

September 9

Scriptures: Read Jeremiah 24 & 25

Key Verse: “For I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land build them and I will plant them?” (Jeremiah 24:6)

Overview

Jeremiah’s vision, recorded in chapter 24, came early in the reign of Zedekiah. His words must have shocked the people of Jerusalem who thought themselves better than those whom they believed were being punished by being taken away captive to Babylon with Jeconiah (22:20-30, also called Jehoiachin; 2 Kings 24:11-16). The fact was, however, that these first exiles were taken away for their own good. By removing them at that time, the Lord protected them from the harmful influences of apostate Judah under the reign of wicked Zedekiah and from the great slaughter of Judah by the Babylonians that was to come eleven years later. These initial exiles are symbolized by the basket of good figs. Among them were all the professional craftsmen, whom Nebuchadnezzar likely desired to help him work on his own building projects. Included were such men as Daniel and his friends and Ezekiel. God promised to bless these exiles, not only materially (many were prosperous, owned land, and built houses; cf. 29:4-7, 28; Ezra 2:69) but also spiritually, for in that distant heathen land they would come to realize the evils of idolatry and would draw closer to God (24:6-7). From this remnant, whom God had separated, purified, and promised to bring back to the land, the true Israel would emerge those who would become believers in Jesus. The apostate people of Judah who, along with King Zedekiah, remained in Jerusalem, as well as those who fled to Egypt would be discarded by the Lord, just as a basket of rotten figs must be thrown away (24:8-10; cf. Deut. 28:37).

Chapter 25 tells us that Jeremiah’s message came in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim and was directed to the people of Judah, whom Jeremiah had been faithfully warning of God’s coming judgment for twenty-three years. Over the years, his warnings and exhortations, and that of other prophets, had gone unheeded. The Lord had delayed the coming of His wrath because of His servant David and because of the few godly kings, like Josiah. But there were more ungodly kings who filled Jerusalem with innocent blood (cf. 2 Kings 24:4) and led the people into the sin of idolatry, turning their hearts away from God. When the message of God’s true prophet was rejected, God sent King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon from the north. God called him “My servant” (25:9), for even though he was a heathen king, he was fulfilling the purpose of God to execute judgment upon the sinful people of Judah, as well as the other surrounding wicked nations whom the Lord would cause to drink the cup of his fury.

For the first time, the specific duration of the Captivity is remarkably prophesied. By divine revelation, Jeremiah foretold of the seventy years that Judah would be in Exile (25:11-12; cf. 29:10; Ezra 1:1; Daniel 9:2; Zech. 7:5). Why the specific number of 70? Interestingly, this represents the sabbatical year (every seventh year the land was to be uncultivated). When this was observed, it was a sign of the covenant people’s consecration and obedience to God (cf. Lev. 25:2-7, 20-22; Ex. 23:10-11). From the time of the Temple’s dedication (1 Kings 8) to the destruction of the Temple was 490 years, which means that during this time, the people, who had promised to obey the Lord, had ignored seventy sabbath years. Therefore, to compensate, the

Lord caused them to be in exile for seventy years. Moses had given a serious warning and a prophecy which stressed the importance of keeping the sabbath for the land, saying that if they did not obey this law, the Lord would compensate the years missed by forcing the land to lie desolate (Lev. 26:33-35, 43), and Jeremiah confirmed this prophecy and the Lord fulfilled it (cf. 2 Chron. 36:21).

Jeremiah vividly foresaw that after God made His own people drink the cup of His wrath, the cup would then be given to the surrounding nations whose idolatry had greatly influenced the people of God. He would cause Babylon to conquer these nations, and finally Babylon, called by the code word “Sheshach”, would be punished by God and be made eternally desolate. Their destruction would mark the beginning of God’s redemption for His people. This prophecy appears to be not only descriptive of the punishment of Judah and her neighbouring nations but of that more distant time when God’s wrath would be outpoured upon the whole world at the time of Jesus Christ’s second advent (cf. Matt. 24:30; Rev. 1:4-9). Jeremiah’s warnings, then, must still be heeded today, for unless the nations repent they will “fall and rise no more” (25:27).

Prayer

Father God, give us a heart to know You. As You spoke by divine revelation to Jeremiah, reveal Yourself also to us, that we might know Your ways and walk in Your truth.