

Jeremiah Warns Zedekiah

Key Verse: "Then Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, If I declare it unto thee, wilt thou not surely put me to death? and if I give thee counsel, wilt thou not hearken unto me?"
—*Jeremiah 38:15*

Selected Scripture:
Jeremiah 38:14-23

JEREMIAH WAS CHOSEN

by God as a prophet of Israel from before his birth. (Jer. 1:5) During his life he witnessed many crises in the nation of Israel. For forty years he went forth with untiring zeal and bold confidence to warn the people of their wicked ways and proclaim the impending disaster that would surely come upon them if they failed to heed God's instructions.

The prophet's strong warnings were mostly ignored by the Israelites, who were then forced to endure many hardships which were allowed to come upon them because of their disobedience. Zedekiah, the last reigning king of Judah, wanted to hear Jeremiah's guidance. However, he chose a course contrary to the Lord's will. Towards the end of his reign, a rebellion by the Israelites took place which brought a quick response from the Chaldeans, who placed the city of Jerusalem under siege.

Jeremiah's prophesying was very unpopular amongst the Israelites. He was accused of weakening the hands of the soldiers, as well as of the people. He was even singled out as one who deserved a traitor's death. At one point,

he was cast into a cistern and left to die, but the king released him when an Ethiopian eunuch interceded on his behalf.—Jer. 38:4-13

“Then said Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, Thus saith ... the God of Israel; If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon’s princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, ... But if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon’s princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand.”—vss. 17,18

Jeremiah’s warning to Zedekiah indicated that if he would exercise faith in God and let him take care of the Babylonian king and his princes in his own due time and way, the nation could avoid the great disaster which would otherwise come upon them. Jerusalem would remain intact and the Israelites could continue to worship at their own temple.

Zedekiah, however, resolved to continue the hopeless struggle against the overwhelming power of the Babylonians. He was sorely defeated. Jerusalem was destroyed and nearly all its citizens were carried away as exiles into Babylon. Thus Jeremiah’s prophecies came to pass, proving that they were inspired by God.

In Jeremiah chapter 30 is another prophecy pertaining to a further climactic experience which God brings upon the regathered nation of Israel at the end of the present Gospel Age, identified as “Jacob’s trouble.” As a consequence of this severe trial, they will have no other alternative than to turn to God and trust him to save them. Afterwards, they will learn righteousness and their nation will be exalted.

While this account pertains to the Jewish nation in Jeremiah’s day, there is a lesson applicable to spiritual Israel in our time. It is the necessity of looking for God’s will in a particular matter and, once it is understood, to exercise faith and trust by leaving it in his hands. ■