

NOTES ON THE PROPHECY AND LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH

“The Weeping Prophet”

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

BONDS AND YOKES

(Chaps. 27, 28)

Chapters twenty-seven and twenty-eight are intimately connected. Both alike treat of the general subject of passive submission to the Babylonian yoke.

Strange as it may seem to those not conversant with the ways of God with man on earth as outlined in the Scriptures, it was He Himself who had raised up Nebuchadrezzar and had given His people and the Gentile nations into his hand. This, and the failure on man's part (especially that of the “**head of gold**,” as the Chaldean monarch was declared to be), will all be found fully detailed in the book of Daniel.

It was for Israel and Judah to own God's righteousness in thus causing the dominion to pass from David's house, because of their sin, and to be given to the stranger. This, Zedekiah, as we have seen, did not do; and from the present position it would appear that he and the kings of the surrounding nations, Edom, Moab, Ammon, etc., had attempted an organized coalition against the king of Babylon. Jeremiah is therefore commissioned to warn Zedekiah and his allies of the futility of any such attempt.

It was in the early part of the reign of Zedekiah then, Judah's last king, that Jeremiah was bidden to make bonds and yokes and put them first upon his own neck, then send them for a testimony to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyrus, and Zidon, by the hand of their own ambassadors, who had come to Jerusalem to confer with the Hebrew ruler (vers. 2, 3). Not only was he to give to each the symbolic bonds and yokes, but he was to give them the explanation likewise:

“And command them to say unto their masters, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Thus shall ye say unto your masters: I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto Me. And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him. And all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the very time of his land come: and then many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of him” (vers. 4-7).

Resistance for the present is but folly, and worse than useless. The king of Babylon was the servant of the Lord, though he wist it not. He could but act by divine permission, and it was the will of God to use him as the scourge to punish the people with whom He had a controversy. That purpose achieved, his power should be broken; but till then no might could stand against his victorious armies. The nation refusing to put the neck under his yoke would incur greater punishment, in the way of the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, until they should be utterly consumed (ver. 8).

They were warned against giving heed to charlatans parading as prophets and diviners, as also dreamers, enchanters, and sorcerers, who abounded among the heathen. Such, as a rule, give the message which they know is most likely to be received with favor; but when they spoke, saying, **“Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon,”** they were prophesying a lie, and only the more drawing down the vengeance of God upon those believing and acting upon their prognostications. If the nations would submit to the yoke, they should be permitted to remain in their own lands as tributaries to Nebuchadnezzar (vers. 9-11).

To Zedekiah also a personal warning and entreaty was given. He was urged not to rise in rebellion, but to bend his neck to the yoke, thus saving himself and the people. In his court also were false prophets, who predicted the success of his effort to throw off subjection to Babylon, but the Lord had not sent them. They were prophesying lies in His name (vers. 12-15).

To the priests and the people a similar address is directed. The pseudo-prophets had declared, **“Behold, the vessels of the Lord’s house shall now shortly be brought again from Babylon.”** This was utterly false; and he pleads with the people not to be deceived. **“If,”** he says, **“they be prophets, and if the Word of the Lord be with them, let them now make intercession to the Lord of hosts, that the vessels which are left in the house of the Lord, and in the house of the king of Judah, and at Jerusalem, go not to Babylon”** (vers. 16-18).

For the Lord had made known to him that not only should there be no present recovery of the sacred utensils now in Babylon, but the brazen pillars and the sea, with all the vessels hitherto allowed to remain in Jerusalem, **“which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took not, when he carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah from Jerusalem to Babylon, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem,”** should soon be carried away also and kept in the city of their captivity until the day appointed for His visitation, when He would bring them up and restore them to the holy city (vers. 19-22). The record of their restoration is given in Ezra 1:7-11.

In His own time the word of the Lord was literally fulfilled, while the testimony of the false prophets was proven to be a lie, as the next incident shows.

“And it came to pass the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, and in the fifth month, that Hananiah the son of Azur the prophet, which was of Gibeon, spake unto me in the house of the Lord, in the presence of the priests and of all the people, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon” (chap. 28:1, 2).

Hananiah reiterated the statement that the vessels of the Lord's house were soon to be returned from Babylon, even setting a definite time limit - "**within two full years.**" He also predicted the return of Jeconiah, with all the captives of Judah, declaring that the Lord was about to break the yoke of the king of Babylon (vers. 3, 4).

Had it indeed been true, Jeremiah would have heartily rejoiced in it; though his own utterances would have entirely failed. Having the secret of the Lord, however, he knew it should be quite the contrary. In reply to Hananiah, he said before all the priests and the people that were assembled in the house of the Lord, "**Amen: the Lord do so: the Lord perform thy words which thou hast prophesied, to bring again the vessels of the Lord's house, and all that is carried away captive, from Babylon into this place**" (vers. 5, 6).

The meek and faithful Jeremiah - how gladly would he, true lover of Judah as he was, have welcomed such an end to the miseries of his people! But he knew it was not to be.

"Nevertheless," he continues, "**hear thou now this word that I speak in thine ears, and in the ears of all the people: The prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied both against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence. The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him**" (vers. 7-9).

He brings no railing accusation: nor is he drawn into useless argument. With the earlier prophets, whose writings they had, his word agreed; while Hananiah's was to the contrary. If it be fulfilled, then he would admit that the Lord had sent him. "**The servant of the Lord must not strive.**"

Hananiah, however, evidently fearing that the composure of the man of God would have some weight with his audience, assumes the dramatic; and taking off the yoke which Jeremiah, in accordance with the Lord's command (chap. 27:2), was wearing about his neck, he broke it in pieces, saying, as he did so, "**Thus saith the Lord: Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within the space of two full years**" (vers. 10, 11).

Error is generally insistent and dogmatic - the more so, often, the farther it is removed from the truth. The servant of the Lord makes no reply. He has no reputation to save: he desires not to attach the people to himself by a display of words. He can afford to wait, for he knows he has the mind of the Lord, which will be verified in its own time. We simply read, "**And the prophet Jeremiah went his way**" (ver. 11).

Alone in the presence of God he received a message for the man who had sought to triumph over him and had withstood his words. He was told to go and tell Hananiah that he had but broken yokes of wood: the Lord should make a yoke of iron, and put it upon the neck of all the nations he had before referred to, and the sentence is reaffirmed, that they should serve the king of Babylon (vers. 12-14).

For Hananiah himself a most solemn word was added.

He had sinned unto death. In God's holy and righteous government, he must die. **"Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah: The Lord hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the Lord: Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord"** (vers. 15, 16).

Solemn is the responsibility resting upon **"vain talkers and deceivers,"** who, by their **"good words and fair speeches,"** deceive the hearts of the simple. **"The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain."** Not alone to profanity does this refer; but to taking upon one the name of the Lord when the life is dishonoring His holiness; or professing to speak in the name of the Lord when one has received no message from Him.

Scarce two months elapsed ere the judgment so solemnly foretold overtook the impostor. **"So Hananiah the prophet died the same year, in the seventh month."** All God's ways are in righteousness, whether in mercy or in judgment.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

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