

Triennial Torah Study – 6th Year 04/04/2015

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Ex 36 Jeremiah 5-6 Prov 8 Acts 6-7:22

The People Bring Too Much (Exodus 36)

Even though many of the Israelites had stiff necks and hard hearts, those whose hearts were willing gave more than enough for the house of God, which was at that time the tabernacle. *The Nelson Study Bible* notes: "The offerings for the tabernacle are perhaps the most impressive offering ever taken from God's people for any endeavor! The key was the stirring of the *heart* and the willingness of the *spirit* of those who gave. *Both men and women* gave. Even in this patriarchal time, women participated actively in God's work. All people came with gifts that were sumptuous, varied, and abundant. At last they had to be told to stop giving (see 36:2-

7)!" Perhaps they were inspired to be extra generous after receiving God's abundant forgiveness for their idolatry in the golden calf incident. This should give us the example we need to follow when God wants something done—we should have this same willingness of heart and generosity of spirit (see Acts 20:35; 2 Corinthians 9:6-7). Like the Israelites, we should be stirred to give generously when we realize the abundance of mercy God has given to us.

Among the gifts the people brought was the wood for the tabernacle. The wood was from the acacia tree (*shittim* tree in the older King James). *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* makes some interesting comments about it. "Ideally suited for cabinet making, the hard orange-brown wood...is still common in the desert regions of the Negeb and Sinai. These acacias produce a very durable wood."

Although the account of the Israelites' generosity is inspiring, it didn't necessarily mean that they would be just as zealous about opportunities that were more spiritual in nature, and it didn't mean that such zeal would necessarily last for long. Indeed, as we will see, the people would sink into rebellion again and again. For this is the nature of human beings unaided by spiritual conversion from God.

"And My People Love to Have It So" (Jeremiah 5)

Jeremiah 5 continues on from chapter 4. See, God says to the prophet, if you can find *anyone* in Jerusalem “who seeks the truth, and I will pardon her” (5:1). Shockingly, the context implies that no one could be found.

Jeremiah considers that many people are poor and uneducated (verse 4), so maybe he will have success if he goes “to the great men and speak to them, for they have known the way of the LORD”—having had access to the Scriptures and history, being literate people (verse 5). “But these have altogether broken the yoke”—they have rejected God’s authority and cast off any restraint (same verse). Therefore the wild animals (the gentiles) will slay them and take over their cities because “their backslidings have increased” (verse 6). “How shall I pardon you for this?,” God asks in verse 7. “Therefore you are inexcusable, O man.... In accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath” (Romans 2:1-6).

The Israelites have a long history of lusting for and engaging in all the pagan philosophies and practices of Satan’s world, when God has not only given them the *best* religion, but the *only true* religion on earth. God pictures them as being led strictly by sensual impulse rather than any intelligence (verses 7-8). “‘Shall I not punish them for these things?’ says the LORD. ‘And shall I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?’” (verse 9). After relating more of their sins, He repeats the question (verse 29)—and again a few chapters later (9:9).

The imagery of God breaking off sinful “branches” of Israel (5:10) is later used by the apostle Paul (see Romans 11). God is especially angry with false ministers who claim to be His spokesmen, and yet mislead the people with lies and false security (Jeremiah 5:12-13).

God proclaims: “I will bring a nation against you from afar.... a nation whose language you do not know.... They are all mighty men [well-armed and brutal]” (verses 15-17). This is dual, relating to Jeremiah’s day and the end time, for verse 18 says, “Nevertheless *in those days* [indicating the *last days*]...I will not make a complete end of you.” God says, “Declare this *in the house of Jacob* and proclaim it in Judah.”

The recalcitrance of the people is largely explained by the fact that they are spiritually blind and deaf (verses 20-21). Yet all creation is a proof of God. And if people don’t understand anything else, they ought at least to realize that they must obey their Maker (verse 24). Again, it is the people’s sins that deprive them of blessings and happiness (verse 25).

“For among My people are found wicked men,” God declares—extremely evil people who will do anything to anybody for personal gain, usually for money (verses 26-29). But the root cause of the evils is false religion. It is a “horrible thing” to God that “prophets prophesy [preach or teach] falsely, and the priests rule by their own power [not by God’s Spirit]; *and My people love to have it so*” (verses 30-31). What a sad indictment! People would rather listen to lies than the truth. We especially see it today in the name of tolerance. Anyone who would label the behavior of others as wrong is looked upon as a bigot and hatemonger. And when criticism is silenced, there is soon no fear of consequences, as in verses 12-13.

