

JEREMIAH THE MAN (646-586 B.C.)

Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, was of a priestly family, but nothing indicates that he ever exercised a priestly ministry. Jeremiah's father was probably a descendant of Abiathar, the sole survivor of the priests of Nob (1 Sam 22.20). After ministering under David, Abiathar was exiled by Solomon to Anathoth, where he had property (1 Kings 2.26). That Jeremiah was a man of means may be inferred from his purchase of the field in Jer. 32.6-15.

Jeremiah was born at Anathoth about 646 B.C. and died, probably in Egypt, not long after 586. He was called to the prophetic office in 626 (1.2; 25.3) and served in it for more than forty years.

As stated above, Jeremiah was called to his ministry in 626 B.C., in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (1.2), and preached in Jerusalem until the fall of Judah in 586 (cf. 7.2; 22.1; 27.1-2; 32.1). After the decline of the kingdom, he labored for some time among the survivors in Judah and later among the Jews who had fled to Egypt (40-44). Expositors differ about the age of Jeremiah at the time of his call, though he was probably about twenty.

RULERS IN ISRAEL DURING THE TIME OF JEREMIAH**a) Manasseh (697-642 B.C.) 2 Kings 21.1-18; 2 Chronicles 33.1-20; Jeremiah 15.4**

Manasseh, evil son of the godly Hezekiah, had the longest reign of all the Hebrew monarchs, from 697 to 642 B.C. He, more than any other single person, was responsible for the final destruction of the kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 23.26; 24.3; Jer 15.4). Most of his 55 year reign was devoted to thorough and going paganism, religiously; and to a renewed subjection to Assyria, politically. This part of his record in 2 Chronicles (33.1-10) closely parallels its literary source in 2 Kings 21.1-10. During his closing years, a personal crisis did bring Manasseh back to repentance; but it was too late to produce a significant national effect (2 Chronicles 33.11-20).

b) Amon (642-640 B.C.) 2 Kings 21.19-26; 2 Chronicles 33.21-25; Jeremiah 1.2; 25.3

The short reign of Amon was a replay of the earlier period of his father, Manasseh. The author of Kings notes simply that he was as evil as his father and so perpetuated all of Manasseh's earlier idolatry (2 Kings 20-21). The author of Chronicles (2 Chronicles 33.21-23) adds that Amon failed to humble himself, but rather "increased his guilt."

c) Josiah (640-609 B.C.) Jeremiah 1.2, 3; 3.6; 22.11, 18; 25.1, 3; 26.1; 27.1; 35.1; 36.1, 2, 9; 37.1; 45.1; 46.2; 2 Chronicles 34.1-36.1; 2 Kings 22.1-23.30

Josiah came to the throne when he was a boy of eight. Politically, Assyria was under strong opposition from Babylon, fighting to survive. This gave Judah more freedom to throw off Assyrian elements in her worship. In 633 B.C., Josiah sought the Lord (2 Chronicles 34.3); his reforms began in 629 B.C. (2 Chronicles 34.3); and in 623-622 B.C., the Book of the Law was found in the temple (2 Kings 22.3-8; 2 Chronicles 34.8-15). The reforms are detailed in 2 Kings 22-23. Though widespread and well inaugurated they did not last, as is evident from Jeremiah's ceaseless condemnation of the nation's sins. Jerusalem was made the only authorized center for worship.

In 609 B.C., Pharaoh Neco of Egypt joined Assyria to strengthen her against Babylon. Josiah, though Neco had warned him, interfered and lost his life at the Battle of Megiddo (2 Kings 23.29; 2 Chronicles 35.20-24). But Babylon, stronger than Egypt, dominated the world scene under Nabopolassar of Chaldea, ruler of Babylonia by 625 B.C. and the destroyer of Nineveh in 612 B.C. His son, Nebuchadnezzar II, succeeded him and reigned for 43 years having defeated Egypt at the Battle of Carchemish on the Euphrates River in 605 B.C. (Jeremiah 46.2; 2 Chronicles 35.20). Thereafter, Babylon was master of the world.

For years, Jeremiah steadily counseled against Judah's involvement in world politics. When the people refused his counsel, he repeatedly entreated them to surrender to the superior forces of Babylon, who at that time were an instrument for carrying out God's will.

d) Jehoahaz (609 B.C.) Jeremiah 22.11; 2 Kings 23.31-36; 2 Chronicles 36.1-4

Distraught over the calamitous death of godly Josiah, the people took matters into their own hands and set Jehoahaz (Shallum, 2 Kings 22.11), son of Josiah, on the throne. In three months of rule he manifested an anti-Egypt and pro-Babylon policy, for which he was removed by Pharaoh Neco (2 Kings 23.31-33), who took him to Egypt and imposed tribute on the country. In his place, Neco set on the throne Eliakim, oldest son of Josiah and half-brother of Jehoahaz (2 Kings 23.34, 36), changing his name to Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23.30-35; 2 Chronicles 36.1-4).

e) Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.) Jeremiah 1.3; 22.18, 24; 25.1; 26.1, 21-23; 27.20; 28.4; 35.1; 36.1, 28-32; 37.1; 45.1; 46.2; 52.2; Jeremiah 22.13-14; 36; 2 Kings 23.34-24.7; 2 Chronicles 36.4-8; Daniel 1.1**f) Jehoiachin (598-597 B.C.) Jeremiah 22.24, 28; 27.20; 28.4; 29.2; 37.1; 52.31-33; 2 Kings 24.8-17; 2 Chronicles 36.8-10; Jeremiah 52.31-34; 2 Kings 25.27-30****g) Zedekiah (597-586 B.C.) Jeremiah 1.3; 21.1-7; 24.8; 27.1-12; 28.1; 29.3, 21, 22; 32.1-5; 34.2-8, 21; 36.12; 37.1-21; 38.5, 14-24; 39.1-7; 44.30; 49.34; 51.59; 2 Kings 24.17-25.26; 2 Chronicles 36.10-21; Jeremiah 39.1-7**