

The Prophets

Lesson #31

Jeremiah 36:1-43:13

Outline

I. ***Prophecies From The Reigns Of Jehoiakim And Zedekiah (21:1-39:18)***

- A. Messages and events before the fall of Jerusalem (34:1-39:18).
 - 1. Jehoiakim's penknife and God's word (36:1-32).
 - a) The dictation of the scroll (36:1-8).
 - b) The public reading (36:9-10).
 - c) The reading to the officials (36:11-19).
 - d) The reading to Jehoiakim (36:20-26).
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 - g) The prophecies recorded again (36:32).
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 - b) Jeremiah's reply (37:6-10).
 - c) The charge of treason against Jeremiah (37:11-15).
 - d) Jeremiah in the dungeon (37:16-21).
 - 3. Confined in a cistern (38:1-13).
 - a) The accusation against Jeremiah (38:1-4).
 - b) Jeremiah in the cistern (38:5-6).
 - c) The rescue of Jeremiah (38:7-13).
 - 4. Counsel to the king (38:14-28).
 - a) Zedekiah's secret interview with Jeremiah (38:14-23).
 - b) The officials' inquiry (38:24-28).
 - 5. The fall of Jerusalem (39:1-18).
 - a) The capture of the city (39:1-3).
 - b) The fate of Zedekiah (39:4-8).
 - c) The release of Jeremiah (39:9-14).
 - d) The commendation of Ebed-Melech (39:15-18).

II. ***The Ministry Of Jeremiah After The Fall Of Jerusalem (40:1-45:5)***

- A. Ministry to the survivors in Judah (40:1-42:22).
 - 1. Gedaliah the governor (40:1-16).
 - a) The release of Jeremiah (40:1-6).
 - b) Gedaliah's assurances (40:7-10).
 - c) The return of the fugitives (40:11-12).
 - d) The warning of Gedaliah (40:13-16).
 - 2. The atrocities of Ishmael and the flight into Egypt (41:1-18).
 - a) The assassination of Gedaliah (41:1-3).

- b) The massacre of the pilgrims (41:4-10).
- c) The escape of Ishmael (41:11-15).
- d) The flight to Egypt (41:16-18).
- 3. Warning against going to Egypt (42:1-22).
 - a) The inquiry of the remnant (42:1-6).
 - b) The Lord's answer to Jeremiah's question (42:7-17).
 - c) Further penalties for settling in Egypt (42:18-22).
- B. Ministry in Egypt (43:1-44:30).
 - 1. The flight to Egypt (43:1-13).
 - a) The warning disobeyed (43:1-7).
 - b) Jeremiah's prophecy in Egypt (43:8-13).

Notes

Prophecies From The Reigns Of Jehoiakim And Zedekiah (21:1-39:18)

- Messages and events before the fall of Jerusalem (34:1-39:18).
 - Jehoiakim's penknife and God's word (36:1-32).
 - The dictation of the scroll (36:1-8).
 - This is the year that Nebuchadnezzar defeated the final remnant of the Assyrian army at Carchemish and established Babylonian dominance.
 - With Nebuchadnezzar on the march against Jerusalem, Jeremiah's message could no longer be considered harmless.
 - The public reading (36:9-10).
 - The fast (proclaimed by the people, not the king) was not that of the seventh month stated in the Law (cf. Leviticus 16:29; 23:27), but possibly one designated because of the first capture of Jerusalem in 605 B.C.
 - These events may have decided Jehoiakim's shift of allegiance from Egypt to Babylon.
- The reading to the officials (36:11-19).
 - The way they addressed Baruch (vss. 15, 19) implies that they favored him and Jeremiah.
 - The nobles were fearful for Jeremiah, but sympathetic with him, and they sought to protect him.
- The reading to Jehoiakim (36:20-26).
 - Unlike Josiah, his godly father (cf. 2 Kings 22:1-23:25), Jehoiakim was not interested in spiritual reform but in an alliance with Egypt and, therefore, was not favorable to Babylon (cf. 2 Kings 23:34-35).
 - Most of the court officials stood by indifferently as Jehoiakim took a scribe's knife and cut off consecutive strips of the scroll as Jehudi read them and tossed them into the fire.

