

CONFLICT WITH AUTHORITY

Jeremiah 22:1 to 29:32;37-38

The inner tensions that wracked Jeremiah were matched by his constant battle with the authorities of his day.

I. Divine Judgment Upon Political Leaders (22:1-23:8)

1. Jeremiah and Josiah (22:10, 15-16)

Jeremiah was conspicuous among those who mourned the passing of the godly monarch.

2. The Fate of Jehoahaz (22:10-12)

Although Jeremiah was grief-stricken over the untimely death of Josiah, he was even more heartbroken over young Jehoahaz. After having ruled for only three months, Jehoahaz had been taken to Egypt. Jeremiah clearly saw that the exile was permanent.

It is a pathetic scene when a young man enjoys the center of the stage for a moment and then is ushered unceremoniously into oblivion.

3. The Destiny of Jehoiakim (22:13-19)

4. God's Wrath upon Jehoiachin (22:24-30)

Young Jehoiachin was doomed through no fault of his own. The sins of his fathers were now being visited upon the children. Nothing could save the city now. Jehoiakim had sown the wind, and his son was reaping the whirlwind.

5. Jeremiah and Zedekiah (23:6; 21; 37-38)

Jerusalem was under siege by the Babylonians, and Zedekiah was desperately trying to defend the city. Everyone was being called to the ultimate sacrifice, even of life itself if necessary. Into this tense situation before all the people, Jeremiah threw his explosive words, "Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death. He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey" (21:8-9). This would be treason in any land. It is a wonder that Jeremiah escaped with his life. On the contrary, Zedekiah appeared to respect him greatly and secretly seemed to believe that the prophet was right.

Like so many leaders today, Zedekiah respected his preacher and wanted to follow his counsel.

(1) He asked his minister to pray for him (37:3). He respected Jeremiah enough to ask for his intercession. He wanted the prophet to use his influence to get God to serve the ends of the state. Apparently Jeremiah was not inclined to do so for no mention is made of his praying for Zedekiah. The purpose of prayer is to seek for God's will rather than to influence him to reinforce our own plans.

(2) Zedekiah was anxious to know what God said. Zedekiah, however, like so many people, kept hoping that God would change his mind and see the situation the way the king viewed it.

(3) Zedekiah was afraid of what others would say. Zedekiah, having heard the truth, did not have the courage to act upon it. He believed what Jeremiah was saying; he could say amen to every word. If he were living today he would be saying to his pastor "That's right, preacher." Why, then, did he not act upon his conviction? Zedekiah was just like his counterparts today: he was afraid of what others would do and say (38:19). Jeremiah assured him that he would be safer in the arms of God than with his own plans. Instead of being afraid of other men, he should be mortally afraid of the wrath of God.

II. Controversies with Religious Leaders (23:9-29:32)

Buried in the heart of the book of Jeremiah are some of the most significant teachings of the prophet. Here is recorded the account of his conflicts with his contemporaries among the prophets.

1. The False Prophets

Many of them were quite sincere in their opinions and spoke with assurance that the Lord had given them their message. They spoke from "their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord" (23:16).

Every religious community has been plagued by the presence of such a group of ministers. Some of these men delude themselves, and others confuse the people with lies (23:22).

2. The Marks of a True Prophet

In this section he points out the characteristics of a true prophet of God.

(1) The true prophet possesses high moral standards (23:9-19,22). The true prophet always seeks to turn people from their sinful ways, instead of encouraging them to continue in them (23:22). The message that he preaches contains "words of his (the Lord's) holiness" (23:9). The true prophet's personal life stands behind his words. He never would say, "Do not do as I do, but do as I say." The faithful prophet never equates right with might (23:10b). He recognizes that often the majority may not be right. Dedicated to decency, he will do nothing to strengthen the bonds of evildoers (23:14). No man is a true prophet of God who is not himself morally pure, both in example and precept.

(2) The true prophet makes accurate predictions (23:20-23).

(3) The divinely inspired prophet will have an effective ministry (23:28-29). Jeremiah challenged his rivals to preach their dreams and see what would happen. If they were from God their words would remain like grains of wheat after the chaff was blown away. Faithful preaching is like a fire devouring stubble or a hammer breaking rock into pieces. Jeremiah did not mean by this that the prophet would necessarily attain worldly recognition, but he did mean that he would accomplish

his purpose. He might be rejected, but he never could be ignored.

(4) His message will have vitality (23:33-40). Every prophet in Jeremiah's day began his oracle with the phrase, "The burden of the Lord." This gave it a note of authority.

(5) The true prophet is cautious (23:32). The true prophet will not be too quick to come to a conclusion.

(6) He preaches judgment upon sin (chaps. 24-26). In 28:8-9, Jeremiah summarized this truth. In chapter 24 Jeremiah refuted the popular opinion in Jerusalem that those taken in captivity in the year 597 deserved it while those left behind were approved of God. Chapter 25 contains the prophet's denunciations both upon Judah and all the nations of the earth. Chapter 26 has already been discussed in chapter 3 of this study. It contains the record of Jeremiah's condemnation of the Temple and the sacrificial system.

(7) Finally, the inspired prophet has faith in the future (29:1-14). Although Jeremiah saw no chance of relief for the present, he was confident of the future, for God would not rest until his will for his people was realized (29:11-14). The real prophet is often overwhelmed with despair when he looks about him, but his faith always looks up to God.