

HEAVEN'S HEROES

Heaven has its heroes, but seldom does this world recognize them. More often than not, the people God calls *champs* - the world calls *chumps*. Christian author A.W. Pink observes, "It's a strong proof of human depravity that man's curse and Christ's blessing meet on the same person." Such was the case with Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was a mighty man of God - faithful even in the midst of difficult circumstances - yet he was despised and re-

jected by his contemporaries.

Even in the final throes of the nation's judgment - when it became obvious that what Jeremiah predicted would come true - the princes of Judah still try to shut him up. King Zedekiah throws him in prison where he remains until Jerusalem is destroyed.

Tonight we'll read about Jeremiah's plight and the fall of Jerusalem...

SOME BACKGROUND AND A TIME FRAME

34:1 provides us a setting, and establishes a time frame... "The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army, all the kingdoms of the earth under his dominion, and all the people, fought against Jerusalem and all its cities..." The Babylonians invaded Judah and Jerusalem on three occasions...

First, in 605 BC. King Jehoiakim was replaced by his son, Jeconiah.

Second, in 597 BC, when Jeconiah was taken prisoner to Babylon, and replaced by his uncle, Zedekiah - a pro-Babylonian puppet.

Zedekiah owed his appointment to office to the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar - but his court was pro-Egyptian. Eventually his counselors influenced

Zedekiah to ally himself with Egypt, and revolt against Babylon. It was a major miscalculation with devastating consequences.

The Babylonians didn't think too highly of treason, and in 586 BC their army launched a third and final invasion. The Babylonian troops destroyed the city of Jerusalem, led its inhabitants to Babylon as captive, killed Zedekiah's heirs, then plucked out his eyes so the last sight he saw was the death of his own sons.

For 40 years Jeremiah sounded the alarm. In 34:2-5 he repeats the warning - Jerusalem will be burned, Zedekiah brought before Nebuchadnezzar, no one will escape. Sadly, Jeremiah's warning once again fell on deaf ears.

Devotion Box - Are You Guilty Of A Panic-piety?

The last half of chapter 34 reveals the straw that broke the camel's back. One of Judah's sins were their disregard for Hebrew slaves.

Under the Law of Moses if you couldn't pay your bills you could sell yourself into slavery to work off your debts. But after six years the slave holder had to free the Hebrew slave. Many of the Jews had refused... until the Babylonians came calling.

With judgment knocking on their doorstep they reconsidered. They entered a covenant - *cut a deal* with God. If God saved them from the Babylonians, they would obey Him. In a moment of *panic-piety* they release their fellow Jews. But as soon as the Babylonians disappeared they renewed their cruelty.

Chapter 37 tells us of the brief reprieve that occurred. When the Babylonians heard that Pharaoh Hophra had deployed his troops to the region they

went to engage the Egyptians. But it was a temporary break in the action. After the altercation, Babylon returned to her siege of Jerusalem.

In the meantime, the Jews had violated their covenant with God, and taken back their slaves. They proved to be *seasonal saints* - *when trouble comes they'll serve the Lord*, but when the dark clouds vanish they're right back to their selfish ways. Some call it *jailhouse religion*, *panic-piety*, *escape-hatch commitment*.

God wants a *permanent-piety* - *an all-weather devotion*. Hopefully, the tread of your faith grips the road in the rain, or snow, or heat. A true faith is good under any conditions.

For many of us, it was a crisis that brought us to Jesus, *and that's okay* - but hopefully now we serve the Lord because we've fallen in love with Him.

Bible Scan - Jeremiah 34-52

WAYS TO SHRED THE BIBLE

After hearing just three or four columns of the book Jeremiah had written, King Jehoiakim grabbed the scroll, shredded it with a penknife, tossed it into the fireplace, and sat there defiantly watching the word of God burn to a crisp. How it must've broke the heart of the merciful and gracious God who was extending to Judah, and their king, one final opportunity to repent of their sin!

I'll never forget what happened in high school - while we were playing basketball, someone broke into our locker room to rip us off. But that's not all they did. I had a pocket Bible that they ripped to shreds. I thought, what kind of person would rip up a Bible? In my mind I pictured some kind of frenzied drug addict - with bloodshot eyes, frothing at the mouth, in a crazed, possessed state, shredding the Bible with his bare hands.

