

Judah After Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE)

Jeremiah's Prophecies Under Zedekiah

Readings: Jeremiah 24:1-10; 27:1-22; 28:1-17; 29:1-32;

Reflections:

- Jeremiah remains on the spiritual offensive. In this section he is attacking the false prophets who are leading the people astray. He also warns the people to settle in their captivity. They will be there for seventy years.
- Jeremiah promises blessings for the exiles from Judah who have good hearts. Again in his promise to them we see how intensely relational God is: "My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart." God's first and foremost concern is his relationship with his people.
- Just as he has promised blessing for those with hearts that set on him, he also gives the strictest warnings for those that remain defiant and rebellious: they will be destroyed!
- The letter Jeremiah sends to those in exiles is interesting. Even though the nation is under judgment, while they are in Babylonia, God continues to want to fulfill his purposes through Israel. They are to settle into that country, grow their families, and pray for the peace and prosperity of that enemy city. It is interesting that the vision of Israel being a light to the enemy nations that surrounded them was somehow being fulfilled as they were held captive within one of those countries. Could God be possibly foreshadowing the coming kingdom where God's people will be agents of peace in whatever country they find themselves?
- As Jeremiah warns about false prophets, he at the same time calls the people to seek God themselves. In this dark and desperate time, we find one of the most treasured promises of hope within the Old Testament: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will lean upon me and come and pray to me, I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,' declares the Lord, 'and I will bring you back from captivity.'" Again we see that a true relationship with God is personal and not centered on religion in any way. God desires us to passionately seek a

personal experience of being in relationship with him. The prophets (holy men) are declared untrustworthy. God calls them to relate to him directly. Now the temple is still viewed at this point as the place to meet with God but as we will see, the way to God is changing as more and more of the religion of the Torah is proven inadequate to deal with the human heart. A second thing we should note is that God envisioned a hopeful future. We often personalize this passage to refer to our present situation and how God envisions good plans for his people. If you look at the passage in sequence, the good plans results in people seeking God and actually finding him. His can also be understood as God announcing again his plans through the coming Messiah. God hear can be saying, "I am planning for a process of restoration that will bring you back from captivity into freedom. When I do this, you will then have a full and open relationship with me." Could it be that God was speaking more symbolically than literally? Could it be that God was referring to spiritual captivity rather than their physical captivity? It would seem that the evidence of history would suggest that although the people were restored to their land and even restored with a new, smaller temple that they never were truly restored to their relationship with God. In fact, rather than living seventy years in captivity they at one point enter into four hundred years of prophetic silence before a prophet named John would appear.

- Jeremiah then goes into a battle with false prophets. God calls him to build and wear a wooden yoke to symbolize the captivity of the people under Nebuchnezzar. As he battles with the false prophets, the issue remains the same: They are declaring everything is going to turn around quickly and the temple will be restored. Jeremiah denies it. Ultimately one of these prophets dies under judgment for preaching rebellion against God. Jeremiah's declaration was proven true: "But the prophet who prophecies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true." It was Jeremiah's prophecies who ultimately came true and so here we have his words recorded in the unfolding story.
- We should note that in this period again that God looks for simply visuals like a yoke, to help clarify his message to the people. These external mimes help to powerfully communicate the message, although it would require Jeremiah to look like a complete fool.
- One of the most striking declarations of Jeremiah was concerning God's purposes for Nebuchnezzar. God makes it clear through Jeremiah that he as creator of the world was handing over the rule of that region to Nebuchnezzar, even to the point of him ruling the wild animals. This is one of the first times we see the creation mandate reappear that was given to first man and woman. Although Nebuchnezzar was a non-Jew, an enemy, a foreign invader, yet God affirms him as the rightful ruler to accomplish God's purposes. The nations are warned not to rebel against him. From an exclusively Israelite perspective, this would appear completely wrong and against everything they new about God. God could obviously use an enemy nation to bring about God's judgment, but it seems that God is taking this one step further. God is giving his divine authority to this enemy. Again, we see that Israel is being forced to look at their enemy, even one that is powerfully holding them in captivity as prisoners, as one whom God values.

- The image of the wild animals being subject to Nebuchnezzar indicates that a sense of order is being brought to that entire area. Somehow this enemy king was being used by God to complete his will in a more holistic way. Rather than the land being overrun with wild animals, it is being stewarded under his rule. The enemy, as terrible as this all seems, is not inherently an enemy of God. Even as Israel faces the largest deportation of their own people as well as almost two generations of living as virtual prisoners in a foreign land, God is hinting at a coming day when all the nations of the world will be welcomed into his kingdom.