

5. Jeremiah

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The prophet Jeremiah has a “gloomy” reputation in Biblical Studies. And indeed, his biography and the historical circumstances of his life during the Babylonian Conquest in 588 B.C.E., the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the Exile of the elites would make any spokesperson charged with proclaiming the Word of God in such times “gloomy” and anguished. But Jeremiah was also not without hope, for he also looked beyond the divine judgment of conquest and exile to a time when God would restore his covenantal relationship with his people. Jeremiah’s life as a prophet is vividly embodied through his own autobiographical ruminations, and the portrayal of events in his life by his scribe, Baruch. As such, the trials and tribulations of his vocation make Jeremiah the poster-child of the prophetic “outsider” who’s own biography incarnates the suffering and ostracizing of Judah during this traumatic and agonizing period of Jewish history.

Assignment #5 for Class on Saturday 29th September 2018

Reading

Please read through the book of Jeremiah in the Hebrew Bible. It’s a lot of text, and should be broken up into digestible portions. (I suggest four “chunks” that correlate to the three major cycles of oracles, and the oracles against foreign nations: 1-25 [maybe 1-10 and 11-25]; 26-36; 37-45; and 46-52). In terms of the “Greatest Hits” of Jeremiah, I would recommend focusing on: 1:1-3:5; 11; 16-19; 22:13-17; 37-39; 50-51 (approximately a quarter of the book). However, for the purposes of this week’s assignment, I would like you to concentrate particularly on the account of Jeremiah’s prophetic activity (chapters 26-45) – and within that sub-section, focus especially on the record of Jeremiah’s suffering before, during and after Jerusalem’s fall in chapters 37-44. Please read through the introduction to Jeremiah in your NRSV Bible, and use the annotations and notes as an aid to understanding and interpretation when you feel in need. [You may also want to consult 2 Kings 21-25 to frame the historical context of the period during which Jeremiah was active as a prophet.]

Thinking & Responding

For this week’s Response Paper, I would like you to focus specifically on the account of Jeremiah’s prophetic activity (chapters 26-45), especially the record of Jeremiah’s suffering in chapters 37-44. *What does the example of Jeremiah tell us about the life and vocation of a prophet? How does his biography, personal misery, and bitter lamentations compare to both the “triumphalism” of prosperity theology and the privileged leadership hierarchy of many contemporary churches? Is Jeremiah’s prophetic example unthinkable in our day and age? If so...why? If not...why not? Does Jeremiah himself possess sufficient hope and trust in God to withstand and resist the tide of despair that engulfs him, personally and culturally?* Please write your Response to these questions in approximately 400-500 words (12-point font, double-spaced, one-inch margin, with your name at the top of the paper). Type up and print your Reflections, and be ready to share and discuss your Insights in class. I will collect them in to review and grade at the end of the class.