

The Church of the Servant King
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Prophecy Series
 (Proph16A_Jeremiah and His Contemporaries)

Review of the Chronology of the Prophets

Baseline Ryrie Chronology		Revised Chronology (Prophecy Series to Date)	
9 th to 8 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Obadiah ✓ Joel ✓ Jonah ✓ Amos ✓ Hosea 		
		8 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Jonah (mid 8th – Nineveh, Assyria) ✓ Amos (mid 8th – Israel) ✓ Hosea (mid 8th – Israel & Judah) ✓ Micah (mid 8th – Israel & Judah)
8 th to 7 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Isaiah ✓ Micah Nahum Zephaniah 	8 th to 7 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Isaiah (Judah)
		Late 7 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Joel (Judah) Nahum (between 663-612 B.C.) Zephaniah (sometime after 622 B.C.)
7 th to 6 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jeremiah Habakkuk 	7 th to 6 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jeremiah (from 627-582 B.C.) ✓ Obadiah (Edom) Habakkuk (between 606-604 B.C.)
6 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ezekiel Daniel Haggai Zechariah 	6 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ezekiel (593-571 B.C.) Daniel (586-516 B.C.) Haggai (ca 520 B.C.) Zechariah (520-519 B.C.)
5 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ezra * Malachi Nehemiah * 	5 th Century	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ezra (ca 450 B.C.) Malachi (450-430 B.C.) Nehemiah (ca 430 B.C.)

Jeremiah – the Man¹

Most scholars believe that Jeremiah was born about 643 B.C., one year prior to the end of King Manasseh's reign. According to early church tradition, Jeremiah probably died in Egypt by being stoned to death.² His call to be a prophet occurred when he was about 20 years old in

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the information in this set of notes was gleaned from two primary sources - Thomas L. Constable, "Isaiah," *Expository Notes* – on compact disc, (August 2003 edition) and also available at www.soniclight.com and John D. Hannah, "Zephaniah" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Old Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 1523-4 and J. Ronald Blue, "Habakkuk" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Old Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 1505-7. I also consulted various class notes and papers related to seminary classes I've taken.

² Charles Lee Feinberg, "Jeremiah," in *Isaiah-Ezekiel*, vol. 6 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 360 quoted in Thomas L. Constable, "Isaiah," *Expository Notes* – on compact disc, (August 2003 edition) and also available at www.soniclight.com.

627 or 626 B.C. He probably ministered for a period of about 40 years. Jeremiah was a man who demonstrated great character and faithfulness as he encountered tremendous opposition throughout his ministry. He probably encountered more opposition from more enemies than any other prophet. Much of it probably arose from a basic part of his message to his people – do not resist God’s disciplining agent – the Babylonian Empire.

Parallels Between Jeremiah and Jesus

There are many similarities between Jeremiah – the man and prophet – and Jesus Christ. In fact, no other prophet has so many similarities or parallels with our Lord. Even the people of Jesus’ day noted these similarities (see Matt 16.14). Consider the following list:³

- ❖ Both men ministered at a time shortly prior to the fall of Jerusalem to foreign forces to include the destruction of the Temple (i.e. the Temple destructions in 586 B.C. and A.D. 70)
- ❖ The worship of Yahweh had become a meaningless ritual and the priesthood was rife with corruption
- ❖ Both men condemned the priests of their day
- ❖ Both condemned the commercialism of temple worship in their day (Jer 7.11 cf. Matt 21.13)
- ❖ Both men foretold the destruction of the Temple (Jer 7.14 cf. Matt 13.2)
- ❖ Both men wept over Jerusalem (Jer 9.1 cf. Lu 19.41)
- ❖ Both men came from a high tradition – Jeremiah from a priestly, prophetic heritage and Jesus from a royal lineage
- ❖ Both men used nature extensively for illustrative purposes in their instruction
- ❖ The enemies of both men charged each of them with political treason.
- ❖ Both men suffered from rejection by the members of their own families (Jer 12.6 cf. Jn 1.11)
- ❖ Both men were compassionate, suffering servants (cf. Isa 53)
- ❖ Both men endured loneliness (Jer 15.10 cf. Isa 53.3)
- ❖ Both men enjoyed unusually intimate fellowship with God (Jer 20.7 cf. Jn 11.41-42)

Historical Setting and Background

The Biblical record of the times during which Jeremiah ministered are recorded in 2 Kings 21-25 and 2 Chronicles 33-36. Contemporaries of Jeremiah include Zephaniah and Habakkuk before the exile and Ezekiel and Daniel after the exile began. After reviewing some information regarding Jeremiah and his times, we’ll review some information regarding the two pre-exilic prophets. The post-exilic prophets, Ezekiel and Daniel, will constitute a separate study.

