

A BIBLICAL STUDY ON JEREMIAH

LESSON TWENTY-TWO: JEREMIAH'S SECOND DISCOURSE, PART TWO

by Sandy Harber

"Declare ye in Judah, and publish in Jerusalem; and say, Blow ye the trumpet in the land: cry, gather together, and say, Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the defenced cities. Set up the standard toward Zion: retire, stay not: for I will bring evil from the north, and a great destruction." Jeremiah 4:5-6

Jeremiah opened his second discourse by urging Judah not to follow the example of backsliding Israel, which was eventually destroyed by Assyria (Jer. 3:5-4:4). But treacherous, or unfaithful, Judah refused to confess their sins and turn back to God. Jeremiah continued his discourse by warning them of the consequences of their actions in bringing God's wrath upon the nation (Jer. 4:6-31). God commanded them to "declare ye in Judah, and publish in Jerusalem" the prophecy of their own destruction. Proclaim throughout the land that God's punishment has fallen upon them. "Blow ye the trumpets" to signal the approach of the enemy from the north. Those who dwell in the countryside, outside of the city walls, were urged to gather together, assemble inside the fortified cities. "Set up the standard," display your banner (flag), but retreat into the safety of the walled cities, and stay there. God has dispatched an army from the north and they will bring great destruction to the land.

Jeremiah had not yet named the enemy from the north. But we know that it is Babylon that God will use to punish unrepentant Judah. In this discourse Jeremiah likened the Babylonian army to a fierce lion (Jer. 4:7) and a dry wind (Jer. 4:11) like the sirocco (a hot, dust-laden wind of cyclonic origin). The prophet warned, "the destroyer of the Gentiles" is on his way (Jer. 4:7). King Nabopolassar of Babylon rose to power in 626 B.C., only a year after God called Jeremiah into service. It is around this time that Jeremiah delivered this very discourse. It was a pivotal time in history, when the power of the Assyrian Empire was waning, Babylon was on the rise, and Egypt was waiting for an opportunity to strike. Little Judah was just a pawn in this game of titans.

The foolish people of Judah did not believe Jeremiah's warnings. False prophets had them convinced that God would protect them because they possessed the Temple and the Ark of the Covenant (Jer. 7:4). God, however, declared that they had brought judgment upon themselves by rebelling against Him (Jer. 4:17-18). Jeremiah understood that the sin of his people had brought God's wrath down upon them (Jer. 4:19-31). He was in despair! Jeremiah's anguish over the fate of his people appears again and again in his writings. He earned the label, "the Weeping Prophet" by unashamedly sharing his feelings. "I am pained at my very heart," he said (Jer. 4:19). "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughters of my people!" cried Jeremiah (Jer. 9:1). It must have been so hard for him to know that judgment was coming and the people would not heed his warnings. There was still time to avert disaster by repenting, but the people did not believe they were in danger or that there was anything for them to repent of. They were content in their sins. Jeremiah longed to save his people from their own folly, but they mocked him and were openly hostile to his message. It would be twenty years before the Babylonian army would attack Jerusalem for the first time, and forty years before Jerusalem would finally fall to the enemy. As the time passed and judgment did not fall the people became more and more convinced that "it could not happen here!"

America would do well to stop and consider its relationship to God and His Word. Our founding fathers believed in the values and principles found in the Bible. Our nation was founded on the belief that we are all children of the Creator God and our freedoms come from Him. But we have drifted away from our origins. We have rebelled against the Biblical teaching on marriage, family, sexual purity, the role of human government in punishing evil doers, and the sanctity of life, including life in the womb. For years people have warned that God will judge our nation for the murder of innocents and the flagrant immorality we celebrate with "pride." As time passed, no judgment came. This is where we are. Like Judah, we have time to repent and change our behavior. Judah didn't change. Will America?

" , , , I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war." Jeremiah 4:19b