

Dr. Allan MacRae: Jeremiah: Lecture 13

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Overview of Jeremiah, Jer 52 Authorship, LXX, and Lachish

Universality of the New Covenant [0:0]

In Jeremiah 31:34 it says, “No one shall say to his neighbor know the Lord...”

And one asks if this necessarily covers the whole earth. I don’t think we could draw from either the Hebrew passage or from the statements in Jeremiah whether it includes the whole earth or not; for that we would have to get evidence from elsewhere. But it would seem to me that it would cover all those who are in physical proximity to one another.

The term “neighbor,” of course, is used by our Lord when he quoted the statement “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” and the question was asked, "who is my neighbor?" In his answer he tells the story of the good Samaritan to show that the neighbor was not necessarily one who had the same views or ideas as one had, but that it meant anyone who was in the same general location, anyone with whom one would fall into a relationship. I personally don’t see how we can consider a neighbor as being restricted to scattered individuals and omitting the individuals who are physically between them. However, to reach an absolute conviction on the subject would, of course, involve consideration of many other passages.

On Disagreements on Exams [1:33]

On another matter, there was one passage in which a student expressed rather shocked disagreement with me in one paper on a number of points, and I’m always glad

to see people disagreeing with me because it shows they are thinking the matter through. I am interested not in getting my own ideas in any particular matter out, but on your learning to analyze and to gather from our study what seems to you to be reasonable. Yet, of course, when it comes to marking an examination, one cannot necessarily give credit to someone simply for expressing their own ideas. I had a professor in college who was very anti-Christian in many of his ideas, and in his examinations I took from him, he would ask a question that was on the philosophical matters he was dealing with. I would always give him an exact statement of what he had said. I would introduce it by the words, "The professor has said..." thus not expressing whether I agreed or disagreed. That's the way I always introduced my discussion of questions when I thought that professor's ideas were wrong. I had another one who had a little different attitude, and with him I would say, "The professor has said", and then I would give him his view exactly, and then I would say "But it seems to be this way," and then I would give him my view because I knew that he was interested not that I agree with him but that I had thought through the material.

But marking is sort of a nuisance anyway. It's primarily a matter of a little extra spur to get people to study and to push forward in the matter. And yet one has to do it as objectively as possible. Therefore, if you choose to give me what I have said, whether you agree with it or not, that is fine. If you choose to add a statement of your own ideas on some points, I'm always greatly interested to hear it. And they certainly won't affect my marking in anyway provided that I do see that you have understood what I have tried to give.

Summary Overview of Jeremiah [3:36]

Now, this book, Jeremiah, is a big book, and there is a great deal of material in it, and all we can do in these few hours together is to get a good introduction to the book. I've tried to touch on those matters which are necessary for understanding the book, and on those matters which seem particularly interesting to us, and to give you the foundation on which you can go further into detail. As you know, we have jumped around a bit, and I think that doing so with such a short time to deal with makes it easier to get into the book, than if, in the case of this particular book, one went straight through it.

One thing that we have noticed is the contrast between the arrangement in Jeremiah and that of Ezekiel, which mostly goes right straight through chronologically. And to a large extent Isaiah does too. But here in Jeremiah the material was evidently revised and rearranged on two or three different occasions, and we noticed evidence in one of these occasions of that having been done.

Jer 52 – Zedekiah and the Downfall of Jerusalem [cf. Jer 39] [4:39]

I'd like, therefore, to spend a minute with you glancing at a chapter which you wouldn't think would come right at this point, but perhaps we could look at right now. And that is chapter 52. Chapter 51 ends with the words, "The words of Jeremiah end here." Then we have chapter 52, which goes back to Zedekiah's becoming king and tells of his rebelling. And then it describes the attack of the Babylonians, the downfall of Jerusalem, the taking of the people into captivity, and in the end of it tells about how Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, after he had been in exile 37 years, was released from

prison by the king called here “Evil-Meridoch”. This is a very good reproduction in Hebrew of an entirely different language of the Babylonian name, “Evil-Meridoch.” (The name reproduction is really very close, much closer than you usually get when you try to reproduce a name in an entirely different language.) It tells how he released Jehoiachin from prison and treated him well for the rest of his life.

Jer 52 and 2 Kings 25 Parallel [5:48]

Now, this chapter 52 seems to be repetition because we have in chapter 39 the account of the downfall of Jerusalem. And, of course, it had the words just before that this is the end of the words of Jeremiah: “The words of Jeremiah end here”. It is interesting that if you look at 2 Kings, you find in 2 Kings that you have this chapter almost word for word. In fact the last part of 2 Kings (25:27-30), the last few verses, is word for word like the last words of this chapter. And then there is a little section in this chapter that isn’t in Second Kings as the previous material is.

Authorship and Jer 52 [6:33]

Now the book is called ‘Jeremiah,’ so some would say, therefore, the last chapter must be by Jeremiah. Now we, of course, are dead opposed to the attitude of those who think that we can take Biblical books and divide them up into sections written by different people at different times and then put together according to certain philosophic ideas, or sometimes in haphazard ways. Such an approach is typical of most of the so-called "higher criticism."

