

August 3

2 Kings 23

2 Chronicles 35

Jeremiah 22 and 26

To give you a quick snapshot to current international affairs, balance of power between nations was shifting chaotically in the last years of the Davidic dynasty. Assyria had been the power broker in the days of Isaiah and Hezekiah but Isaiah's prophetic words regarding the rise of Babylon were beginning to sound very ominous and just to keep things interesting while the old and the new empires were jousting on the eastern front, Pharaoh Neco down in Egypt was doing all he could to make his play for international immortality...including meddling with the kings of Judah which we learn about.

In our reading today we hear how the great King Josiah dies and then the kings who follow him...kings who, unlike Josiah, did evil in the eyes of the Lord. In all probability what we have in Jeremiah 22 is a snapshot of what Jeremiah was saying to one of these kings and to Israel at time of his reign:

To Shallum (his personal name) who was the son of Josiah (also known as Jehoahaz meaning the Lord will help) and who ruled for a few months after Josiah died in battle of Megiddo (609 B.C.) Jeremiah gives some words of wisdom. Shallum was taken into exile, down into Egypt. Jeremiah's message to him and concerning him is, Do not weep for the dead king or mourn his loss (Josiah) but Israel should weep bitterly for Shallum his son who Jeremiah says "Who is exiled, because he will never return nor see his native land again" ... "He will die in the place where they have led him captive ..." You may remember that he was deposed by Pharaoh Neco of Egypt and taken to Egypt in chains. Jehoiakim was placed on the throne then by the Egyptian ruler. We will read more about him in the days to come.

Moving onto to Jeremiah chapter 26 early on in Jehoiakim's reign, Jeremiah brings a strong word from the Lord. The response of the people? An almost unbelievable amount of hostility from the religious leaders – Jeremiah was challenging their ministries and they felt it! Reading this interaction between he and the religious leaders brings two points of application to mind.

One, it should encourage us to hold on, even if we are the only voices speaking for God to keep on speaking.

I am reminded of the story of Martin Luther when he was called by the entire religious and civil establishment of his day and told to recant his views that challenged everything the Roman Catholic Church had been teaching:

The Hollywood version of what happened on that day is that Luther strode with a magnificence confidence, even arrogance, into the great hall. In a booming voice cried out to all those when asked to recant, "Here I stand." He was convinced by the Word of scripture or by the light of evident reason that my position was wrong. Here I stand, I can do no other. Well what really happened is that after a great deal of wrestling and personal torment, being called into that forum and told to recant, and asked for his answer, there was a long silence. Finally, Luther's lips were moving but no one could hear what he said. When he was challenged to speak up, he said, Could I have 24 more hours to think about this. He wasn't sure. He almost recanted! How grateful we should be that Luther on the next day came back and said, Unless I am convinced by scripture itself or by the light of evident reason, I cannot recant. Here I stand. I cannot do anything else. God help me. There may well come a day when you too will need that kind of fortitude.

Second point I wanted to make is that this mob scene is an important reminder of how easy it is to get nationalistic fervor and patriotism confused with righteousness. When Jeremiah spoke out the judgment of God against the nation, it offended the nationalistic fervor and feelings of the people of Jerusalem. Had it not been for the careful intervention of a few cautious officials Jeremiah may have been toast. Part of what got Jeremiah into so much hot water with the people was an inability on their part to separate righteousness from nationalism. Let's be careful of that same mistake.

Our situation with Jeremiah resolved itself in part of the fact that Micah the prophet had said many of the very same things before him and gone unpunished. Now that Micah was widely recognized and revered as God's prophet how could they judge Jeremiah for saying the very same thing? It is interesting to note that while we have seen allusions and even quotations from one prophetic book in another already, the quote from Micah's Book which is found in Jeremiah 26:18 is the only instance of which I am aware in which an Old Testament prophet quotes another and names him.

Our reading finishes today with another reference to one of God's prophets named Uriah who also prophesied against Jerusalem in the time of Jeremiah and Jehoiakim. This intrigues me because apart from these very few verses in Jeremiah 26 there is no other mention of him in scripture. There are so many stories that are not told in scripture of heroic men and women who stood for God and for righteousness that I sometimes wish God had given us a book several times larger than the one we hold in our hands. In the meantime it will have to satisfy us to know that there was a faithful prophet named Uriah, who being somewhat less prominent than Jeremiah, was more vulnerable to the wrath of Jehoiakim. Secret agents went down to Egypt where he was in hiding, brought him back to Judah and had him murdered. That will give us some idea of the kind of threat that Jeremiah had to live with on a day-to-day basis. Rescued from a mob one day, he had no assurance whatever that the king wouldn't try to

execute him the next. And still he spoke courageously for God. "Kill me if you want," Jeremiah said, "but God has sent me to speak these words. If you kill me you will only succeed in bringing even greater condemnation upon yourselves." On the day which chapter 26 records, at least those words had some sway and Jeremiah lived -- but not comfortably.