But here's what I've learned since. The people most likely to shred a Bible are not the crazed lunatics. In fact, they wear the uniform of education and credibility. Three types of people are most prone to rip apart the Bible: *the liberals, the liars, and the lukewarm.*

The first culprits are the liberal theologians. Rather than use a penknife to cut up Scripture they use a tool called "*higher criticism*". Instead of coming under the authority of the whole Bible they'd rather pick and choose what they want to obey. Thus, they have the audacity to tell you what parts of the Bible they think are inspired and what parts are not.

The most blatant attempt of the liberal's butchering of the Bible occurs every four years when a group called *the Jesus Seminar* meets to refine their conclusions over what portions of the Bible are authentic, and what parts are fabrications. Of course, their so-called scholarship is a farce, and flies in the face of the historical facts. Their conclusions are contrived and their motives sinister.

They remind me of the atheist grandson who challenged the faith of his elderly grandma, "Grams, how did Jonah possibly survive in the belly of a whale?" The old lady replied, "I don't know, when I get to heaven I'll ask him." The grandson shot back, "What if Jonah isn't in heaven?" She answered, "Then you ask him."

Liberals cut up the Scriptures, but so do the *liars*. The cults are also culprits. The penknife is out every week in the Kingdom Halls and Mormon temples.

People deliberately manipulate the Scriptures to make it support their false claims. Errant versions of the Bible have doctored problematic passages, and twisted translations to fit preconceived interpretations. The New World Translation is a bogus Bible. The book of Mormon isn't history - it's fiction and fantasy.

But the most subtle form of Scripture slicing is done by supposed Bible believers who've become selective in their faith - *the lukewarm*. They claim to believe the whole book, but there're passages they won't touch with a 10 foot pole.

Go to some churches and you'll never hear the word "*sin*" or "*repent*". You'll never be challenged with the Lordship of Jesus, and the demands of discipleship. Go to other churches and you'll never hear of the rapture and Jesus' soon return. Some pastors never deal with Acts 2. They preach the *Great Commission* each week, but they're guilty of the *Great Omission*. If we're going to be a bold witness for Jesus we need the supernatural, gift-giving power of the baptism of the Spirit.

Paul told the elders at Ephesus, "I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God." When a pastor picks and chooses what he wants to teach he can be guilty of cutting up the Bible, and never delivering the tougher sections. We need to be careful that we don't gravitate to certain portions of our Bible, and ignore the rest. *Don't let your highlighter become a penknife.*

GOD'S INDESTRUCTIBLE WORD

"Century follows century, there It stands. Empires rise and fall and are forgotten, dynasty succeeds dynasty, kings are crowned and uncrowned, emperors decree its extermination, there It stands.

Despised and torn to pieces, storms of hate swirl about it, atheists rail against it, agnostics smile cynically, profane punsters caricature It, there It stands.

Unbelief abandons It, higher critics deny Its claim to inspiration, thunderbolts of wrath smite It - an anvil that has broken a million hammers, there It stands.

The flames are kindled about It. The arrows of hate are discharged against It. Radicalism rants and raves about It... There It stands.

The tooth of time gnaws but dents It not. Infidels predict Its abandonment. Modernism tries to explain It away. Devotees of folly denounce It. There It stands.

It is God's highway to Paradise. It is the light on the pathway in the darkest night. It leads businessmen to integrity and uprightness. It is the great consoler in bereavement. It awakens people numbed by sin. It answers every question of the soul. It solves every problem of life. It is a fortress often attacked but never failing.

Its wisdom is commanding and it's logic convincing. Salvation is its watchword. Eternal life it's goal.

It punctures all pretense. It is forward-looking, outward-looking, and upward-looking. The Bible outlives, out lifts, outlives, outreaches, outranks, and outruns all other books. Trust it, love it, obey it, and eternal life is yours." - by AZ Conrad

Devotion Box - Are You A Zedekiah?

Zedekiah is an interesting study. He was the consummate politician. Privately, he respected Jeremiah- but publicly kept his distance. He was wise enough to recognize that Jeremiah spoke God's Word, but lacked the backbone to obey.

Zedekiah was like the guy who comes to church. He respects the message, but lacks the strength to obey. He keeps coming back hoping that one day the terms will change.

It's been said, "A politician is an animal who can sit on a fence, yet keep both ears to the ground." This was Zedekiah. He was a wimp. He was a man with big ears, but no backbone. Make sure you don't act like a Zedekiah.

Devotion Box - How to Survive in the Slime

Jeremiah 38:6 tells us, "So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the king's son, which was in the court of the prison, and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire. So Jeremiah sank in the mire." This was probably a cistern once used to store water. Now the bottom was covered with deep, thick, suffocating sludge.