The Kings of Judah During Jeremiah’s Life and Ministry

Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, was the king of Judah during Jeremiah’s early years and was responsible for the evil conditions that characterized Judah (Jer 15.4 cf. 2 Ki 23.26). Manasseh apparently repented toward the end of his life (2 Chron 33.15-19); however, not soon enough to compensate for all the evil he had perpetuated in Judah. His reign extended from 697 to 642 B.C.

Principle: There are often irreversible consequences associated with arrogance in the life of God’s people.

Principle: The true measure of one’s life is most often obtained after their death.

³ This list was derived from Thomas L. Constable, “Isaiah,” *Expository Notes* – on compact disc, (August 2003 edition) and also available at www.soniclight.com.

Manasseh's son, **Amon**, succeeded his father to the throne of Judah and Amon proved to have been influenced more by Manasseh's evil years than by Manasseh's brief period of repentance. Like his father, Manasseh, Amon encouraged the worship of the sun, moon, and stars and Baal. Both built altars to these objects and placed them in the courts of the Temple (2 Ki 21.4-5). They even made an Asherah pole, an image of the goddess Asherah, and placed it in the Temple (2 Ki 21.7). Child sacrifice and astrology prospered (2 Ki 21.6; 23.10-11). Amon just continued the policies of his father (2 Ki 21.19-26; 2 Chron 33.21-25). Amon's flagrant rebellion against Yahweh provoked some officials to assassinate him (2 Ki 21.23), so Amon's reign was very short – only two years (642-640 B.C.).

Amon was succeeded by his eight year old son – **Josiah** – who reigned for thirty-one years (640-609 B.C.). At the age of 8 in 640 B.C., Josiah's reign began and he was to become one of Judah's best kings. He began to seek the Lord when he was only 16 years old and he began a series of spiritual reforms in Judah when he was 20 years old (2 Chron 34.3-7) around 620 B.C. Jeremiah received his call to be a prophet during the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign when Josiah was 21 years old (i.e. 627 B.C. – Jer 1.6). His spiritual reforms were given impetus by Hilkiah, the high priest, having discovered a copy of the Law during the 18th year of Josiah's reign (622 B.C.).

During this period, Assyria was declining in power and dominance in the region while the Neo-Babylonian Empire was just beginning to emerge. The latter was not the power it would soon become. One of Josiah's projects was the repair of Solomon's Temple (Jer 12.4-6). During the restoration of the Temple, Hilkiah, the high priest and possibly Jeremiah's father, discovered the Mosaic Law which had been all but forgotten (2 Ki 22.8). The result was a return to the worship and ritual requirements specified in the Law, specifically the book of Deuteronomy (2 Ki 23). Josiah's reforms served to eliminate much of the idolatrous practices, cultic prostitution, child sacrifice and pagan altars in Judah as well as some former Israelite territory. Josiah even reinstated the Passover.

Unfortunately, Josiah's zeal was not matched by a wisdom borne of years of humility and objectivity in living the spiritual life. In 609 B.C., Josiah, age 39, died while attempting to block the forces of Pharaoh Necho II of Egypt from their advance northward to link up with the Assyrians against the westward expanding Neo-Babylonian Empire. Josiah had rejected the Word of the Lord through such prophets as Jeremiah who encouraged Judah's leaders to accept God's discipline via the Babylonian empire. Evidently, Josiah allowed himself to be influenced by the nationalists in Judah instead of God's prophet. The nationalists were attempting to do the right thing, but at the wrong time. The nationalists understood the promises and covenants God had made with His own. At a different time in Judah's history, the nationalists would have been taking the correct course of action. However, the nationalists were interpreting history using only divine establishment principles without combining that understanding with a spiritual life and perspective.

Principle: People who understand divine establishment principles can still misinterpret God's activity in their contemporary human history because they are deficient in their spiritual walk and knowledge.

Some of Jeremiah's prophecies date from Josiah's reign. Zephaniah also ministered during the reign of Josiah as did the prophetess, Huldah (2 Ki 22.14-20).

Jeremiah also ministered during the brief reign of Josiah's successor – **Jehoahaz** (a.k.a. Shallum). Jehoahaz reigned during 609 B.C. Jehoahaz was a son of Josiah and ruled for only three months. Jehoahaz was popular with the Judean population because he was not cooperative with Pharaoh Necho who controlled Judah after slaying Josiah. Pharaoh Necho deported Jehoahaz to Egypt as a prisoner where he later died (22.10-12).