- The prophecies rewritten (36:27-28).
 - Soon after the king's destruction of the scroll, the Lord ordered Jeremiah to write a duplicate of it.
 - God's message was not to be lost but rewritten with more words of judgment added to it.
- The condemnation of Jehoiakim (36:29-31).
 - The king's anger at Babylon may show that Jehoiakim had already decided on rebellion against Babylon (cf. 2 Kings 24:1), a rebellion that resulted in the captivity during the reign of Jehoiachin.
 - The manner of Jehoiakim's death is nowhere stated. On the ground of this verse, it is believed that this wicked king may have died in a palace coup or popular uprising (cf. 22:19).
- The prophecies recorded again (36:32).
 - Jehoiakim's destruction of the scroll was one of many attempts through the centuries to destroy God's word.
 - It is certain that our present text of the book is longer than the original portions that had brief abstracts of Jeremiah's earlier prophecies. The additions doubtless included the doom of the godless king.
- Resolute Jeremiah and weak Zedekiah (37:1-21).
 - Zedekiah's request (37:1-5).
 - The introduction is similar in form to what one finds throughout the book of Kings when a new king is introduced (cf. 2 Kings 24:17).
 - At the approach of Egyptian troops, led by Hophra (cf. 44:30), Babylon temporarily raised her siege of Jerusalem. Soon after this, the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians and resumed the siege of Jerusalem.
 - Jeremiah's reply (37:6-10).
 - Jeremiah did not waver in his fidelity to the truth. The relief of Jerusalem was, he said, only temporary and would ultimately change nothing. This was only a passing incident.
 - Circumstances and appearances to the contrary, God's ultimate word about Jerusalem was that it would be taken and burned. There was no basis for a false hope.
- The charge of treason against Jeremiah (37:11-15).
 - There was no proof whatsoever that he meant to defect to the Babylonians when the siege was temporarily lifted. His enemies misinterpreted his leaving the city and threw him into a dungeon.

- The officials involved in beating and arresting Jeremiah could not have been those of Josiah's time (cf. 26:16; 36:19), for they were probably captives in Babylon with Jehoiachin.
- Jeremiah in the dungeon (37:16-21).
 - The officials have "heard" the warning, but their response shows that they actually refuse to "hear" it.
 - The "many days" refers to the period when the Babylonians renewed their siege. So desperate was the situation for Jerusalem that Zedekiah felt he must have another message from Jeremiah even if he had to speak to him in secret.
 - The situation was ironic: the false prophets who lied to the king and the nation were free; Jeremiah who told them the truth was in prison! The prophet then asks not to be sent back to the house of Jonathan the secretary, lest he die there.
- Confined in a cistern (38:1-13).
 - The accusation against Jeremiah (38:1-4).
 - The enemies of Jeremiah heard what Jeremiah said; however, their reaction to what they heard shows that they did not truly "hear" it.
 - Jeremiah was officially charged with working against the war effort and with weakening the will of the people to resist the Babylonians.
 - Jeremiah in the cistern (38:5-6).
 - Zedekiah's surrender to his officials was a clear indication of his lack of moral fiber.
 - To throw Jeremiah into the miry cistern would have surely resulted in his death had he not been rescued. This was his third and harshest imprisonment.
 - The rescue of Jeremiah (38:7-13).
 - In ancient courts eunuchs were employed as keepers of the royal harem. Thus they had private access to the king (cf. 2 Kings 24:15).
 - The considerations in this section support the conclusion that Zedekiah had Jeremiah imprisoned out of fear, rather than from a personal denial of Jeremiah's prophetic work.
- Counsel to the king (38:14-28).
 - Zedekiah's secret interview with Jeremiah (38:14-23).
 - This is the third and last time Zedekiah sends for Jeremiah (cf. 37:3, 17). Zedekiah is offered one last opportunity to "go forth" to the Babylonians.
 - Zedekiah is being asked to act in the best interests of those under his care (his family and the city) rather than according to his own, short-term self-interests.

