

THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE -- JEREMIAH

INTRODUCTION:

1. Jeremiah is best remembered as the prophet "who wept" during "the decline and fall of the Hebrew nation."
2. Jeremiah:
 - a. The name means "exalted of Jehovah."
 - b. He was the son of Hilkiah of the priestly families.
 - c. He prophesied for about 40 years - 626 B. C. (13th year of the reign of Josiah Jer. 1:2) until after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.
 - d. He has been called "the most miserable prophet, the most pessimistic priest, and the most unpopular preacher the world has ever produced." (Banowsky)
Yet, Raymond Calkins said, "There is no nobler, more militant or morally more splendid character to be found in the whole range of scripture. Moses and Paul of Tarsus are the only men who can stand beside him."
3. In this study, let's observe:

DISCUSSION:

I. THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH DOES NOT LEND ITSELF TO EASY ORGANIZATION AND ARRANGEMENT.

- A. George Adam Smith described it as "a conglomeration of prophesies."
- B. The outline might go like this as given by J. B. Tidwell:
 1. The prophet's call and assurance. ch. 1
 2. Judah called to repentance. Ch. 2-22.
 - a. Her sins set forth. 2-6.
 - b. The call to repentance. 7-10.
 - c. The appeal to the covenant. 11-13.
 - d. Rejection and captivity foretold. 14-22.
 3. The book of consolation. ch. 23-33.
 - a. The restoration of the remnant. 23-29.
 - b. The complete restoration. 30-33.
 4. The doom of Jerusalem due to the people's wickedness. ch. 34-36.
 5. The history of Jeremiah and his times. ch. 37-45.
 6. Prophecies against foreign nations. ch. 46-51.
 7. Historical appendix. ch. 52.

II. THE COMMISSION GIVEN TO JEREMIAH. Jer. 1:10.

- A. The injunction here is both negative and positive; both destructive and constructive.
 1. He preaches doom and desolation.
 2. He also predicts mercy and restoration.
- B. In addition to diagnosing the sickness, Jeremiah also prescribes the remedy.
- C. Bill Banosky suggests that in this two fold division we observe:
 1. First, "that Israel's problem of sin contains an historical example for our age
 2. Secondly, we shall notice that the solution to the problem unveils the greatest prophetic utterance in the Old Testament."

III. THE PROBLEM - TWO-FOLD IN NATURE. Jer. 2:13.

- A. First, they had forsaken God. 2:13a.
 1. The fact that Judah had forsaken God is emphasized by the fact that the word "return" (or the idea) appears more than 40 times in the book. Jer. 3:7; 4:1; 5:3; 15:19; 36:7; etc.
 2. The word "backsliding" appears 13 times in Jeremiah and in only two other books - Proverbs (once) and Hosea (3 times). 2:19; 3:6,8,11,12,13,22; 8:5, etc.
 3. "This message, uttered in the midst of social and religious conditions similar to our own, has an astonishing timeliness for our age." (Banosky).

