

8. Truth and false

April 23, 2015

The Lord, finally, was fed up with all the disobedience and idol worship of the people of Judah. He used king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to teach them an unforgettable lesson even their descendants will not forget. Between the Lord and the disobedient people of Judah was the faithful prophet Jeremiah, who almost was a lone voice in the land against all the threats.

People generally don't like to hear bad news. Especially when they are surrounded by their enemy, daily food and water is scarce, and people are dying with diseases all around them, the last thing they want to hear is that their enemy is going to win the war and take all of them away to the foreign country for 70 years, not 7 days, or 7 months, not even 7 years. Jeremiah was either just plain stupid, or ever so faithful to his calling as a prophet, that he would not diminish one word out of what he was told to speak.

Throughout his call as a prophet of God, Jeremiah encountered so many false prophets that he couldn't even name all of them. Whenever Jeremiah declared what the Lord told him to speak to the Israelis, there were many voices of false prophets who would say anything to please people's ears to gain their popularity. 2500 years later, we still have so many voices that call out, "Peace, peace," but there is no true peace without the Prince of Peace. I like what Henry David Thoreau, an 19th century American historian said, "The more we know about the ancients, the more we find that they were like the moderns."

A. 70 YEARS OF REST

Jeremiah 25:1-4 The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), 2 which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying: 3 "From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, this is the twenty-third year in which the word of the Lord has come to me; and I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, but you have not listened. 4 And the Lord has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear.

Jeremiah 25:8-11 "Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Because you have not heard My words, 9 behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' says the Lord, 'and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations. 10 Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. 11 And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

There are many things in common between the people of Judah at this time and the American people now. They both heard about the truth of God and His messages enough to follow Him, yet they defiantly rejected and are rejecting Him.

The Lord sent them many unknown prophets previously and had warned of great judgment if they didn't repent and turn to the Lord, but they were ignored. For Jeremiah had been preaching to them for 23 years up to this point.

For the first time, the prophet told them that they would be exiled 70 years. For the last 490 years, the Israelis ignored what the Lord told them to do – obeying the law of the Sabbatical Year. Was this merely about the rest for the land? No, it's far more than that. It's about being obedient to His commandments – everyone of them. This still applies to us. We cannot pick and choose what we'd like to obey and not obey from His Word, the Bible.

Please note how the Lord addressed Nebuchadnezzar in v8 – *“Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant”*. I am sure that this was very unsettling with the hearing of the Jews. I am sure that they were thinking, “How could this awful man, Jeremiah say, “Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant”? He has to be a traitor.” Of course, the Babylonian king wasn't a believer of the true God of Israel, but the Lord chose to use him for His purposes.

We need to remember that our God is sovereign and can use whatever tools He deems to use to accomplish His purposes on earth, even unbelieving leaders like Obama.

B. DON'T DIMINISH A WORD

Jeremiah 26:1-2 In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the Lord, saying, 2 “Thus says the Lord: ‘Stand in the court of the Lord’s house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the Lord’s house, all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word.

Jeremiah 26:7-11 So the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the Lord. 8 Now it happened, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, “You will surely die! 9 Why have you prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, ‘This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without an inhabitant’?” And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the Lord. 10 When the princes of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king’s house to the house of the Lord and sat down in the entry of the New Gate of the Lord’s house. 11 And the priests and the prophets spoke to the princes and all the people, saying, “This man deserves to die! For he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears.”

Prophet Jeremiah again preached what the Lord commanded him to do without diminishing any word. The false prophets would say anything people want to hear, but the believers of God should not do that.

To the false prophets and priests and the people around them, it was blasphemous for Jeremiah to declare that God would allow the holy city Jerusalem and His holy temple to fall into the defiling and destructive hands of the heathens.

When the Lord puts the words in a believer's heart to speak, he or she must be obedient to speak them exactly without adding, subtracting, or replacing. It is our responsibility to speak to whomever the Lord designates without fear or concern for

repercussions. Sometimes I wonder what some of these so-called seeker sensitive church pastors are going to say to the Lord when they meet him in heaven.

