

## THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH – PART TEN – CHAPTERS 45-52

This powerful record of the life of one faithful prophet concludes with a series of messages to specific people and nations. The first was a word of encouragement to one faithful friend who had acted as Jeremiah's scribe. The rest may also have been written at earlier times during Jeremiah's ministry but were collected together at the end of his book.

While the rest of the Jews face disaster for their choice, Baruch has so faithfully stuck with God and Jeremiah. In his heart he has struggled at times with whether he should give up and put his own safety first. Jeremiah is told to urge him not to quit and that he will live.(45:1-5)

The next six chapters contain a series of messages which God gives Jeremiah to deliver to the neighbours. God's interest is not only in the Jewish people but in all mankind. Pharaoh Neco had led the army which killed King Josiah thus ushering in a period of spiritual decline under Josiah's godless sons and grandson. Neco in turn was defeated by the Babylonians. No-one but God is almighty. No-one but God can save us eternally. This message not only warns the Egyptians of their coming defeat,(46:1-26) it also reminds the Jews in a later time that taking refuge in Egypt as Abraham had done,(Gen.12:10) instead of in the love of God, is no protection.(46:27,28)

The next warning is to the Jews' old enemy, the Philistines, who since the days of Samson,(Judg.14) have oppressed them from time to time. In past times it had been David who demonstrated that though the giant of the Philistines may be bigger than us, God was much bigger than him.(I Sam.17) This time it will be the king of Egypt who will be God's instrument to teach them the terrible lesson that seeming success without God is temporary.(47:1-7)

The Moabites are distant relatives of the Jews through Lot, Abraham's nephew. They had repeatedly led Israel into spiritual and moral compromise.(Num.25:1; Judg.3:12) They trusted in themselves and their god, Chemosh, and influenced the Jews to do the same.(48:7) Compromise leads us to do the Lord's work negligently, without our hearts being in the task.(48:10) Pride is their problem because their geographical remoteness had protected them against the invaders who had over-run their easier to reach neighbours. God judges them because they know better as descendants of Abraham's brother. But when they have learned their lesson there is hope for them.(48:1-47)

The Ammonites had a similar origin and had frequently tried to steal territory from Israel and introduce their god, Milcom.(Judg.11:4; I Kings 11:5) the tables will be turned one day. Even for them there is a way back to hope.(49:1-6) The Edomites were descended from Esau, Jacob's twin brother, and often pictured the natural, self-made man. Unlike the neighbours their 'god' seems to have been their own ability.(Obad.1-9) Their territory included rugged mountains in which they thought they were untouchable.(49:7-22) Other neighbours, Syria, Kedar and Elam, would be humbled in their arrogance,

although even for them there could still be hope when they learned to submit to God.(49:23-39)

Finally, Babylon, the seemingly unstoppable conqueror, would one day face her own defeat at the hands of the Medes and Persians because she too would persist in looking to other gods. She had every opportunity through the witness of men of God like Daniel to turn as a nation to the Lord. There is a striking parallel to Egypt whose kings had seen God at work through Joseph at the beginning of the Israelites time there, and Moses at the end, but eventually had hardened their hearts. Babylon had been allowed to be the means of judgement on Judah for their idolatry but she had persisted in the same mistakes. The 'shepherds', the spiritual leaders of Judah had failed her but God would eventually raise up new ones who would be faithful.(50:1-51:58) Jeremiah was told to send this last message to the Babylonians, and when it had been read, drop the scroll in the River Euphrates.(51:59-64)

Jeremiah's contribution to the book which bears his name concludes with chapter 51. His editor adds a final chapter summarising the historical events from the fall of Jerusalem. He repeats part of chapter 39 and then gives some extra detail on the fate of the temple and its contents. He gives exact numbers of those taken into exile on the 3 occasions the city was captured. The numbers are surprisingly small, revealing that Jerusalem itself was only a small town at this stage in its history. The last story records how some 25 years later King Jehoiachin, Zedekiah's short reigning predecessor, was rescued and treated well by a new king of Babylon. He becomes the first among the exiles to be blessed as Jeremiah had promised the whole exile group would one day be 'resurrected'.(52:1-34)

Jeremiah's own fate is not recorded here although Jewish tradition, apparently confirmed by Heb.11:37, says that after 13 years as a hostage in Egypt his captors finally silenced him by pushing him into a hollow log and cutting it in half. What a dramatic end to a courageous ministry!

## PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Where else in the Bible do we find even great men of God struggling with doubt at times? How does God deal with them? Record how you have struggled with doubt in your life in some circumstances. How did God meet your need?(chapter 45)
2. How does each message to one of the neighbouring nations fit their particular history and attitude? What can we learn from this series of messages about the need to have the right message for the right person or group? Give an example of how God has given you a Bible message for a group of people.(chapters 46-51)
3. Why do you suppose the last chapter records the blessing on a failed king but not the death of a faithful prophet? How has God blessed you through this book?(chapter 52)