- a. 20th Century man "reveals an arrogant, self-willed departure from God, plus a self-determined attempt to live a self-sufficient life."
- b. Man today is determined to leave God out of his life, just as man did then and as man did in Paul's day. cf. Rom. 1:25-32.
- B. Second, they had "hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." 2:13b.
 - 1. There seems to have always been a terrible tendency on the part of man to worship the works of his own hands - a broken cistern. Jer. 1:16.
 - a. Such reveals a stubborn determination to "walk after our own devices," and each one "do the imagination of his evil heart." Jer. 18:12.
 - b. God's account of the potter and the clay is his answer to man's puny pride. Jer. 18:2.
 - (1) It is not in man that walks to direct his own steps, but then each one of us thinks he's an exception. Jer. 10:23.
 - (2) "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." Jer. 17:5.
 - 2. The American people of today have hewed themselves out broken cisterns to fill their lives and make themselves happy.
 - a. We have the cistern of the highest standard of living.
 - (1) We are so happy that over 20,000 will commit suicide this year "having everything to live with and nothing to live for."
 - (2) We are so well-adjusted that over 1,000,000 of us are chronic alcoholics, over 60,000 are advanced narcotic addicts, and over half of our hospital beds are filled with mentally ill.
 - (3) We are so happy that morals have become irrelevant - cheating is acceptable, over 225,000 unwed mothers this year, crimes increased.
 - (4) We are so happy that when more than 770,000 of our teenagers go to jail this year 'we shake our heads in bewilderment' as if we really don't know why.
 - (5) Jeremiah said "let not the rich glory in his riches." (9:23).
 - b. We have the cistern of science and education. Jeremiah said, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom." (9:23).
 - 3. The problem was greatly increased in Jeremiah's day by false prophets who promised peace when there was no peace. Jer. 6:14.
 - a. They closed the eyes and ears of the people with their "sugar-coated sermons" to the true conditions of the times.
 - b. In similar vein, there are many today who are trying to do the same thing.
 - (1) Some are trying to gloss over our spiritual condition by advocating "positive thinking."
 - (2) Others offer a quick and false peace of mind much like one might take an aspirin for a headache.
 - (3) This idea of crying peace, peace when there is no peace is false security.
 - 4. Jeremiah exposed Judah's spiritual condition in language too plain to be misunderstood. Jer. 5:30,31.
 - a. He had reason to cry. Jer. 9:1.
 - b. He even uttered the hopeless moan heard in our day: "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?"

IV. THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM THEN AND NOW.

- A. "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings..." (Jer. 3:22).
- B. The amazing prophecy about Christianity. Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:6-13.
 - 1. Individuality. "I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts."
 - a. Under Judaism, worship had been primarily a relationship between a nation and God.
 - b. Jeremiah now reveals that every man shall die "for his own iniquity." Jer. 31:30.

- c. Jeremiah anticipated the motto of individual religion. Mt. 18:20; Acts 17:24.
- d. Bill Banosky wrote: "Even after Jesus made it clear that faith is born not in public ceremony but in individual hearts, there have been many tragic lapses. Modern Christendom is markedly characterized by creedal systems as substitutes for a personal knowledge of the Savior. Religion is corporate, external, and formal rather than individual, internal and intimate. With all our talk of devotedness to the Lord it is still difficult for the individual soul to avoid a burial beneath elaborate church machinery. Faith is measured by the regularity of church attendance, and service is marked by the performance of certain external works. In many quarters family or private worship has been surrendered while the more important public assembly continues to be reversed. Fearing a mystical relationship we have fled the phrase 'Christ is my personal savior' in favor of salvation by congregation. In answer to medieval scholastic logic which attempted to prove God and fit him neatly into the existing ecclesiastical structure, Martin Luther retorted, 'The most important thing about the existence of God is that he exists for thee and me.' The young Christian who knows well church doctrine but has never met God, will have little defense in a moment of temptation. When we are strangers to God six days a week, the service of the seventh day will unavoidably reflect our long-felt worship weaknesses. As we think in brotherhood terms of the church universal, and exist in the atmosphere of a congregation unit, let us cautiously remember that the unit in religion is one soul; and religion is an intimate communion between that soul and God." (The Old Testament Books, p. 317). This is not to deemphasize public attendance, external work, etc., but to make us realize that mere external acts must have a vital connection with our relation to God.
- 2. Universality. "They shall all know me..."
 - a. Under the new covenant man must not only know God before he can become a Christian but all can know God.
 - b. Jesus emphasized this truth in the great commission. (Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15,16.)
- 3. Remission of sins. "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."
 - a. The blood of bulls and goats under the first covenant could not take away sins. Heb. 10:1-4.
 - b. Under the New Covenant the blood of Christ would completely remove sins. Heb. 9:11-14; 8:12.

CONCLUSION:

- 1. Jeremiah asked the question in his day "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?" (Jer. 8:22) Yes, Yes, the answer can be now.
- 2. Jeremiah's cry still rings. "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." (Jer. 8:20) Why not?