**September 21 (Jer 1-2)**

**The Prophet Jeremiah**

We know far more about his life and personal emotions than any other prophet, the conflicts of a man chosen as God’s mouthpiece very much against his own inclinations.

Jeremiah (c. 650 – c. 570 BC). According to Jewish tradition, Jeremiah wrote the book that bears his name, the Books of Kings, and the Book of Lamentations, with the aid of scribe and follower Baruch ben Neriah.

He was a significant figure in the Kingdom of Judah in the late 7th and early 6th centuries BC. Of priestly lineage, Jeremiah was reluctant to heed God’s call to be His prophet, beginning a ministry of more than five decades. He forewarned of the siege of Jerusalem and Babylonian captivity as consequences for disobedience, idol worship, social injustice, and moral decay.

Jeremiah is also an important figure in Judaism and Islam. His book is read in synagogues as part of the haftara, selections from the books of the prophets publicly read in synagogue. Islam also regards Jeremiah as a prophet and his story is included in the Islamic tradition but not in the Koran.

**Lineage and early life**

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, a priest from the land of Benjamin in the village of Anathoth, which was a Levite city in lands of the Tribe of Benjamin. It was located about three miles north of Jerusalem. In the course of his career, Jeremiah’s kin and other men of Anathoth plotted to kill him, probably fearing that his prophecies would result in the closing of the Anathoth sanctuary.

Jeremiah prophesized from the thirteenth year of Josiah, king of Judah (626 BC), until after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of Solomon's Temple in 587 BC. This covered the reigns of five kings of Judah: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. In the rabbinic commentaries, the prophetess Huldah was a relative and contemporary of Jeremiah, both descendants of Rahab by her marriage to Joshua. Jeremiah was also a contemporary of the prophet Zephaniah.

The prominent secretary of King Josiah’s court, Shaphan son of Azaliah, and his family (sons Ahikam and Gedaliah) had a relationship with Jeremiah, these sons acting significantly to protect Jeremiah from persecution (see Jer 26:24, 39:14, 40:5 and 43:6). The prophet’s relationship with the Shaphan family has suggested to some biblical scholars that he may have trained at the scribal school in Jerusalem over which Shaphan presided.

**Babylon**

Jeremiah was in prison when Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonian army in 587 BC. The Babylonians kindly released him and allowed him to choose where to live. Jeremiah then went with Gedaliah to Mizpah in Benjamin, whom the Babylonians had made governor of Judea.

**Egypt**

Johanan succeeded Gedaliah, who had been assassinated by an Israelite prince. Ignoring Jeremiah, Johanan fled to Egypt, taking with him the king's daughters, Jeremiah and Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe and servant. There, the prophet probably spent the rest of his life. There is no historical record of his death.

**Structure of the Book**

It can be divided into roughly six sections: Coogan, Michael D. (28). *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament: The Hebrew Bible in Its Context*. Oxford University Press.

• Chapters 1–25 (The earliest and main core of Jeremiah's message)

• Chapters 26–29 (Biographic material and interaction with other prophets)

• Chapters 3–33 (God's promise of restoration including Jeremiah's "new covenant" which is interpreted differently in Judaism than it is in Christianity)

• Chapters 34–45 (Mostly interaction with Zedekiah and the fall of Jerusalem)

• Chapters 46–51 (Divine punishment to the nations surrounding Israel)

• Chapter 52 (Appendix that retells 2 Kings)”

J.A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, (NICOT), Erdmans, 1980:

“1. Chapters 1-25: Divine Judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem.

Chapters 26-36: collection of oracles = history of word of God proclaimed by Jeremiah and rejected by the nation.”

Chapters 26-29: “…for the most part related to biographical narratives referring to incidents in the life of Jeremiah…not in any way chronological.”

2. Chapters 3-33: The Book of Consolation. Scroll of Restoration

Chapters 34-35: “…for the most part related to biographical narratives referring to incidents in the life of Jeremiah… not in any way chronological.”

Chapter 36: Jeremiah’s Scrolls

Chapters 37-45: covers Jeremiah’s life from siege/fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. to the last recorded episode of his ministry in Egypt.

3. Chapters 45-51: Oracles Against the Nations.

 Chapter 52: Historical Appendix (based on II Kings 24:18-25:3)

**Discussion Questions**

1) We learn a good deal about the prophet in these first two chapters, more than many of the other prophets—why do you think this is and how does it prepare the reader for Jeremiah’s message? What do these verses tell us about the office of prophet in Israel?

2) In verses 1:11-17, God used other means of communicating His will and intent other than direct statement. Why would God show Jeremiah an almond branch, and how does the boiling pot tell Jeremiah what will happen to Judah?

3) Outline the bare facts that God conveys to Jerusalem and all of Israel (= Israel + Judah) in Chapter 2. Then see what different sets of poetic images Jeremiah includes to intensify God’s word in the chapter. Why do you think OT prophecies often are in poetry and not prose?

4) How can you personally apply these verses?

5) Make up a question of your own and answer it.