

Dr. Allan MacRae: Jeremiah: Lecture 14

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Jer. 39-45 and Final Thoughts

Lachish Letters [0:0]

In reference to the Lachish letters, some of them were written during the final conquest of the city. And one of them says, "We see the lights of Lachish, but we cannot see the lights of Azekah." And I mentioned a few minutes ago that Jeremiah speaks of the time when all the cities were taken by the Babylonians except Azekah and Lachish (Jer. 34:7). Inevitably, in those days these cities, largely built on high hills at that time - they would watch for the lights from the city to see whether the city was still continuing or had yet fallen to the Babylonians.

[Student Question:] *Which chapter is significant for Lachish?*

[Dr. MacRae's Response:] Well, I had a note here, I thought, referring to the precise verse, but I don't see it. But it's very easy in a concordance to look up Lachish in Jeremiah. I believe there is only one reference to it in Jeremiah. Though there is more about the city in Isaiah because of the attacks of Sennacherib a century and a half earlier. But at this time there is only the one reference here. What's interesting is that Jeremiah refers to both Lachish and to Azekah, which are the two that are mentioned, in this particular letter and also both mentioned together in Jeremiah 34:7.

Jer 39-45 Gedaliah Assassination & Jeremiah to Egypt [1:47]

This section then runs from 39--in the middle of the chapter--through 45, or

perhaps 44 because 45 goes back to tell of God's blessings to Baruch and the promise which continued all through this period. In this section we have a very interesting story of what happened. The narrative is very interesting to see as to the events – and I'm just going to very briefly summarize them--after the fall of Jerusalem. I mentioned at the end of the hour the last time how we were told that Nebuchadnezzar had taken a personal interest in Jeremiah. And Jeremiah was told that he could come to Babylon if he wanted – where the captives were being taken--or he could go back to Jerusalem, which had been destroyed by the Babylonians. He could go back to the land of Judah or he could stay with the governor who had been appointed – Gedaliah, son of Ahikam: he could stay with him. Jeremiah decided to stay in the land (Jer. 40:6).

And so then we read that the Babylonians appointed this man Gedaliah as governor. And then some of the very loyal, nationalistic Jews decided to kill him. After all he was a traitor serving as governor under the Babylonians who had destroyed their city. And they wanted to kill him, and Jeremiah warned them about it, that they should not do it, but they came anyway. They attacked Gedaliah, who refused to believe such a thing would happen and did not use proper security and precautions, and they killed him. Then we find a number of others that they killed at that time.

And then they reasoned, "We must flee into Egypt. We must flee because when the king of Babylon hears that we killed the governor he appointed, he will want to kill us. We must flee down into Egypt" (Jer 43:1ff). And it is a theme that runs through the book of Jeremiah as it does a large part of Isaiah, that it is foolish to put confidence in Egypt to protect you--from Assyria in the case of Isaiah and from Babylon in the case of Jeremiah.

The king of Egypt is interested only in his own objectives. He will not give you proper support, and he cannot now because God has turned over the world for a time to Nebuchadnezzar and to Babylon.

Jeremiah's Warning not to Flee to Egypt [4:19]

And so here we find that Jeremiah warned the people and he said, "Do not to flee to Egypt". He said, "If you flee to Egypt, God will not protect you there." He said, "Stay here in the land," and he said, "You will be able to live out your life here" (Jer. 42:12). They couldn't believe that because they thought that the Babylonians would certainly punish the whole group of them for what had happened. But Jeremiah said "Stay here and God will protect you." Now, the actual assassins had fled into the land of Ammon, so these to whom Jeremiah was speaking were more or less innocent bystanders (Jer. 41:15).

But he warned them not to go to Egypt. But they picked up and went to Egypt and carried Jeremiah with them; took him with them to Egypt. And then we find in chapter 43 that Jeremiah told them in Egypt, "The danger you fear here [in Judah] will overtake you in Egypt."