But that doesn’t mean that the title of a book necessarily tells you who wrote every bit of the book, or even any of it. I don’t think anybody thinks that Samuel wrote all of

Second Samuel. Anybody who knows anything about it certainly doesn't think he wrote even a word of Second Samuel because Second Samuel begins some years after the death of Samuel. First and Second Samuel originally were one book, and they are named after Samuel because he is the principle character in the early part. We don't know who wrote the book of Job. It might have been written by Job, but certainly there is no reason to think it was written by Job. A title doesn't necessarily say who it was written by.

If we have the statement--"the prophecies of Jeremiah"--as we have in the beginning of this book, then we have the scriptural declaration that at least the major part of what follows was written by Jeremiah.

But it is in no way a question of Jeremiah's narrative to say that it seems extremely unlikely that chapter 52 was written by Jeremiah. I wouldn't say it's impossible, but I think I would question very much the possibility of his having written the last few verses which deal with events that happened so long after the life of Jeremiah.

Student Question: "You said that chapter 52 of Jeremiah was the last section of 2 Kings?"

Answer: 2 Kings, yes. That the last few verses are identical and then there's a little bit in Jeremiah that isn't in 2 Kings, just a few verses, but 2 Kings 25:27-30 matches word for word Jeremiah 52:31-34. We don't know which came first, but I would think it more likely that Jeremiah is taken from 2 Kings rather than vice-versa because it sort of doesn't fit here in Jeremiah since we've already had the account of the fall of Jerusalem. And then we end with these words recapitulating the fall of Jerusalem.

[Student Question:] “In the American Standard they translate ‘thus far are the words of Jeremiah’. With that interpretation, it would seem to indicate that we could have some, rather than all ‘the words of Jeremiah are ended.’ It would seem that maybe you could go farther with ‘thus far are the words of Jeremiah.’”

Answer: That may be a little more literal. "Thus far the words of Jeremiah" seems to imply a question as to what follows. It doesn't necessarily say that what follows isn't from Jeremiah. And it is certainly possible that Jeremiah wrote this and that it was incorporated in 2 Kings. That's entirely possible. But the very fact that such a thing like "Thus end the words of Jeremiah", or "Thus far are the words of Jeremiah" was put in there suggests rather strongly that it wasn't part of Jeremiah's words. And the fact that it is simply a recapitulation in Jeremiah, while in 2 Kings it is in its logical place telling about the downfall of Jerusalem suggests very strongly that it originates in 2 Kings.

Baruch and the Writing of the Book of Jeremiah [10:21]

Just to make an offhand guess, I would say that perhaps Baruch, the scribe who did the actual writing of what Jeremiah dictated to him, perhaps he or perhaps somebody else, in putting together the book of Jeremiah and the beautiful, carefully worked out poetry that Jeremiah wrote in the book of Lamentations with his great lament over the fall of Jerusalem, that somebody thought that it made a logical connection between the two. So he gives details again on this which is the event that Jeremiah looked forward to through most of his book--the coming of the great disaster which he was predicting for 25 years or more before it happened. It also leads right into Lamentations, “How deserted

lies the city, once so full of people; how like a widow is she who once was great among the nations,” and so on.

These five chapters of beautiful poetry in Lamentations have been ascribed to Jeremiah - I have no reason to think he didn't write them, but it doesn't actually say that anywhere, so far as I recall, that he did write Lamentations.

[Student Question:] “Are you saying then that the possibility that Baruch or someone else who assembled these books may have borrowed this from 2 Kings and placed it in here?”

Answer: “Yes, I would think it very likely – because it's practically word for word except for just these very few verses. And it logically makes a place of stepping from Jeremiah into Lamentations. Logically you might say it binds the two together. And it repeats again that which is the great subject of the book of Lamentations.

Structure of the Book of Jeremiah [12:05]

Well, in the book of Jeremiah we have noticed that there are a few major divisions, and you remember the first division is general prophecies in which are interspersed autobiographical expressions of Jeremiah's strong feelings. And then after that we have nine chapters which deal with the kings and the prophets' names. And after that we have the four chapters which differ so much from the rest of the book because in these four chapters, chapters 30 through 33, he is there looking forward to the contrast between the previous chapters and the chapters that follow. The previous chapters are condemning the people for their sin in a very great measure, whereas the latter chapters are pointing to God's wonderful mercy and grace that are going to be given in the future

and promising return from exile and promising many blessings. And then we notice that after chapter 33, chapters 34 to 39, deal largely with the events during the last few years before the downfall of Jerusalem and with the events when the enemy was there right at the gate of Jerusalem. And in these chapters, of course, his relations with Zedekiah are particularly important.

I would think that the division between this and the next section of the book ought to be made in the middle of chapter 39 because the first ten verses of chapter 39 tell about the downfall of the city and the fate of Zedekiah. Then from chapter 39, verse 11 on, it is telling about Nebuchadnezzar personally, and I would think that would be a logical place to make the division between this third main section and the fourth which deals with Jeremiah's experiences after the fall of Jerusalem, and that topic goes on until the end of chapter 45.