Jeremiah's ministry continued into the reign of Jehoahaz's successor – **Jehoiakim** (a.k.a. Eliakim). Habakkuk also prophesied during this period. Jehoiakim was Jehoahaz's older brother. He reigned for 11 years (609-598 B.C.). It was during the reign of Jehoiakim that the Neo-Babylonian Empire established itself as the most powerful empire in the region when it defeated the Assyrian/Egyptian alliance at the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. – the same year that the first deportations of some of Judah's population to Babylon occurred.

Jehoiakim refused to follow Jeremiah's counsel to submit to the Babylonians and he even burned the written prophecies of Jeremiah, thereby showing his contempt (Jer 36). Jeremiah strongly denounced Jehoiakim for his wickedness (22.18-19; 26.20-23; 36). Eventually, Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylon in 601 B.C., so the Babylonians deposed him and took him to Babylon (2 Chron 36.6). He later died after being returned to Jerusalem in 561 B.C. (cf. 22.19).

Jehoiakim's son – **Jehoiachin** (a.k.a. Jedoniah or Coniah) – succeeded Jehoiakim to the throne, but he reigned for only three months (598-597 B.C.). During that time, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem and carried off a large portion of the city's population in 597 B.C. He died in Babylon (52.31-34).

Zedekiah, Josiah's third son, became a puppet king of Judah under Nebuchadnezzar after Jehoiakim's deportation. He reigned from 597 to 586 B.C. Judean nationalists (Jer 37-38) pressured Zedekiah to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar which he did by making a treaty with the Pharaoh of Egypt (Jer 51.59). This act of arrogance resulted in the final siege of Jerusalem (588-586 B.C.) and the third deportation to Babylon (586 B.C.). The Babylonians took Zedekiah captive to Riblah in Syria where they killed his sons and blinded Zedekiah. He, too, eventually died in Babylon.

Since Jeremiah preached a message to Judah that encouraged Judeans to not revolt against Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar allowed Jeremiah to choose where he wanted to live. Jeremiah decided to stay where he was. Nebuchadnezzar placed a Judean by the name of **Gedaliah** in the position of governor. However, Judean zealots under the leadership of a man named Ishmael assassinated Gedaliah (Jer 41.2) and fled to Egypt taking Jeremiah with them (Jer 42-43). Jeremiah spent the remaining years of his life in Egypt.

Principle: Arrogant people are easily deluded by popularity.

Principle: God's judgment (discipline) is always related to spiritual condition.

Date of Writing

If, as I believe, Jeremiah wrote this book with the assistance of his scribe, Baruch, then he probably completed his editorial work on the book sometime after his last historical reference – Jehoiachin's release from Babylonian captivity in 561 B.C. (Jer 52.31-34). We do not know exactly when Jeremiah died, but if he was born about 643 B.C., then he would have probably died within a matter of years after 561 B.C. as it was not as common then for a man to reach 80 years of age.

Purpose

Jeremiah's purpose was to call his hearers to repentance in view of God's coming judgment upon Judah which was to come soon from an army from the north (Jer 2-45). Judgment was coming because God's people had forsaken Yahweh and pursued idolatry. Eventually, Jeremiah realized that the people were so steeped in reversionism with hardened hearts that they would not repent. In order to minimize the destruction, suffering and death that was sure to come, Jeremiah urged his listeners to submit to Babylonian rule. He assured his audience that God still had a purpose for His people (Jer 30-33). In addition, he pronounced oracles against those peoples and nations that opposed God's chosen people (Jer 44-51).

Theme & Message

As a spiritual man, Jeremiah realized that Judah's problems all stemmed from her spiritual condition, specifically her apostate and unbelieving status as God's elect nation. Jeremiah held the priests largely responsible for this behavior. Worship had become a mere formality, a ritual without any spiritual substance. This resulted in the people giving an audience to false prophets which only led to further spiritual blindness.

God's judgment was inevitable. Judah and Jerusalem would be destroyed. The rule of the Davidic kings would be interrupted by this judgment. However, there would be a return from exile (25.11; 29.10). Israel and Judah would one day experience a glorious future because God is faithful to His promises (32.1-15). At that time there would be a repentant attitude demonstrated by God's elect nation (32.37-40). The Messiah would rule over her (23.5-8).

There is a strong emphasis upon the Covenants in Jeremiah's book, particularly the Mosaic and New Covenants. Jeremiah understood the Mosaic Covenant to be a grace provision from Yahweh toward His elect people which initially consisted of redeemed Jews. However, that elect people had failed to fulfill their responsibilities per that covenant. Jeremiah anticipated the appearance of the promised Davidic Messiah and the fulfillment of the kingdom promises that God had made to David. At that time, there would be a New Covenant made between Yahweh and His people (31.31-34). It would replace the Old Covenant given to Moses and usher in a new, personal relationship with Yahweh to an extent never experienced previously.