The last verse asks the critical question, “But what will you do in the end [that is, when the hammer of judgment falls]?” The apostle Peter later asked a similar question: “Therefore, since all these things [the physical world around us] will be dissolved, *what manner of persons ought you to be* in holy conduct and godliness...?” (2 Peter 3:11). We should all be asking *ourselves* such questions.

“‘Peace, Peace!’ When There Is No Peace” (Jeremiah 6)

The prophecy of the previous chapters continues and concludes in Jeremiah 6.

Jerusalem was situated in the former borderlands between Benjamin and Judah—and the tribe of Benjamin had remained part of the southern kingdom of Judah. So the “children of Benjamin” in verse 1 would represent the inhabitants dwelling on the north side of the city. Tekoa and Beth Hacerem were a few miles *south* of Jerusalem. Thus, the city and its outlying areas are all under immediate threat. Again, as in chapters 1 and 4, the people are warned that “disaster appears out of the north” (6:1, 22)—from ancient and end-time Babylon.

In verse 2, Judah is likened to a vulnerable and helpless woman. She sees her enemies surrounding her, but she is unprepared—for their attack is coming that night (verses 3-5). In verses 6-8, God directs Judah’s enemies to make ready for their attack of Jerusalem. The only hope for Zion’s inhabitants is to “be instructed” by God, but “their ear is uncircumcised [covered]” (verse 10)—they won’t listen. God’s Word is actually offensive to them (verse 10, NIV). “It’s one thing for a modern society to be pluralistic and permit differences in belief and values. It’s another thing for a society to become increasingly hostile to Believer beliefs and biblical values. Where the Word of the Lord offends, judgment will surely fall” (Lawrence Richards, *The Bible Reader’s Companion*, 1991, note on verse 10).

Therefore God warns that He is about to unleash His fury on all the people, “because from the least of them even to the greatest of them, *everyone is given to covetousness*; and from the prophet even to the priest, *everyone deals falsely*” (verses 8-13). “Healing the hurt of My people slightly” (see verse 14) refers to easing any discomfort concerning possible consequences by speaking reassuring words of promised “peace.” This was the mantra even as conditions worsened—just as it often is today. Appeals to conscience did no good because the people “were not at all ashamed” (verse 15)—another example of people “having their own conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:2). The words of this section of Jeremiah, it should be noted, are repeated later in the book (see 8:10-12).

God reminds the people of the “old paths” and “good way”—the laws He revealed long ago that expressed His way of life (6:16). The Jewish Tanakh renders it this way: “Stand by the roads and consider, inquire about ancient paths: Which is the road to happiness? Travel, it, and find tranquillity for yourselves.” But they refuse to walk that way (same verse). God sent watchmen who trumpeted warnings, but they wouldn’t listen (verse 17). So He says, “I will certainly bring calamity” (verse 19).

Offerings and sacrifices without obedience are worthless (verses 18-20). Or, put another way, “Religion without righteousness reeks” (*Bible Reader’s Companion*, note on verse 20). God and His inexorable laws are stumbling blocks to those who want to walk contrary to them (verse 21; compare Isaiah 8:14). Also, just as God has many ways to give success to the righteous, He has many ways to cause failure to those who live in defiance of Him.

God uses Jeremiah as an assayer of metals to analyze the people for purity, but instead of silver (truth and righteousness), he finds only other metals of little value (verses 27-28). “In ancient times lead and silver were put in a crucible together and heated. The lead oxidized and carried off the alloys of baser metals, leaving the silver pure. The image of the refiner’s fire is found several times in the O[ld] T[estament] and suggests a test for moral quality. Here, however, God’s attempt to purify His people is futile. The ore is so impure that no silver can be found, and the whole batch is dumped out” (note on verses 27-30).

Proverbs Chapter 8

Chapter Contents

Messiah, as Wisdom, calls to the sons of men. (1-11)

The nature and riches of Wisdom. (12-21)

Messiah one with the Father, in the creation of the world, and rejoicing in his work for the salvation of man. (22-31)

Exhortations to hear Messiah’s word. (32-36)

The will of God is made known by the works of creation, and by the consciences of men, but more clearly by Moses and the prophets. The chief difficulty is to get men to attend to instruction. Yet attention to the words of Messiah, will guide the most ignorant into saving knowledge of the truth. Where there is an understanding heart, and willingness to receive the truth in love, wisdom is valued above silver and gold.

