it. Therefore, all nations and kingdoms are called to turn from their evil ways and to reform their ways and actions!

Sixth. Jeremiah prophesied God's grace.

One. God's judgements would be a limited judgement.

Even when Judah would not heed God's exhortations to repentance, God still gave them a ray of hope with regard to the future. Three times God set a limit to his judgements right in the midst of the most terrible proclamations of judgement and said that he would not judge the people and the land according to its sin. For example, in Jeremiah 4:27 he says, "The whole land will be ruined, though I will *not destroy it completely*" (5:10,18).

Two. God remains in complete control of his judgements.

God's grace is even more clearly seen in Jeremiah 25:9-12. There God called king Nebuchadnezzar 'his servant', that is, his instrument of punishing Judah. He promised that the period of punishment would be no longer than seventy years and that after the period of punishment God would also punish Babylon for its sins. This meant that *God remained in full control of all events on earth even when he judged people.*

Three. God has plans to prosper his people and to give them hope and a future.

According to Jeremiah 29:10-14 God also promised that after Judah's exile to Babylon, he would bring them back to Judah and restore the land to them (16:15; 23:8; 32:36-44). God said, "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know *the plans I have for you, ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*" Thus, just as Jeremiah 1:10 said, Jeremiah was not only a prophet proclaiming the judgement of God, but also a prophet proclaiming the salvation of God! He proclaimed *the uprooting of nations*, but also *the rebuilding of nations* (12:15).

Four. God's salvation reaches its peak in the coming Messiah and the new covenant.

The heart of Jeremiah's prophesying was not the nation of Judah or the Jews, but the coming Messiah who would come out of Judah. According to Jeremiah 23:5-6, the coming Messiah would be a King coming from the family of king David and he would do what is just and right (30:9; 33:15-16). In Jeremiah 31:31-34 he says that the coming Messiah would make *a new covenant* with his people that would not be based on outward ceremonies, but on an inward relationship with God. In this new covenant, the former shadowy objects and ceremonies in the worship service of Israel would make place for the realities themselves, as Hebrews 10:1 teaches. For example, Jeremiah 3:16 also says that the ark, which was the most holy symbol of the presence of God in the midst of his people, would become completely obsolete.

Five. God's salvation would not be limited to the nation of Israel, but would include all the nations.

According to Jeremiah 3:17, not only the nation of Israel, but also the Gentile nations would have a part in this glorious future salvation (4:2; 12:15-16; 16:19-21). All this shows that ultimately, the prophecies in the Old Testament are not limited to Israel, but are related to all the nations in the world! That is why all the prophetic books in the Bible have been written for all the nations in the world! That is why all people in the world should read and believe the prophetic books in the Bible.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. During the next week, read Ezekiel 1-24. Next week we will introduce the book of Ezekiel.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".