Eschatological Passages

In contrast to Isaiah, Micah, Zechariah and Daniel, Jeremiah did not reveal much about the coming Messiah, even though there are a few significant Messianic predictions as noted in the preceding section. We will study these passages in the next lesson in this series.

Jeremiah's Contemporaries

As mentioned previously, there were other prophets prior to the Exile that ministered during at least some of the period that Jeremiah ministered. (We will study Ezekiel and Daniel, two Exile period prophets, separately). The pre-Exilic prophets that ministered during some of the same period as Jeremiah include Zephaniah and Habakkuk.

Zephaniah

Little is known about Zephaniah the man. His ancestry is traced back four generations which is very unique among the prophets. He was the great-great grandson of Hezekiah, king of Judah. This made him the only known Old Testament prophet with such a high social standing and perhaps even royal standing. God protected Zephaniah during his childhood during Manasseh's evil reign (2 Ki 21.16) which may have some relation to the meaning of his name – "Yahweh hides" or "Yahweh has hidden" or "Yahweh treasured." Zephaniah could have been a resident of Jerusalem because of his words "from this place" (1.4) and his overall familiarity with the city (1.10-11).

Zephaniah's ministry was during the reign of King Josiah (640-609 B.C.). His prophecies in the book that carries his name were given sometime after the time of Josiah's revival in 622 B.C., but before the destruction of Nineveh in 612 B.C. as the capital of the Assyrian Empire. Thus, Zephaniah ministered during that period in Judah's history that corresponded to a power vacuum in the region since Assyria was on the decline and the Neo-Babylonian Empire was just beginning to emerge. A false sense of security and power was pervasive in the thinking of the Judean populace as we have seen in our study of the historical background associated with Jeremiah's ministry. King Josiah extended his military influence as far north as Naphtali, a

strategy probably influenced by the nationalists in Judah who were at least to some degree desirous of having an undivided kingdom like that of David and Solomon. As we've noted, Josiah also removed the Assyrian religious practices from Judah.

Both Jeremiah and Zephaniah prophesied to a people who were prosperous and deluded with a false sense of power and security, yet who remained spiritually unrepentant. This was in spite of the fact that there were wonderful exceptions such as Josiah and the prophets.

Principle: The spiritual man or woman will always suffer by association with the spiritually degenerate people with whom they are affiliated.

We will examine a few passages in Zephaniah which carry eschatological significance. The phrase "the day of the Lord" is an expression used very frequently in this book – in fact more so than in any other OT book.

Habakkuk

Like Zephaniah, little is known about Habakkuk, the man. Habakkuk was evidently an officially ordained prophet who took part in Temple liturgical singing. He was also well educated, spiritually sensitive, and he wrote with a poetic style as much as in a prophetic style. It appears that Habakkuk wrote his book sometime around the time of the Neo-Babylonian Empire's victory at the battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.). Therefore, Habakkuk wrote on the eve of pending destruction of Judah at the hands of a newly dominant Empire. As we have seen, Judah was filled with corruption. Josiah's son Jehoahaz had been deposed by the Egyptians and his brother, Jehoiakim had been placed on the throne. Also, as we have seen Jehoiakim was evil, ungodly, and rebellious (2 Ki 23.36-24.7; 2 Chron 26.5-8).

Habakkuk looked all around and saw only the ungodly continue to prosper. Worldly empires rose and fell and inflicted punishment upon God's people seemingly at their whim. During this brief period in Judah's history, wealth was accumulated by the unrighteous while the righteous suffered. So, Habakkuk's book begins with an interrogation of God. Most Old Testament prophets proclaimed divine justice and judgment; Habakkuk pleaded for divine judgment against the unrighteous nation Babylon that God would use to discipline His Own unrighteous people. As part of his plea, Habakkuk asks several questions regarding God's methods (chapter 1). In response, God answers with a series of "woes" directed towards Babylon (chapter 2). Finally, in chapter 3, Habakkuk praises God for his sovereign faithfulness.

The heart of the message of Habakkuk is not so much eschatological as it is an encouragement to live by faith. In 2.4, Habakkuk declares "the righteous will live by his faith." When one looks around horizontally, there may be reason to be terrified by all the injustice; however, when one looks up vertically to the Lord, trust and peace of mind should result.

We will not spend any time with the book of Habakkuk in this series since there is little to no eschatological material in the book.