

THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH – PART FOUR – CHAPTERS 5-11

CHAPTER FIVE AND SIX – JEREMIAH'S TRAINING FOR MINISTRY CONTINUES

Having heard and responded to God's call, and learned from God what would be at the heart of his message, sin, salvation and judgement, Jeremiah's preparation continues. In chapter five he is sent out into the city of Jerusalem to learn about people. Are things as bad as God has said?(5:1,2) He immediately acknowledges that they are, but wonders if it is different with the leaders who have good understanding of God's word. They too, he finds, have gone their own way and are deserving of God's judgement.(5:3-6) The Lord confirms his observation. Judah do not deserve God's forgiveness because of their on-going unfaithfulness to Him which shows in their unfaithfulness to their wives and husbands. Those who should be God's mouthpieces, but are just bags of wind, are most guilty.(5:7-13) Because Jeremiah has grasped this sad reality, God is ready now to use him as His mouthpiece with a fiery passion which will set his nation alight. He is to be very specific about the coming foreign invasion which is a consequence of them abandoning God. Even now however Jeremiah is promised that there will be a remnant who will survive what is coming and return home eventually. They have failed to see God's goodness to them in practical ways and have denied help to those who need it.(5:14-29) Again the spiritual leaders carry the first responsibility but the ordinary people like it that way.(5:30-31)

The deserved nature of God's coming judgement is again spelled out because Jerusalem ignores every warning.(6:1-8) The Lord is always searching for even a few who will listen to Him, but no-one will. Young and old, male and female choose money rather than God, and will lose it all. The leaders who should have told them the truth have instead given an easy and popular message.(6:9-15; II Tim.4:3) Despite God's pleading they ignore the truth hoping that religious ceremonies will save them, but they will not.(6:16-21; Hos.6:6) A terrible invader is coming from whom there is no escape.(6:22-26) Jeremiah's first task is to check out the truth and justice of what God is saying.(6:27-30)

CHAPTERS SEVEN TO ELEVEN – JEREMIAH'S FIRST STEPS IN MINISTRY

At last it is time for Jeremiah to preach his first message. Significantly he is sent first to the temple to talk to those who should have been most willing to listen because they had come supposedly to worship God. In the same way, Paul as a missionary went first to the synagogues.(Acts 13:5,13; 14:1; 17:1) He is to warn them that true worship begins with listening to God's word instead of the false teaching they have been receiving. The truth could then result in repentance and changed behaviour, both in personal morality and in social concern. At present the temple is a house of thieves.(7:1-11; Matt.21:13)

Jeremiah is sent next to Shiloh, where the tabernacle was first kept when the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, to learn from history.(Josh.18:1; Judges 18:31; I Sam.4:3) When God's word was really central in the thinking of His people, they were blessed and protected but when they neglected His word, they were defeated by their enemies. History is about to be repeated.(7:12-15) Probably much to his surprise, Jeremiah is told not to pray for the forgiveness of his people. God cannot forgive those who do not repent so it is not appropriate to pray for their salvation.(7:16-20; Jn.17:9) On the other hand he is to urge them to obey God from the heart instead of continuing their meaningless religious rituals. Sadly they have gone on ignoring all those prophets whom God has sent.(7:21-26) Jeremiah is to spend a lifetime speaking to a nation most of whom will not listen but will prefer the most hideous form of idolatry which will damage their families and bring destruction on them as a people.(7:27-34)

Even the dead will be humiliated by the coming invader. Life will seem worse than death. Still they will refuse to listen and turn back to God and His word.(8:1-7) The heart of the problem rests in the spiritual leadership where truth has been exchanged for empty lies that are claimed to be wisdom. The motivation is money which leads them to preach a comfortable message which does not work. They are about to lose everything.(8:8-12) They will realise too late the consequences which their sin has brought on them. Their hoped for help will not come. Will they look even then to God as some of a previous generation did when serpents invaded the camp?(8:15-17; Num.21:6) Jeremiah is deeply affected emotionally by what he has learned. He realises just how bad the situation is, and weeps for his people.(8:18-22; Lk.19:41-44; Acts 20:19,31)

His sorrow is so great because they all seem so unfaithful. All Jeremiah wants to do at first is to run away from Judah.(9:1,2) God agrees that because the people have left Him out, no-one can be trusted.(9:3-6) But He has a different solution, to assay them which is to have a process which sorts the gold out from the rest.(9:7-9; 6:27-30) It will begin with the fire of His judgement through the coming invader, and it will be because of the attitude of their hearts.(9:10-16) The people will soon be the ones who are weeping. But God's purpose is that they might come to understand why things are as they are and come to value His wisdom rather than their own, and His riches not earthly ones.(9:17-24) God's wisdom will show them the difference between outward and inward circumcision, between outward observance and a change of heart.(9:25,26; Rom.2:28,29)

Those who do not know the Lord gain their world view from their society and their supposed interpretation of the stars and natural events, but their gods are powerless to do them good or harm.(10:1-5; I Cor.8:4) Jeremiah catches a fresh vision of the uniqueness and power of the real God and the emptiness of anything else, and tells God what he has seen.(10:6-10) The Lord encourages him to begin his messages with a clear picture of Him as the only Creator of the universe and His people.(10:11-16) Surely then people will take God's warning seriously?(10:17,18) Jeremiah grieves for the fate of himself and his people, realising again that it began with a failure of leadership.(10:19-22) He acknowledges that only God can change even his heart, and he wants God's work to begin with him.(10:23-25)

God now begins to teach Jeremiah the importance of His covenant with His people. He made an agreement with them when He brought them out of Egypt. If they were faithful He would continue to bless them and keep them. If they were unfaithful then they would lose their land.(11:1-8) This is why they are about to be exiled. Their new gods will do nothing for them.(11:9-13) Again Jeremiah is told not to pray for people who do not want to be saved. They are compared to an olive tree whose fruitless branches will be pruned away and burned because of their idolatry.(11:14-17; Rom.11:17-21) The Lord reveals to Jeremiah that his ministry is going to be tough. People will be against him because of his message. He is not going to be discouraged and will be faithful to his calling despite the cost. Punishment of those who persecute is God's business not ours and Jeremiah is prepared to leave this to the Lord. Sadly the first to persecute him will be his own people from Anathoth.(11:18-23; Lk.4:24; 21:17; Matt.10:16)

PRACTICAL EXERCISE

1. Summarise the lessons Jeremiah had to learn and the questions he had which God answered in preparing him for his ministry. Write down some of the key steps so far in your own preparation to serve the Lord.
2. Describe the spiritual conditions of people in Jeremiah's time and some of the reasons for them. Compare these with our world to see what is similar and what is different.