We used to have a fellow in our church who owned a company that cleaned out water towers, and cooling tanks. He described for me what we'd expect Jeremiah to find at the bottom of a cistern. The slime would be puffy - very fine and light - which made it impossible to wipe off. There was no way for Jeremiah to get the mess out of his hair and eyes. It engulfed you, and created a claustrophobia.

The mire also stunk, and gave off toxic gasses that would cause disorientation. My friend told me Jeremiah's ordeal would be like diving into a septic tank.

Also keep in mind they threw him into the mud hole to die. Long before he starved he would've died of hypothermia. The temperature in a subterranean cave is 57 degrees. You die in water 75 degrees. Remember too, Jeremiah was probably in his 60s at the time. *What a way to spend your retirement years.* His wrinkled body would've been shaking and numb buried in the cold slime.

Earlier in his life, Jeremiah would've complained. In chapters 12, 15, and 20 when he was persecuted he grew impatient, indignant - he wanted to quit. But there's no mention here of a sour attitude. Over the years, Jeremiah had learned how to rejoice in the face of adversity. Amazingly, he refused to let the mire "mire" him down.

Guys, God will bring us joy and strength even in the mud holes of life. We need to learn to draw on Him when we *sink* and get *let down*.

AFTER THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

How Nebuchadnezzar heard about Jeremiah we don't know. Perhaps from a Hebrew prince turned Babylonian official, named *Daniel*. However it happened, Nebuchadnezzar offers to bring Jeremiah to Babylon, and set him up for life. He can spend the rest of his years hobnobbing with the Babylon jet-set...

But not Jeremiah! As it was said of Moses in Hebrews 11, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt..." Jeremiah remained bound to the plight of the Jews for the rest of his life.

Most of the Jews were taken to Babylon, but Nebuchadnezzar left behind 3 groups: 1) the very poor; 2) the Jews who had fled to surrounding countries, but returned when the Babylonians left; 3) Jewish freedom fighters who'd come out of hiding after mounting an unsuccessful guerilla war against the Babylonians.

Nebuchadnezzar sets a governor over the Jews left in the land. Gedaliah rules from Mizpah - 8 miles north of Jerusalem.

Devotion Box - Pointers on Prayer

Get Serious

When the Jews who are left in the land come to Jeremiah for guidance they appear serious. They tell the prophet in 42:6, "Whether it is pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God..."

So often we pray hoping the Lord tells us what we know in our hearts we're going to do anyway. We want God to rubber stamp our plans, rather than reveal His will.

We ask the Lord where He wants us to go for this year's vacation hoping he confirms the cruise to Cancun. We don't want to hear about some mission trip to Rosarito.

Be Patient

Notice too in verse 7, "And it happened after ten days that the word

of the LORD came to Jeremiah." Notice, even the godly prophet Jeremiah didn't get an instant answer to his prayer. He had to wait over a week for God to supply the answer.

Perhaps this is why we don't get answers to our prayers. We pray for 10 minutes, and if the answer doesn't arrive we give up. We're way too impatient.

In Matthew 6 Jesus said, "Everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." But in the original language it reads, *"Everyone who keeps on asking... and keeps on seeking... and keeps on knocking."* Don't pray once and quit. Jesus' teachings on prayer emphasize persistence!

JEREMIAH'S MESSAGE TO THE DUKES OF HAZZARD

Even from prison Jeremiah somehow continues to trumpet his message.

In 38:2 he says to the people, "Thus says the LORD: 'He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but he who goes over to the Chaldeans shall live; his life shall be as a prize to him, and he shall live.'" In other words, their only hope was to give in, submit, to the judgment of God.

Think of Jeremiah's message this way... Say you're late for work, and you step on the accelerator. You're bookin' - doing 85 mph around I-285. Suddenly you look in your rearview mirror and see the flashing blue light special. *You have a choice!*

You can drop down in third gear and put the pedal to the medal. You can play Dukes of Hazzard and try to outrun the state patrol - *or* you can submit. If you pull over and accept your punishment you'll pay a fine - but if you bolt and get caught, you'll pay a much steeper price. You'll lose your license. Maybe do some time. Jeremiah is telling the nation Judah *"you've been pulled over."* If you submit to God's judgment and surrender to the Babylonians you'll live to learn your lesson. But if you buck God's discipline and choose to fight, you'll die a horrid death.