- He also stands figuratively for the entire nation. He is being told to place his personal welfare into the hands of his enemies. The Lord has declared that only there will he be safe.
- The officials' inquiry (38:24-28).
 - Zedekiah is typical here of all men. He expects Jeremiah to be honest with him and not tell the officials, but he then demands the opposite of Jeremiah when he interacts with others.
 - Jeremiah did not tell a falsehood, but he did not tell them the whole truth, for that was neither necessary, nor did they have a right to demand such information, and he would have broken his promise to his ruler and betrayed what was revealed to him as the advisor of the king.
- The fall of Jerusalem (39:1-18).
 - The capture of the city (39:1-3).
 - The narrator describes the entire siege and capture of Jerusalem, from beginning to end, in a very few lines (cf. 2 Kings 25:1-21).
 - The dates span the beginning and end of the siege, which lasted about eighteen months.
 - The fate of Zedekiah (39:4-8).
 - The flight was at night; thus the verb "saw" is to be taken in the sense of hearing or learning that the Babylonians had taken the gate of the citadel of Zion. Zedekiah finally followed Jeremiah's advice.
 - Zedekiah was captured and taken to Riblah, where Nebuchadnezzar had his headquarters. It was a strategic site, which had been the military headquarters of Pharaoh Neco in his campaign against Assyria (cf. 2 Kings 23:33).
 - By modern standards what Nebuchadnezzar did was unusually harsh, but it was in accord with ancient pagan practices and is understandable in view of the trouble that Judah and especially Zedekiah had given Babylon.
- The release of Jeremiah (39:9-14).
 - To make a new beginning and not leave the land utterly desolate, Nebuzaradan placed some of the poorest people in charge of fields and vineyards as their own, though with reclamation rights by the conqueror (cf. 52:16; 2 Kings 25:12).
 - Jeremiah's advice about submitting to Babylon even during the siege had been proclaimed over so long a time that it could not have escaped the attention of the Babylonian authorities.

- The commendation of Ebed-Melech (39:15-18).
 - This message must have come to Jeremiah soon after Ebed-Melech had rescued him. It is included here so as not to break into the chain of events (cf. 38:14-39:14).
 - Ebed-Melech needed this message of hope, for he had doubtless incurred the wrath of Jeremiah's enemies for lifting him out of the cistern and so feared reprisals.

The Ministry Of Jeremiah After The Fall Of Jerusalem (40:1-45:5)

- Ministry to the survivors in Judah (40:1-42:22).
 - Gedaliah the governor (40:1-16).
 - The release of Jeremiah (40:1-6).
 - The treatment by Nebuzaradan is in marked contrast to his treatment at the hands of the officials of his own people.
 - Jeremiah loved his people in spite of their mistreatment, hatred and threats on his life. Now he would at least be free of ungodly priests and false prophets.
 - Gedaliah's assurances (40:7-10).
 - The Babylonians probably had informed Gedaliah that they would be lenient toward any refugees, as long as they were not disruptive.
 - Gedaliah's promise is directed to a subject nation, in subjection because of their infidelity. He encourages them to follow the course of economic rebuilding, indirectly suggesting they give up any military schemes.
- The return of the fugitives (40:11-12).
 - With his forthright honesty, Gedaliah inspired confidence; and his orders were obeyed. Many of those returning to Judah had fled from the Babylonians and had taken refuge in a number of neighboring countries. In God's mercy these refugees constituted a remnant.
 - That one of their own nation was made governor gave them confidence; thus they felt that the Babylonians were not wholly without compassion for them in their time of tragic need.
- The warning of Gedaliah (40:13-16).
 - Judah was still in a state of much unrest. Now a plot to assassinate Gedaliah comes to light, instigated by Baalis, king of Ammon, who used as his agent Ishmael son of Nethaniah.
 - Baalis may have felt that eliminating Gedaliah would make it easier to carry out his own plans to conquer Judah.
 - Gedaliah was right in forbidding Johanan to assassinate Ishmael but wrong in his estimate of Ishmael.