Jeremiah's Prophecies in Egypt [5:24]

And we read in chapter 43, verse eight, that in Tahpanhes, the place in Egypt where the Jews had settled, "The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah; 'While the Jews are watching, take some large stones with you and bury them in clay in the brick pavement near the entrance to Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes. Then say to them, "This is what the LORD almighty, the God of Israel says: 'I will send for my servant Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and I will set his throne over these stones I have

buried here. He will come and attack Egypt, bringing death to those destined for death, captivity to those destined for captivity, the sword to those destined for the sword.” And chapter 43, verse 12, ends, “As a Shepherd wraps his garment around him, so will he wrap Egypt around himself and depart from there unscathed.” That’s an interesting phrase. “He will depart from there unscathed.”

Now if Nebuchadnezzar conquered Egypt and made it part of his kingdom, as he did to Jerusalem, you would naturally expect that he would take it over and make it part of his kingdom. He would take people into exile the same as he did to Jerusalem. But to say that he will “depart from there unscathed” suggests that he will conquer it. And as Jeremiah told them, “the evil you feared here [in Judah] will overtake you in Egypt,” but that Nebuchadnezzar will “depart from there unscathed” suggests that he won’t be able to establish a continuing control there. That’s what actually happens.

Nebuchadnezzar, years after this time, 20 years or so after this time, Nebuchadnezzar made an expedition against Egypt. He overcame the Egyptian army and went through much of Egypt, pillaging and ruining various things but did not have the force to hold it, but left unscathed, but did not take it over. So in these few words we show the accuracy of the prediction that God gave. God told the prophet that they would not gain anything by going to Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar would actually conquer Egypt but he suggests that it would not be a continuing conquest.

Jer 46-51: Concerning the Nations [7:48]

Now this section then I think is a very interesting section. There is very little in it beyond what I said that needs time and thought to understand it. It ends with chapter 45,

the promise given to Baruch. And then chapters 46 to 51 form a unit by themselves. We have similar units in Isaiah and in Ezekiel. It is a unit in which the prophet turns his attention away from the situation of his associates, the situation in Judah and in Israel. He turns his attention to the nations, the ungodly nations which God has used as his instrument to punish His people, but which deserve no credit having done so. They have not done it to do God's will; they have done it in order to achieve their own objectives. But they have done it with great cruelty, and God says they are going to be punished. So in Jeremiah 46-51 we have a very different type of material.

Jer 46 Pharaoh Neco [8:48]

Chapter 46 is quite interesting because we know that it was given early in Jeremiah's ministry. You find in chapter 46, verse two, "This is the message against the army of Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt, which was defeated at Carchamish on the Euphrates River by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah." And the chapter describes in very vivid ways the overthrow of the army of Egypt. This is the army, you know, which at the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry had killed Josiah. They had proceeded north to try to help the king of Assyria, but the Babylonians, who had revolted against Assyria, defeated them completely. This is within the next few years, after Josiah's death. And this describes how pell-mell the Egyptians fled down through the coastal plain into Egypt, and we can imagine Jeremiah up there on the hill country of Judah seeing the fleeing army and describing here how God was punishing the Egyptians, and then going on to tell how He would do it again in later times, and how Nebuchadnezzar would come against them.

Jer 46-51 Punishment of Foreign Nations Especially Babylon [10:03]

So in this section from chapter 46-51 we have the punishment against a number of the foreign countries given. There's much detail in it that would be interesting to look at but it is a different sort of thing from what we've been having and in a short course like this there is hardly the time to look into it at length. Perhaps we'll take just a second on the denunciation of Babylon with which this section ends. God tells of the punishment to come on Babylon.

And in chapter 51, verse 41, he says how Sheshach will be captured, "the boast of the whole earth sees, what a horror Babylon will be among the nations." Now this word "Sheshach" corresponds to nothing that is known in ancient history. And it is here given in connection with fighting against Babylon, and it occurs once before in the book in chapter 25, verse 26. And it is generally believed that it was sort of a cryptogram for Babylon. Instead of taking the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *beth*, they took the next to the last, *sheen*, for Sheshach. So it is a cryptogram for Babylon put in so that if the Babylonians read it, they would not feel that it was a treasonable document. Now this last part in Jeremiah has many references to Babylon so that idea could not apply here except for a reminiscence of the use once in that way early in the book of Jeremiah. This term "Sheshach," was used to hide from the Babylonians this opposition to them.