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org
For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapel.org/stonemountain/biblescan.htm

Calvary Chapel Announcements - February 4, 2001 - The latest issue of LikeMinds explains our building project and how you can get involved.. Our Dad & Daughter Banquet is scheduled for February 15, at 7 pm- register tonight... The next Pastors' Prayer is February 18 at 5:30 pm.. An Appreciation luncheon for all police officials and firefighters, February 18, at 1 pm... Servants Retreat, March 9-10, at FFA Camp in Covington. For anyone who wants to be more involved in ministry at CC... Check out today's Announcement Sheet for our Calvary Connection Home Fellowships.
Next Bible Scan - February 11 - Lamentations 1-5

"Moab has been at ease from his youth; He has settled on his dregs, and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel..." - Jeremiah 48:11

Bible Scan Memory Verse

Devotion Box - The Aim of Ambition

Chapter 45 is a flashback to the events discussed in Jeremiah 36.

Understand, all heroes have a sidekick. The Lone Ranger had Tonto – Batman had Robin – Yogi had Boo-Boo – Andy had Barney – the Skipper had Gilligan. Likewise, Jeremiah had a sidekick named Baruch.

At times it's hard to be a # 2 guy. A sidekick can get lost in the shadow of the hero. That's why when Jeremiah gave Baruch the scroll and told him to read it in the temple, he got excited. Baruch viewed it as his big break. He would finally get some time in the spotlight.

But in verse 5 Jeremiah asks Baruch to check his motives, "Do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them..." Shakespeare puts into the mouth of one of his characters, "I charge you, fling away ambition – by that sin the angels fell."

Baruch had ambition – which is not all bad. He wanted to be successful. He wanted to *be in the Jews' Who's who*. The question is why? There's nothing wrong with wanting to do a great thing, but what's your motive? The key to Jeremiah's question are the words "for yourself" – "Do you seek great things *for yourself*?" What's the goal - God's glory, or my glory?

The prophet warns Baruch that the hammer is about to fall on Jerusalem. Judgment is right around the corner. So what if he became king. He'd be stripped of his position once the nation had been conquered.

Jeremiah's warning is also applicable to us. The temporal world we live in is on its way out. The values of selfishness, pride, manipulation will be conquered by Jesus. One day soon the Lord will return to establish His kingdom.

Seek great things... but not *for yourself*. Seek to be great in God's kingdom. And Jesus told us how – in Mark 10:43, "whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant." To be great for God is to serve.

THE SADDEST VERSE IN THE BIBLE

Jeremiah 43:7 is one of the saddest verses in the Bible: "So they went to the land of Egypt, for they did not obey the voice of the LORD. And they went as far as Tahpanhes." 860 years earlier God delivered the children of Israel from Egypt, now because of their rebellion they end up right back where they started. In fact *Tahpanhes*, which was the capitol of Egypt at the time, was situated in the northeast corner of the country – in the region of Goshen. The Jews returned to the very place they had occupied when they lived as Egyptian slaves.

BABYLON IS FALLING

The fall of Babylon is a classic tale of antiquity. The Medes and Persians had the city surrounded, but Babylon was prepared for an extended siege. It was an impregnable fortress with its own water supply. A double wall – 311 feet high, 87 feet thick – circled the city - and the Euphrates river flowed under the walls.

But the Persian general, Ugabaru, had an idea. He dispatched some engineers upstream who diverted the water out of its riverbed. Rather than go over the walls the Medo-Persian troops came in under the walls through the dried up riverbed. Babylon was taken by the Medes and Persians without firing a shot.

There is a problem though, when we try to reconcile Jeremiah's prophecy with ancient history. Aspects of the prophecy fail to correspond with historical accounts. 51:58 describes how Babylon's broad walls will be broken, and gates burned. Neither happened in 535 BC. 50:41 says "many kings" will attack her, not just the Medes and Persians. 50:40 describes her judgment like the overthrow of Sodom – the implication being a consumption by fire. 50:39 tells us as a result of God's judgment Babylon will never be inhabited. Not true of ancient Babylon. In fact, after it was conquered by the Medes and Persians, Babylon remained a great city for centuries. 200 years later Alexander the Great made it his capitol.

I believe Jeremiah's prophecy necessitates a future fulfillment. And that's why Saddam Hussein's reconstruction of Babylon has attracted so much interest from Bible students. 62 miles south of Baghdad, Hussein and the Iraqis have spent millions of dollars rebuilding the ancient city. Saddam styles himself as the next Nebuchadnezzar, and Babylon will be his memorial.

Granted, the new Babylon is not much more than a curiosity – but who knows what the future holds. Jeremiah's prophecy is still to be fulfilled.