

August 7

Jeremiah 36 and 45

We begin today with the scroll burning incident recorded in the Chapter 36. It occurred in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Jehoiakim's reign. It was the year that Jeremiah had the revelation that is recorded back in Chapter 25. He told the king and people that because of their repeated disobedience they would fall to Nebuchadnezzar.

Well we learn that the scrolls were written when Jeremiah would get a message from the Lord and it would usually begin with the instruction, "Write this down." Since a large portion of the Bible is comprised of these words from the prophets we should be grateful that they obediently wrote them down. As Jeremiah heard from the Lord, he would dictate them to his scribe, Baruch, who would in turn write them onto the scroll. Then Baruch, faithful man that he was, got the dubious challenge of going to the temple and reading the words aloud to the people who were gathered there for worship. He had to do it because Jeremiah was restricted – not allowed to go to the temple because he was such a trouble maker. Whether or not he was already under arrest and confined to the king's courtyard or I cannot say. Perhaps he was just forbidden access to the temple. That is the view that I am inclined to take. But the point is that already almost 20 years before Jerusalem's fall; Jeremiah is ostracized and kept away from the temple and the people.

A reason for his exclusion from the precincts of the temple is probably related to the incident recorded back in chapter 19 when he smashed the clay vessel at the temple and then told all the people that is what God was going to do to Judah. I think that I could endure persecution and rejection and mistreatment for a while at least – a year or two or three, but Jeremiah was in that position for many, many years. But he remained faithful. Incredibly, Baruch also remained faithful with his friend and mentor Jeremiah. He had the courage to go and read the words that he knew would create a terrible stir. The questioning process that followed is very interesting. The words (which are not given-but which undoubtedly are very similar to if not identical with some of the messages already recorded in this book) fill the officials with fear when they hear them. The people have already heard them and they want to know one thing – where did these words come from? Did Jeremiah dictate the message? Then before the scroll to the king they instruct Baruch and Jeremiah to go and hide so that in his fury the king will not execute them. Now here is what interests me about all of this. In spite of the fact that they refused to obey his message and heed his words, it is evident to me that they knew full well that Jeremiah was actually speaking for and on behalf of Jehovah God. If someone else wrote the scroll, they are prepared to dismiss- a crackpot-a prophet of doom to whom we should not listen...BUT if Jeremiah wrote them, well then this was something serious...something about which to be afraid and something the king should know about despite the predictable outcome. They don't like what Jeremiah says they decide to publicly oppose him. Why? Probably because of their fear of what the king would do. They do not know that Jeremiah really spoke for God and if he did then they were afraid to harm him or to allow the king to harm him. If they just hated Jeremiah and wanted him out of the way they would not

have taken the precaution of making sure he was hidden before they went to the king!

We learn elsewhere in scripture that for nearly 20 more years this routine continued and yet no one was prepared to take Jeremiah out to assassinate him or cut out his tongue and silence him. It's because they really knew he was truly speaking for God and they were afraid to silence him.

The really sad part of the story is when the words were finally read to the king-he had and the people who were closest to him were not afraid. They showed no fear, only anger. It looks to me like the officials who took him the scroll were hoping that the king would listen and obey, that he would put on sackcloth and repent. But he would not, so they would not either. When they saw that his intention was to burn the scrolls they begged him not to. Unfortunately, we read he would not listen, so the words of God were consumed by a flaming fire. Jehoiakim hadn't learned. At God's command Jeremiah just wrote the words down again and added a terrible postscript which sealed the fate of Jehoiakim. This action of burning God's word was the reason that he died a terrible death and was succeeded on the throne of Judah not by his son but by his brother.