

Jeremiah (September 27)

Reading Jeremiah

His wide eyes grope for light, yet they remain full of darkness. Numbness nibbles his toes and fingers. It creeps through his bones, causing them to quake. He thinks, “We have turned back too late. The way to freedom is too far.” So desperation gives way to utter despair. And then, piercing the darkness, comes one pure, clear beam of the brightest light.

Reading Jeremiah is like entering the cavernous darkness of another person’s frustration and despair. The Lord called Jeremiah – the “iron” prophet – to preach a hapless message of repentance to the stony hearts of sinful Judah. Jeremiah pours out his strength in the task, hammering the people with prophecy after prophecy, firing them with repeated warnings of judgment. The result is one of the longest compositions in the Bible, most of which is pure rebuke or calls for the people to turn from their sin. Yet at the heart of Jeremiah, shining brightly as a ray of light through the darkness, appears the aptly named “book of comfort” (chapters 30-33), one of the brightest Old Testament prophecies of everlasting salvation. Indeed, people in Jesus’ day even identified Jesus with Jeremiah.

Author and Date

The book records the message and the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah, whose personal life and struggles are made known to us in greater depth and detail than those of any other Old Testament prophet. Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry began in 626 BC and ended sometime after 586. His ministry was immediately preceded by that of Zephaniah. Habakkuk was a contemporary, and Obadiah may have been also. Since Ezekiel began his ministry in Babylon in 593, he too was a late contemporary of the great prophet in Jerusalem. How and where Jeremiah died is not known; Jewish tradition, however, asserts that while living in Egypt he was put to death by being stoned.

Themes and Message

Referred to frequently as “Jeremiah the prophet” in the book that bears his name, Jeremiah was ever conscious of his call from the Lord to be a prophet. As such, he proclaimed words that were spoken first by God himself and were therefore certain of fulfillment. Many of his predictions were fulfilled in the short term, and others will be fulfilled in the long term.

Called to the unhappy task of announcing the destruction of the kingdom of Judah, it was Jeremiah’s commission to lodge God’s indictment against his people and proclaim the end of an era. At long last, the Lord was about to inflict on the remnant of his people the ultimate covenant curse. He would undo all that he had done for them since the day he brought them out of Egypt. But God’s judgment of his people, though terrible, was not to be the last word, the final work of God in history. Mercy and covenant faithfulness would triumph, Israel would be restored, the nations that crushed her would be crushed, and the old covenants (with Israel, David, and the Levites) would be honored.

Blessings for Readers

As you read Jeremiah’s prophecies, gain new appreciation for the importance of daily repentance and devotion. In Jeremiah’s day, the people of Judah strayed because they neglected God’s word until they forgot what true faith and worship were. Jeremiah, the “iron” prophet, withstood the worst conditions because God’s word burned like fire within him and continually guided his faith and life. Patient Jeremiah stands for us as an enduring example of faithfulness to the Lord amid all trials.

Recognize that no matter what troubles assail you, your faithful God stands with you. The heart of Jeremiah’s message is that the Lord always has our everlasting salvation in view. God fulfilled Jeremiah’s prophecies of the new covenant in the life, death, and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ, who welcomes us into his kingdom and gives to us the new testament in his blood.