

August 6

Jeremiah 25 & 35

Today we read Jeremiah 25 and 35 and have passed the halfway point of the longest book in the Bible. Before getting specifically into Jeremiah's prophecies here is a little historical background of what is going on. It is Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon who will dominate the biblical landscape for the next several decades after his appearance. He reigned in Babylon from 605 - 562 B.C. and we will become much better acquainted with him when we read the Book of Daniel. The fate of the whole Near Eastern world became clear in 605 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar, who was at that time still the crown prince, led the armies of Babylon into battle at Carchemish and defeated the forces of Pharaoh Neco of Egypt. The result was duplicated at Hamath and within months, upon the death of his father, Nebuchadnezzar was king of a vast empire. Jehoiakim's first attempt to break away from Nebuchadnezzar came around 602 B.C. and was encouraged by some short-lived victories in Egypt when Nebuchadnezzar's invasionary forces were repelled but not defeated. Jehoiakim thought an alliance with Egypt would save Judah. Jeremiah, speaking for God, told him differently and Egypt eventually was unable to help. Jehoiakim was at the mercy of King Nebuchadnezzar and the King even contented himself for a time with the temple treasury of the Lord and brought the articles back to Babylon.

So while this is all going, here comes Jeremiah with a continuing message from the Lord. In our readings, we are by the day gaining more and more insight into this remarkable man and into his ministry as the prophet of God to a nation that wanted no part of his message. Within a few sentences of chapter 25 we were reminded of the length of time he ministered under very unfavorable circumstances, faithfully delivering the Word of God to people who wanted less and less to hear it or respond. In the 23rd year of his public ministry (that will be roughly half way through his career) he brought the very specific prophecy that is found in Jeremiah 25 to the people. PAUSE...23 YEARS????!! Jeremiah had been faithful in delivering a message to a tough crowd for 23 years???...AND, we learn this was only about half-way through his ministry. Go Jeremiah!

Well in his prophecy he clearly identifies both Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar as the instruments by which God's righteous punishment is going to be brought to them. When Isaiah said it, it was news, but by now even non-prophets could see the handwriting on the wall. The rather spectacular bit of foretelling here relates to the duration of the captivity which Jeremiah matter-of-factly says will be exactly 70 years. And after the 70 years of captivity, Jeremiah says, Babylon itself will be judged and God will pay her back for the violence and destruction she has visited upon other nations.

Can you imagine what a comfort this prophecy from the lips of Jeremiah must have been to a generation later as the children of Abraham found themselves weeping by the rivers of Babylon? They would have the clear word of God's prophet that their exile was not permanent and that after just 70 years (one man's lifetime) they

would be freed to return home. Without this prophecy they might have languish without hope, but God wanted to assure them of His plan and purpose - You have a national lesson to learn, but it will be learned and I will bring you back again when its accomplished. Don't worry. Daniel -- whose exciting life we will read about in a few days, was one of the ones who took great courage from Jeremiah's promise of 70 years, then restoration.

I even believe that the old men and women who solemnly trekked out of Jerusalem -- some in chains and some just walking behind the wagons on the long road to an exile from which they personally could never return were probably greatly encouraged to remember that old Jeremiah -- the prophet they had hated and despised so much -- had said it would only last for 70 years. At least their children -- or grandchildren would see Jerusalem again. At least this new bondage would not last for 400 years as the old one in Egypt had done!! I am enormously comforted by the fact that God cared so much for Judah, in spite of her apostasy that He told her in advance how long the punishment was going to last.