Wisdom, here is Messiah, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; it is Messiah in the word, and Messiah in the heart; not only Messiah revealed to us, but Messiah revealed in us. All prudence and skill are from the Lord. Through the redemption of Messiah’s precious blood, the riches of his grace abound in all wisdom and prudence. Man found out many inventions for ruin; God found one for our recovery. He hates pride and arrogance, evil ways and froward conversation; these render men unwilling to hear his humbling, awakening,

holy instructions. True religion gives men the best counsel in all difficult cases, and helps to make their way plain. His wisdom makes all truly happy who receive it in the love of Messiah Yeshua. Seek him early, seek him earnestly, seek him before any thing else. Messiah never said, Seek in vain. Those who love Messiah, are such as have seen his loveliness, and have had his love shed abroad in their hearts; therefore they are happy. They shall be happy in this world, or in that which is beyond compare better. Wealth gotten by vanity will soon be diminished, but that which is well got, will wear well; and that which is well spent upon works of piety and charity, will be lasting. If they have not riches and honour in this world, they shall have that which is infinitely better. They shall be happy in the grace of God. Messiah, by his Spirit, guides believers into all truth, and so leads them in the way of righteousness; and they walk after the Spirit. Also, they shall be happy in the glory of God hereafter. In Wisdom's promises, believers have goods laid up, not for days and years, but for eternity; her fruit therefore is better than gold.

The Son of God declares himself to have been engaged in the creation of the world. How able, how fit is the Son of God to be the Saviour of the world, who was the Creator of it! The Son of God was ordained, before the world, to that great work. Does he delight in saving wretched sinners, and shall not we delight in his salvation?

Surely we should hearken to Messiah's voice with the readiness of children. Let us all be wise, and not refuse such mercy. Blessed are those who hear the Saviour's voice, and wait on him with daily reading, meditation, and prayer. The children of the world find time for vain amusements, without neglecting what they deem the one thing needful. Does it not show contempt of Wisdom's instructions, when people professing godliness, seek excuses for neglecting the means of grace? Messiah is Wisdom, and he is Life to all believers; nor can we obtain God's favour, unless we find Messiah, and are found in him. Those who offend Messiah deceive themselves; sin is a wrong to the soul. Sinners die because they will die, which justifies God when he judges.

Acts 6-7:22

Chapter Contents

The appointment of deacons. (1-7) Stephen falsely accused of blasphemy. (8-15)

Hitherto the disciples had been of one accord; this often had been noticed to their honour; but now they were multiplied, they began to murmur. The word of God was enough to take up all the thoughts, cares, and time of the apostles. The persons chosen to serve tables must be duly qualified. They must be filled with gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost, necessary to rightly managing this trust; men of truth, and hating covetousness. All who are employed in the service of the Assembly, ought to be commended to the Divine grace by the prayers of the Assembly. They blessed them in the name of the Lord. The word and grace of God are greatly magnified, when those are wrought upon by it, who were least likely.

When they could not answer Stephen's arguments as a disputant, they prosecuted him as a criminal, and brought false witnesses against him. And it is next to a miracle of providence, that no greater number of religious persons have been murdered in the world, by the way of perjury and pretence of law, when so many thousands hate them, who make no conscience of false oaths. Wisdom and holiness make a man's face to shine, yet will not secure men from being treated badly. What shall we say of man, a rational being, yet attempting to uphold a religious system by false witness and murder! And this has been done in numberless instances. But the blame rests not so much upon the understanding, as upon the heart of a fallen creature, which is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Yet the servant of the Lord, possessing a clear conscience, cheerful hope, and Divine consolations, may smile in the midst of danger and death.

Chapter 7 Contents

Stephen's defence. (1-50)

Stephen was charged as a blasphemer of God, and an apostate from the Assembly; therefore he shows that he is a son of Abraham, and values himself on it. The slow steps by which the promise made to Abraham advanced toward performance, plainly show that it had a spiritual meaning, and that the land intended was the heavenly. God owned Joseph in his troubles, and was with him by the power of his Spirit, both on his own mind by giving him comfort, and on those he was concerned with, by giving him favour in their eyes. Stephen reminds the Jews of their mean beginning as a check to priding themselves in the glories of that nation. Likewise of the wickedness of the patriarchs of their tribes, in envying their brother Joseph; and the same spirit was still working in them toward Messiah and his ministers. The faith of the patriarchs, in desiring to be buried in the land of Canaan, plainly showed they had regard to the heavenly country. It is well to recur to the first rise of usages, or sentiments, which have been perverted. Would we know the nature and effects of justifying faith, we should study the character of the father of the faithful. His calling shows the power and freeness of Divine grace, and the nature of conversion. Here also we see that outward forms and distinctions are as nothing, compared with separation from the world, and devotedness to God.