Jeremiah was rescued by the politicians from the hands of the priests and false prophets. That's bad, really bad.

C. ANOTHER FALSE PROPHET

Jeremiah 28:1-4 And it happened in the same year, at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year and in the fifth month, that Hananiah the son of Azur the prophet, who was from Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of the Lord in the presence of the priests and of all the people, saying, 2 "Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying: 'I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. 3 Within two full years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the Lord's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon. 4 And I will bring back to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah who went to Babylon,' says the Lord, 'for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.'"

Jeremiah 28:15-17 Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, "Hear now, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, but you make this people trust in a lie. 16 Therefore thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will cast you from the face of the earth. This year you shall die, because you have taught rebellion against the Lord.'" 17 So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month.

While Jeremiah was wearing the yoke and preaching to the nation to submit to Babylon, one of the false prophets, Hananiah came up with his own version of prophecy. The people in Jerusalem were thinking that Hananiah was correct because at this time in Babylon, king Nebuchadnezzar was busy putting out a fire of a revolt in his own kingdom. They thought that God had broken the yoke of Babylon and all the captives and the temple articles would return soon. What Hananiah said was a direct conflict with Jeremiah's prophecy.

We see the footnote at the end of chapter 28. Hananiah's prophecy didn't come true, but his life came to an end. This reminds me of the incident with Korah in Numbers 16. The Lord showed to the people who was the true leader of Israel by taking out Korah and his supporters.

The people of Israel would rather listen to Hananiah's "easy-on-the-ears" false prophecy over Jeremiah's truth. It's always the case that when we reject the light chastisement of the Lord, we end up getting a much heavier chastisement for a longer period of time due to our own dumb choice. That's the reason when I go through a trial, I've learned to ask the Lord, "What do You want me to learn from this trial?" instead of "Why, Lord?"

D. THE GOD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Jeremiah 29:8-14 For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. 9 For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the Lord. 10 For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace

and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.

Can you imagine yourself traveling by foot, in chain, from Israel to Babylon, the modern day Iraq – over 800 miles – as prisoners of war, soon-to-be-slaves in a foreign land? It doesn't matter what your position was in Israel or how rich you were, you will become nothing more than a piece of property that is owned by your future master who can kill you if he doesn't like you for any reasons.

Let's say you are 40 years old and Jeremiah says, "The Lord will bring the Israel people back from Babylon after 70 years." That means that you are not going back to your country alive, most likely. I am sure that you would be filled with discouragement and hopelessness. If you need the Lord, this is the time.

Chapter 29 contains letters from Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon to give them words of encouragement without condemnation. He told them how to behave in their new place. Jeremiah had a true shepherd's heart. He reminded them about "clean" and "unclean" things, and he wanted them to be good witnesses for the Lord in the idol central Babylonia.

Wishful thinking or drummed-up false prophecies only give a temporary relief and followed by a valley of total discouragement. But true hope is based on the revealed Word of God. The Lord gives them His promise which cannot be broken under no circumstance.

If you haven't yet, I'd like all of you guys to memorize v11. It is a great reminder that the Lord has complete control of our future. When I get to talk with the clients in my drawing business, they cannot quite figure out how I am going to draw what they are thinking. On many occasions, I see a completely finished drawing in my mind's eyes while I listen to their concept for a drawing. Our God already saw the entire future of ours before the time ever began.

We merely see the beginning. God sees the end from the beginning. Take heart. We see a blank canvas. God sees a masterpiece in progress. The Holocaust survivor Corrie ten Boom said, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God." I love that.

Know this: God is thinking about you right now. He is not thinking about you merely as one person of the billions and billions of people in the human race. He is thinking about you as an individual.

Psalm 40:5 Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done; and Your thoughts toward us cannot be counted to You in order. If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.

God's thoughts toward you are continuous, nonstop, and innumerable, because He loves you very much. That's the truth.

E. APPLICATIONS

- 1) When the Lord puts the words in a believer's heart to speak, he or she must be obedient to speak them exactly without adding, subtracting, or replacing.
- 2) You are still a work in progress. God is still finishing you, so don't be impatient. Don't feel it's over, just because you are not where you need to be yet.