Jer 45 and God's Promise to Baruch [13:56]

And at the end of that section we have the shortest chapter in the book, chapter 45, a chapter which has only five verses in it, though the fifth verse is as long as three ordinary verses. And in that chapter he tells Baruch, "in the fourth year of Jehoiakim"—you're going way back – but "in the fourth year of Jehoiakim", he tells Baruch, he says, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says to you Baruch, 'You said, "Woe to me; the Lord has added sorrow to my pain; I am worn out with groaning and can find no rest." The LORD says, "Say this to him: "This is what the LORD says, 'I will overthrow what I have built and uproot what I have planted throughout the land. Should you then seek good things for yourself? Seek them not for I will bring disaster on all people', declares

the LORD. ‘But wherever you go I will let you escape with your life.’”

And so Baruch was given this promise from God that he would not die in any punishment from the kings, or in the conquest, or from the opposition of wicked people. God would let him escape with his life. This doesn’t mean that he will never die, but it means that he will not have a violent death. It certainly means that he would continue for a long time. And so the archbishop felt, and I think rightly, that these three verses should be put into a section by themselves, at the end of this fourth section of the book.

Jer 46-52—Concerning the Nations [15:32]

Then from chapter 46 on we have the word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah concerning the nations. From here on he is not primarily interested in Israel anymore, but from here on through chapter 51 he is giving God’s punishment upon the nations that had so mistreated Israel. This section from chapter 46 on, in the Septuagint, is placed in the middle of chapter 25. So there we have a major difference in the arrangement between the Septuagint and the Hebrew texts. It seems to me that the Hebrew arrangement is more logical, but in chapter 25:15 the LORD says, “Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.” And right about there the Septuagint inserts chapters 46 through 51.

Septuagint and Jeremiah [16:30]

The Septuagint, as you know, is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. In general, the Septuagint follows the Hebrew pretty closely. There are places where we see some Hebrew may be different in some copy that the Septuagint used. There are a few

places where the Hebrew text has become corrupt in the course of transmission.

Occasionally, we find the Septuagint gives us a clue to what is a correct reading where the Hebrew has been incorrectly transmitted. But I've known fine Christian people who've gone overboard on this and taken the idea that wherever the Septuagint and the Hebrew differ, you should follow the Septuagint. I think that's an utterly wrong idea. I think there are a few cases where the Septuagint preserves the right text, but in most cases where the Septuagint and the Hebrew differ, the Hebrew Masoretic text is correct.

Now there's no book where the Septuagint differs as much from the Hebrew as the book of Jeremiah. But the differences are largely from the Septuagint's omitting a great deal of material. The Septuagint is maybe a fourth shorter than the Hebrew and there is much omitted. Of course, there is much repetition in any Hebrew text. It is typical of ancient Hebrew to repeat a great deal, and in Jeremiah there are many very similar messages. And so it would seem likely that whoever translated the Septuagint felt that he could give the message of Jeremiah while leaving out certain parts. So you have omissions all the way through although you get most of the same ideas. The one really big change in Jeremiah is the insertion of this prophecy against the nations in the middle of chapter 25 instead of at the end of the book. And that, of course, does not affect the interpretation or the understanding of this at all.

Cities Outside Jerusalem: Lachish [18:30]

Now, in the course of the attacks on Jerusalem, we have an occasional mention of other cities than the city of Jerusalem. And there is one case where it refers to the cities of

Lachish and Azekah as being the two cities that have not yet been conquered when most of the cities had already been taken, when Jerusalem was coming under the final siege. This city of Lachish was the second largest city of the kingdom of Judah. It is quite important in connection to the book of Isaiah. It has much less importance in connection to the book of Jeremiah. But it is of considerable interest to us because of the fact that a considerable part of it has been excavated. Lachish was excavated mainly about 40 years ago, before World War II. And Lachish was discovered then - previously the place had not been understood. But there is a rather large hill which Dr. William Albright had suggested was Lachish and there was a large excavation of Lachish carried on, and in the course of it they found just about the only sizable group of materials that are identical in language with our Biblical Hebrew. And those have been called the "Lachish Letters." These letters are hard to interpret. Letters are all hard to interpret – but these are particularly hard because they are written on pieces of pottery that are broken in some places. And letters are hard to interpret because they usually assume something. It's not always easy to know what's referred to.

When I was studying in the University of Berlin before they had trans-oceanic air flight to any extent, I got a letter from my mother in Los Angeles, and she said, "Sam came over last evening and we had a very pleasant time with him." I would get the letter maybe three or four weeks after she wrote it. And I would write her and say, "I'm glad you had a good time with Sam last evening. Did you mean Sam Watson, or did you mean Sam Southerland?" And when she got it, six weeks had passed since she wrote her first letter and she couldn't remember what even she had referred to. She had to hunt and

make inquiries to find out which Sam it was that was there for an evening about the time that she wrote me. And then she would write her next letter and say it was Sam Southerland that was here that night, and when I got her reply six or seven weeks after I'd written the inquiry, I'd forgotten all about the inquiry. Well now in this case it just shows that in letters we often refer to things without explaining them. And so these Lachish Letters are not particularly easy to understand.

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