

HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

October 22, 2006

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
- b) Amon (642-640 B.C.) 2 Kings 21.19-26; 2 Chron. 33.21-25; Jer. 1.2; 25.3
- c) Josiah (640-609 B.C.) Jer. 1.2, 3; 3.6; 46.2; 2 Chron. 34.1-36.1; 2 Kings 22.1-23.30
- d) Jehoahaz (609 B.C.) Jer. 22.11; 2 Kings 23.31-36; 2 Chron. 36.1-4
- e) **Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.)** Jer. 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; Jer. 22.13-14; 36; 2 Kings 23.34-24.7; 2 Chron. 36.4-8; Daniel 1.1

The reign of Jehoiakim was the time of Jeremiah's greatest trial and opposition. Politically, king and prophet were diametrically opposed, the king favoring Egypt and Jeremiah counseling submission to Babylon. Spiritually, the two were even farther apart. Jehoiakim has been characterized as the worst and most ungodly of all Judah's kings. He has been labeled a bloodthirsty tyrant, an inveterate enemy of the truth. He cared nothing for the worship of the God of Israel; exacted exorbitant taxes, used forced labor without pay, and had no regard for the word or prophet of God (Jer. 22.13-14; 36). In Jehoiakim's 11 year reign, the Battle of Carchemish took place (cf. 46.2). It was an event of permanent significance, for it marked the transfer of power over the Middle East from Egypt to Babylon. This defeat was the final blow to Egypt's aspirations and guaranteed the Chaldeans the supremacy of the West. It was the turning point of the period and had important consequences for Israel's future. The Babylonians made Jehoiakim their vassal and exiled a number of Jewish nobles (2 Kings 24.1), among them Daniel (Dan 1.1). Of all the kings under whom Jeremiah prophesied, Jehoiakim was the most outspoken foe of the message and messenger of God (Jer. 26.20-23; 36.20-26). In 598-597 B.C., he revolted against Babylon but was unsuccessful, thus adding to Judah's problems (2 Kings 24.1-5). In Jehoiakim's time, Jeremiah was persecuted, plotted against, maligned and imprisoned. The king destroyed his written prophecies, but the prophet did not swerve from his divine commission (Jer. 11.18-23; 12.6; 15.15-18; 18.18; 20.2; 26.10-11, 24; 36.23). Jehoiakim's reign ended violently in Jerusalem in 598-597 B.C., in the eleventh year of his rule, as Jeremiah had predicted (Jer. 22.18-19). The Chronicler records Jehoiakim's deportation to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar (2 Chron. 36.6-7; Dan 1.1).

- f) **Jehoiachin (598-597 B.C.)** Jer. 22.24, 28; 27.20; 28.4; 29.2; 37.1; 52.31-33; 2 Kings 24.8-17; 2 Chron. 36.8-10; 2 Kings 25.27-30

Jehoiakim was succeeded by his son, Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah and Coniah; 2 Kings 22.24, 28; 24.1), who reigned only three months (2 Kings 24.8), but this teen-age king ruled long enough to reveal himself as a wicked monarch, whom Jeremiah strenuously denounced (Jer. 22.24-30). Jehoiachin's father's rebellion against Babylon forced Nebuchadnezzar to besiege Jerusalem in 597 B.C. when Jehoiachin capitulated (2 Kings 24.12). He was exiled to Babylon with many of Judah's upper class (Ezekiel 1.2), and the temple was plundered (2 Kings 24.10-16). Jehoiachin was a prisoner in Babylon for thirty-seven years (Jer. 52.31-34). He was released by Evil-Merodach, son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25.27-30). Strangely, the Jews long held a hope of his restoration to the Davidic throne; and Ezekiel refers to him, not to Zedekiah his successor, as king.

- g) **Zedekiah (597-586 B.C.)** Jer. 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 Chron. 36.10-21

Among the many accomplishments of the great Nebuchadnezzar were king making and name changing. After the exile of Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar set on the Judean throne Mattaniah, a son of Josiah, full brother of Eliakim and uncle of Jehoiachin, and changed Mattaniah's name to Zedekiah (2 Kings 23.34; 24.17; 2 Chron. 36.10; Jer 1.3). What was the situation in Judah at the outset of Zedekiah's reign? Clearly a series of sieges and deportations with changes in rulers had depleted the small kingdom of some of its best minds. Zedekiah, weak, vacillating, deficient in personality, found it beyond him to exert effective governing leadership. A puppet of Babylon, to whose king he had sworn fealty in the name of the God of Israel, he was checkmated in every decision by the pro-Egyptian policy of his officials.

Zedekiah's relationship with Jeremiah was closer than any previous Judean king with the probable exception of the godly Josiah, but he was powerless to protect Jeremiah from the vicious designs of the nobles and to follow the God-given counsel Jeremiah ceaselessly reiterated about submitting to Nebuchadnezzar. In the fourth year of his reign, Zedekiah had plotted rebellion against Babylon with a confederacy of the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon (Jer. 27.3-11). This was their object in sending representatives to Jerusalem. The plot was denounced by Jeremiah and ultimately came to nothing. Perhaps Zedekiah's visit to Babylon that same year was intended to assure Nebuchadnezzar of his loyalty (Jer. 51.59).

The end, however, was not far off. In the ninth year of his reign (588 B.C.), Zedekiah conspired with Pharaoh Hophra against Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon responded with an invasion of Judah, which ended when the city fell in the summer of 586 B.C. (2 Kings 24.20-25.7; 2 Chron. 36.17; Jer 38.28-39.10). Throughout the siege, Jeremiah urged Zedekiah to surrender (Jer. 21.1-10; 34.1-5, 17-22; 37.3-10, 16-17; 38.14-23). The destruction of Jerusalem at this time, (annually observed in mourning among Jews the world over on the ninth of the month Ab), was the greatest judgment of God on Israel in the OT. Zedekiah, captured as he tried to escape, his sons slain before him and his eyes blinded, was carried to Babylon with a company of his subjects.

After the destruction of the city and temple, the king of Babylon appointed Gedaliah governor of Judah. After a brief period (which, in the absence of evidence, could be three months or a few years), Gedaliah was murdered by a scion of the Davidic house, possibly at the instigation of pro-Egyptian sympathizers. Fearing reprisal from Babylon, the survivors of this tragedy fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah and Baruch by force with them. Strange that Jeremiah, who counseled throughout his ministry against confidence in Egypt, should end his earthly days there against his will.