Jer 51 Babylon and Sheshah [11:54]

I'm a little bit curious as to why that would be used in chapter 51 to hide the meaning from the Babylonians when everywhere else in that chapter it just comes right out and says "Babylon." "Sheshach" is used in chapter 25, to hide it. And then in chapter

51, written later when there was no longer the need to hide it, I think it was reminiscent of its use earlier. There is no need to use it later, in fact "Babylon" is used right in the same verse there. So I think that it is a reminiscent of its use earlier. And it is generally considered to be that.

Well, it would be very interesting to study the details of these denunciations of the nations, to see as in verse 43 of chapter 51 specific predictions that have been fulfilled in later times. There aren't many of those. Most of them that were fulfilled in later times we don't have any evidence how they were fulfilled. But it would be very interesting, but quite different from what we have covered mostly in the course. So, unfortunately, we don't have time in this course to deal with that.

Jeremiah and His Opposition [13:07]

I think one of the most interesting things in the book of Jeremiah is the length of Jeremiah. The fact that this man who was called by God to be His spokesman, stood unflinchingly for God's message through such great difficulty with almost the whole nation turned against him. He had kings trying to kill him, leaders of the country trying to kill him, people considering him as a traitor, and he gave God's message to them. He presented his word, and took great dangers upon himself. The few passages in the earlier part give us a glimpse of his mind and his feelings. We know how deeply he felt being misunderstood this way, being thought that he was callous and that he did not love his people. The book of Lamentations shows us how very deep his love was. But though he loved his people, he loved God more, and he stood for God's truth even when it resulted in his being misunderstood, in his being abused, and even in his being persecuted. And

time after time it seemed as if he wouldn't live long. He saw others who gave similar messages being killed, but God had promised in chapter one that He would make him like an iron fortress; He would make him like a bronze wall against his enemies. He would protect him, and God protected him throughout his ministry.

Then after the downfall of the city, you see him telling these people not to kill Gedeliah, telling them that God would punish them for it. And yet they do it, and then they want to go to Egypt. And we find him telling them, don't go, you will be able to continue here, you will not be killed if you stay here. But if you run off to Egypt, the disaster you fear here will overtake you in Egypt. And yet they not only run to Egypt, but they take Jeremiah with them. And so he is dragged off to Egypt with them. And there in Egypt he continues his prophesying, though he doubtless had more leisure and probably then wrote the book of Lamentations with its wonderful poetry. Lamentations is clearly a worked out arrangement, so different from the rather haphazard order that in the midst of all this distraction that was unavoidable in connection with the book of Jeremiah.

Reflections on Jeremiah [15:28]

Jeremiah gives us many instances of God's wonderful predictions, instances of God's wonderful power, and one of the greatest things in the book is the picture of this man who stood true to God even when just about everything seemed to be against him. And it's a wonderful thing to realize that though Jeremiah must have been detested by most of his people, yet God raised up enough people who thought of Jeremiah as a true prophet and who highly regarded him that they kept his life and they preserved him

against all the dangers. And they included him in the books that they passed on which they understood as God's Word.

We don't know what's ahead for us, but I think that it is good for us to be prepared. We don't know how much longer we'll have the freedom we now possess to give out the Word of God. But we can know that if God was with Jeremiah, He will be with all who stay true to Him and who put His word ahead of others. And so I think that one of the great things in the book of Jeremiah is the example that he gives us. We have the assurance that even if we are like the prophet whom Jehoiakim sent down to Egypt for and brought back and killed, we can be a witness for God. God called Stephen to be a wonderful witness to Him even though he was stoned. But God protected Paul through all of his difficulties. We don't know what God's will is for any one of us, but we know that whatever it is, if we're true to Him, His will and His purpose is best, and whatever happens we'll be able in the end to look back and see how God led in it all. Now I think that Jeremiah is tremendously important to each one of us for this reason.

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