- The atrocities of Ishmael and the flight into Egypt (41:1-18).
 - The assassination of Gedaliah (41:1-3).
 - We find out that Ishmael is of royal descent and this means his attack is likely to be construed by the new administration as a political move, an attempt by the Davidic family to reestablish its fallen kingdom.
 - It is clear that this is to be viewed as an act of direct rebellion against the sovereignty of Nebuchadnezzar.
 - The massacre of the pilgrims (41:4-10).
 - Just as in the assassination of Gedaliah, Ishmael used the element of surprise. Here it enabled eleven men to slaughter seventy of the eighty pilgrims.
 - The massacre may have been done for plunder and to intimidate the remnant in Judah. Ishmael's greed led him to spare ten of the eighty men because of their cache of food, which was probably concealed in a cistern in a field.
 - Ishmael's motive in transporting the remnant may have been threefold: (1) to escape punishment, (2) to find refuge with Baalis, who had instigated the assassination of Gedaliah (40:14), and (3) to sell the remnant as slaves to the Ammonites. Included among this remnant mentioned in vs. 10 were probably Jeremiah and Baruch (cf. 42:2).
 - The escape of Ishmael (41:11-15).
 - Johanan and his followers respond swiftly to the news of Ishmael's attack and catch up with the assassins and their captives at Gibeon.
 - The captives break free of Ishmael's men, who turn and run without a fight, escaping the rest of the way to Ammon.
 - The flight to Egypt (41:16-18).
 - Johanan now decided to go as quickly as possible to Egypt. He and the army officers with him feared reprisals when the news of Gedaliah's assassination reached Babylon.
 - Ishmael had completely frustrated any plans for peaceful settlement in the land.
- Warning against going to Egypt (42:1-22).
 - The inquiry of the remnant (42:1-6).
 - It is interesting to note that Jeremiah almost certainly has been among those captured at Mizpah, yet he is not mentioned until this moment.
 - The people solemnly pledged to obey everything the Lord would tell Jeremiah; that is, they promised to obey the Lord regardless of the nature of his answer.

- The Lord's answer to Jeremiah's question (42:7-17).
 - The long delay is explained perhaps by God wanting to give the Jews an opportunity to show the sincerity of their claim that they would obey His leading and to allow time for their anxiety to be dispelled.
 - In unsparing words, Jeremiah warned of the terrifying consequences if the remnant insisted on leaving the land. Trust in human beings would neither avail them nor bless them.
- Further penalties for settling in Egypt (42:18-22).
 - Egypt appeals to them because it looks to be a place of peace and prosperity, but moving to Egypt constitutes disobedience.
 - How little did they realize that in Egypt the temptation for them to worship idols -- the very sin that had led to the nation's fall -- would be even stronger than before.
 - Jeremiah also reminds them it was not he that had instituted the inquiry; they themselves were responsible for provoking the Lord's severe answer. It was a mistake because their imminent rejection of God's word means that they now have an additional reason for the Lord to be angry with them.
- Ministry in Egypt (43:1-44:30).
 - The flight to Egypt (43:1-13).
 - The warning disobeyed (43:1-7).
 - To divert attention from breaking their promise to obey the Lord's message, they tried to save face, not only by giving Jeremiah the lie, but also by accusing Baruch of plotting to get Jeremiah to deliver the remnant to the Babylonians.
 - The remnant was made up of the many Jews who had fled to nearby countries after the fall of Jerusalem. Unfortunately they all agreed to follow Johanan and their other leaders instead of the Lord.
 - Jeremiah's prophecy in Egypt (43:8-13).
 - This will be the first in a series of prophecies delivered by Jeremiah to the Jews in Egypt. In an indirect way, Jeremiah is repeating the prediction, given in 42:15-17, that the destruction which has already come to Jerusalem will now come to the disobedient Jews seeking refuge.
 - Jeremiah likens the ease with which Nebuchadnezzar would do these things to the casual way in which a shepherd wraps himself in his garment. In fact, the conqueror would return unscathed from Egypt.