

MESSAGE FOR KING ZEDEKIAH

TEXT: JEREMIAH 34:1-22

INTRODUCTION:

1. The four kings who followed King Josiah were all opposed to the prophet Jeremiah, because Jeremiah advised them to submit to Babylon.
2. Their policy was to rely upon Egypt. They thought that by forming an alliance with Pharaoh they would be successful in stopping King Nebuchadnezzar.
3. Jeremiah told them their schemes were contrary to the will of God.
4. H.A. Ironside said, "The king of Babylon had been appointed by God and set over the nations. Egypt was a broken reed. The only safe and right policy was to submit to the authority ordained of the Lord, and to acknowledge how richly the sins of Israel and Judah had deserved this national degradation" (*Jeremiah and Lamentations*).
5. King Zedekiah was made king by Nebuchadnezzar. He was a double-minded man and unstable in all his ways. Zedekiah was afraid to stand up to his counselors (cf. 38:1-6).
6. H.A. Ironside said, "Finally, when his position became desperate and the city seemed about to fall, he threw the prophet into prison, and refused to hearken to his admonitions" (*Jeremiah and Lamentations*).
7. Jeremiah chapter 34 begins with a message from the LORD to King Zedekiah (34:1, 2).

I. HE WOULD DIE IN PEACE IN BABYLON

1. King Zedekiah was told that Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon would lead his army into Jerusalem and Nebuchadnezzar would "burn it with fire" (34:1, 2; cf. 34:22; 37:8).
2. This is recorded in II Chronicles 36:19, "And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof."
3. King Zedekiah would be taken as a captive into Babylon. However, Jeremiah promised King Zedekiah a quiet death and a royal funeral (34:3-5).
4. Verse 7 refers to the last two fortified cities in Judah -- Lachish and Azekah.

II. ZEDEKIAH'S DECREE (34:8, 9)

1. King Zedekiah's "covenant" (34:8) was a decree proclaiming liberty for the slaves. A calf was slain and then cut in half. Then the princes, priests, and people walked between the halves as a sign that they were in agreement with the terms of the covenant (34:18, 19).
2. According to the Mosaic Law, Hebrew slaves were to be released on the seventh year. Exodus 21:2 says, "If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing."
3. Deuteronomy 15:12 says, "And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee."
4. H.A. Ironside said, "Rapacity and covetousness had made this law a dead letter for years. Now, the king and people covenanted to observe it, and to proclaim liberty" to the manservants and maidservants.

III. JEREMIAH REBUKED THE VACILLATING KING

1. As soon as the proclamation was made, it was quickly repealed, putting the manservants and the maidservants back into subjection (34:10, 11).
2. Apparently Zedekiah's motives for freeing the slaves were not right, and as soon as King Nebuchadnezzar and his army left, he broke the covenant (cf. 34:21b).
3. King Zedekiah broke his covenant, so the LORD reminded him of the covenant He made with their fathers when He brought them out of Egypt (34:12-14).
5. This ("the Mosaic Covenant") covenant states that in the seventh year their slaves should be set free (Ex. 21:2; Deut. 15:12).
4. King Zedekiah "had done right" in God's sight, "in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbour" (34:15).
5. But in turning from their covenant, and causing their servants once more to enter into bondage, they had "polluted" God's name (34:15, 16). They had polluted God's name by not keeping their word.
6. Therefore, the LORD would "proclaim a liberty" against them -- even to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine (34:17).
7. "And I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth" (34:17b). They would be scattered all over the world.
8. Judah's princes and people sealed the covenant when they "cut the calf in twain and passed between the parts thereof" (34:18, 19).
9. This seems to have been the ancient custom for the contracting parties to a solemn covenant. A sacrifice was offered, and the pieces or parts

- thereof arranged in order on the altar; then the persons pledging themselves passed between the pieces.
10. The earliest mention of it is in Genesis 15. Abraham was instructed to take “a heifer of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle-dove and a young pigeon” (Genesis 15:9).
 11. H.A. Ironside pointed out that all of this was typical of the one true sacrifice -- the Lord Jesus Christ -- each representing Him in some special aspect (*Jeremiah and Lamentations*).
 - The young ox speaks of Him as the patient Servant, providing food for others.
 - The goat is, in Matthew 25, used to picture the sinner, and points, therefore, to Him whom God made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
 - The ram is the consecration offering, and tells of His submissive obedience unto death.
 - The turtle-dove, as others have suggested, is the bird of love and sorrow: and never was either love or sorrow so great as His.
 - The pigeon, of course, is similar; and both being from the heavens, they pointed to the One who came from heaven to die on earth for our redemption.
 12. It was in this way, that the people of Judah had confirmed a covenant in regard to the Sabbatic year of release.
 13. They had offered to the Lord a calf, and “passed between the parts thereof” (34:18). Nothing could have been more solemn. They bound themselves, by the strongest of all vows, to proclaim liberty to every bondman or bondmaid of Hebrew birth.
 14. But because there was no true self-judgment, and no sincere repentance, they soon fell back to their old ways and so the LORD would give them into their enemies’ hands (34:19, 20).
 15. Their dead bodies would “be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth” (34:19, 20). The transgressors of God's covenant would incur the same fate as the slaughtered animal (34:18-20).
 16. Verses 21 and 22 refer to a temporary break in the siege of Jerusalem. More details are given in chapter 37.
 17. Rather than trusting in the LORD, King Zedekiah looked to Egypt for help. When the Egyptian army came to help Judah, the Chaldean army went out to meet them.
 18. But the Egyptians turned around and went home, and the Chaldeans came back and burned Jerusalem with fire (34:22; cf. 34:2; 37:8).

CONCLUSION:

1. As we have been studying the book of Jeremiah I have attempted to emphasize application as well as interpretation.
2. The interpretation of Jeremiah 34 is easy to understand, and so is the application.
3. People (even Christians) make promises to God but they quickly forget all about them.