

Chapter 29: Jeremiah

Key Terms

- Jeremiah: seventh-century prophet of Judah
- Babylonian Empire: major power in the ancient Near East ca. 612–539 BC
- covenant: the means by which God reveals himself to, initiates relationship with, and establishes his presence among humanity by entering into a mutually binding agreement with a person or people
- vassal: a subordinate nation or people group (usually as a result of a treaty following conquest)
- oracle: an authoritative prophetic speech
- “confessions” of Jeremiah: series of laments and complaints from Jeremiah to the Lord

Key Ideas

- The law in the heart.
- God's bringing an enemy against Israel.
- God as the potter who destroys and builds up.

Chapter Summary

The book of Jeremiah occupies more space in the Bible than any other book. Unlike many of the OT books, Jeremiah provides information concerning its writing. After the prophet had been prophesying for about twenty years, God instructed him to record his prophecies; in obedience to this command Jeremiah employed Baruch to write down his dictations. After the first record was destroyed, a second was made. The biographical sections of the book were probably added later by Baruch.

Jeremiah's call came soon after the religious reform of Josiah and was quickly followed by the emergence of the Babylonian Empire. Josiah's reforms died with him on the battlefield of Megiddo. The destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC was followed by two deportations of the people to Babylon.

Jeremiah was commissioned to warn the people of the consequences of their actions and to bring them back to covenant faithfulness. The book consists of poetic prophetic oracles (indictment, judgment, instruction, and aftermath), historical narratives, and prose speeches. Jeremiah's oracles consist of: judgment oracles, which are the most prevalent type of oracle in the book and proclaim judgment on the people of Judah and other nations; instruction oracles, which are very few in number and outline what God required of the people; and aftermath oracles, which are found primarily in the Book of Consolation (as well as directly before and after it) and provide hope for the people after God's judgment.

Jeremiah explains God's policy for dealing with the nations: their evil and good deeds are measured on a scale, and when the evil outweighs the good by a certain amount, God sends judgment. Also notable in Jeremiah's writings is the proclamation of the new covenant. This covenant would be distinct from the other covenants in that it would contain only a document clause. People would not have to be taught the law, because it would be written on their hearts. The terms of the covenant, however, would be the same as that made with Abraham. The new covenant would thus be an extension of the previous covenants. Another prominent theme in Jeremiah is the difficulty caused by false prophets, who proclaimed a positive message to the people and accused Jeremiah of being a false prophet because of his negative message.