

THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH – PART EIGHT – CHAPTERS 32-36

BELIEVE YOUR OWN PREACHING

The city of Jerusalem is being attacked by the Babylonians who have surrounded it. As happens at times like this, any dissenter who opposes resistance to the enemy is imprisoned to stop him undermining morale. Jeremiah is a prisoner in King Zedekiah's palace jail because he has consistently prophesied defeat for Judah and captivity for the people and the king in particular.(32:1-5) His response is an interesting one. God has told him to demonstrate his confidence in the Lord's promise that His people will return after 70 years by buying his uncle's field to which as his heir he was entitled. His message was of bad news of captivity because of sin, and of restoration because of God's grace. He is now emphasising the second part of the message by 'putting his money where his mouth is'. The impact of his action would be particularly strong because, in obedience to God, he himself had not married so he had no immediate heir.(16:2; 32:6-15) For the creator of the universe nothing is too difficult. As God had shown His loving kindness to Israel by redeeming them out of slavery in Egypt so He would soon do it again, this time out of Babylon.(32:16-25) He takes the opportunity again to remind the people that their idolatry, having other gods, is the reason.(32:26-35) Restoration will be on the basis of a new covenant which will allow God's grace and love to be poured out first on family life. Jeremiah encourages others to follow his example by putting a stake in the ground for the future God has promised.(32:36-44)

REST IN YOUR OWN BRANCH

Again God speaks to Jeremiah in prison. He is given more good news of how it will be when God restores them to their own land. Not only will they rebuild their homes but they will experience enormous blessing in spiritual terms. They will be totally forgiven, God will reveal truth to them, there will be healing among them, probably first in relationships damaged by sin, and they will be overwhelmed by joy because of how good God is to them.(33:1-9) Family life will be restored. God will take them back to the very best that they enjoyed when they first entered the land. Farming will again be possible.(33:10-13) How will all this happen? Jeremiah takes up again a theme he began in chapter 23, the righteous Branch of David. A king will arise, far better than any of David's descendants so far, who will reign forever. The priests will also resume their role forever. In a measure this would be fulfilled when the people returned after 70 years with people like Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest, leading them as described in the books of Haggai and Zechariah. But its real fulfilment would only be in Jesus.(33:14-18) God will never break His promise.(33:19-26)

GUARD YOUR GOD GIVEN FREEDOM

Next Jeremiah has a personal message for King Zedekiah. He will be defeated but there is some good news. He will not die in war but peacefully as a prisoner of Babylon and his descendants will be able to mourn him properly.(34:1-7) Zedekiah had taken a desperate measure as leader of a besieged people by ordering the freeing of all slaves. Those who owned slaves obeyed but then immediately re-enslaved them.(34:8-11) Jeremiah reminds them that God's instruction when they first came out of Egypt had been that slavery was only to last for 6 years and in the 7th year all slaves were to be set free.(Exod.21:2) They have disobeyed His command and that of the king. Their punishment would come from the king of Babylon. God would release them from His care to suffer the consequence of their treatment of their slaves. The leaders whose example should have been outstanding will be the first to be punished.(34:12-22)

PERSEVERE IN YOUR FAITHFULNESS

The culture of Jeremiah's day was of unfaithfulness to God, going with whatever 'god' seemed to offer them the most at the time. There were however some remarkable exceptions. A man by the name of Jonadab (or Jehonadab) had supported the rebellion of Jehu in the time of King Ahab of Israel about 200 years before. Jehu had been responsible for ridding Israel, at least for the time being, of the worship of Baal.(II Kings 10:15-23) No more is known of Jonadab apart from this further glimpse in Jeremiah 35. Apparently to keep his family from being drawn into the wild and materialistic living of the rest of the country he had led them in a covenant not to drink wine, sow seed or live in permanent houses. As nomads they had migrated from Israel down to Judah at a time of danger.(35:11) Remarkably they had remained absolutely faithful to Jonadab's advice. Offered wine by Jeremiah at God's direction, they refuse as God knew they would.(35:6) Jeremiah can now use them as a lesson to the rest of the country of faithfulness to a covenant and the reward from God which has followed (35:12-17), and will continue to follow.(35:18,19)

WRITE DOWN YOUR MESSAGE

Only a few people are listening when Jeremiah speaks. God now leads him to try another medium, the pen. Early in the reign of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah is instructed to write down on paper all the messages God has given him so far, much of the book as we have it up to this point. If people listen, disaster can still be averted.(36:1-3) Possibly because he can not write himself, Jeremiah calls Baruch, the scribe, to help him. The problem now is to be sure that what has been written is read by as many as possible. Jeremiah has been banned from the temple area so he sends Baruch there to read his book aloud to the many who come from all over the country to worship.(36:4-10) One leader is deeply impressed by what he hears and shares the message with the others who in turn ask Baruch to read the book again just for them. The whole group are moved and decide that the king should also hear. Baruch and Jeremiah are told to hide while this happens for fear of reprisals.(36:11-19) The king listens but rips the book up and burns it bit by bit despite the pleading of three of his leaders. He sends other officials to arrest Baruch and Jeremiah but they are in hiding.(36:20-26) God is not to be silenced and commands Jeremiah to have Baruch write it all over again, adding extra warnings to the king about his own personal fate and that of his descendants who will not succeed him on the throne.(36:27-32) And so Jeremiah's words have continued to speak for another 2600 years all over the world.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Describe times when God has called you to show your confidence in His faithfulness. Compare chapter 33 with Jn.15 to illustrate what God promises us if we abide in Him.
2. Record how you have seen the gospel set people free, only for the church to enslave them again. Set down any outstanding example of faithfulness you have seen like that of Jonadab's descendants. What ideas have you tried to keep your teaching firmly in the memories of your hearers?