

Triennial Torah Study – 2nd Year 08/10/2011

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Ex 36	Jer 5-6	Prov 8	Acts 6 – 7:22
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Ex 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.

Much of this treasure that was offered up to Yehovah was left behind at Mount Sinai and is there to this very day. It was buried in the lake area where the water had gathered that came out of the rock that split which Moses had struck.

Jer 5-6

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.

Chapter 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 Christian 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 tranquility 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 Old Testament 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).

Prov 8

Chapter 8 is the second appeal of wisdom in the prologue, following 1:20-33, in the form of a hymn extolling its value and importance. Recall that the adulteress was "loud" and "outside, at times in the open square, lurking in every corner" (7:12) to waylay the simple. Wisdom is also to be found crying out all over town and wherever people might be found. But what she speaks is right (verses 8-9). And what she offers is priceless blessings far greater than any physical possessions or pleasures (verses 10-11, 18-21; compare 3:14-15). She may seem undignified in hawking her wares everywhere, so to speak, but the point is that wisdom is not restricted to the higher echelons of society. She is available for everyone who will love her and seek her. Of course, wisdom is also vital for rulers. It is wisdom, skill in how to live and behave, that enables proper governance (8:15-16). Solomon understood this when He asked God for wisdom to rightly govern the nation of Israel.

We must not only love what God loves but also hate what He hates (verse 13).

God Himself made use of His own wisdom in creation (8:22-31; compare 3:19-20). The personification of wisdom here has led some to believe that the preincarnate Jesus Christ is the One speaking as Wisdom in these verses. However, we must consider that Wisdom here speaks of having been “brought forth” before anything else (verses 24-25) and this is not true of God the Word who always existed. Again, we must understand in this passage a personification of a quality that is not in actuality a person. While there are some parallels here with Jesus Christ, who served as the agent of God in creation and was the embodiment of divine wisdom, we should not make the mistake of equating Him with Woman Wisdom.

Still others see a parallel between the personification of wisdom and the Egyptian concept of Maat, though this is unlikely. The NIV Archaeological Study Bible explains: “In ancient Egypt Maat was the abstract principle of truth, order, justice and harmony; as well as the name of a goddess who personified those virtues. Kings were enjoined to practice Maat in order to ensure a long reign.... Scholars naturally wonder to what degree the Egyptian concept of Maat influenced Israelite thinking on justice and order in society. Specifically, the feminine personification of Wisdom in Proverbs 8 has been suggested to have been derived from the Egyptian goddess Maat.... It is difficult to posit a direct line of influence from Egypt to Israel on the subjects of order, justice or Maat. Both Israel and Egypt understood that justice and harmony are necessary for life to function smoothly. But Wisdom, in Proverbs 8, is a personification not a goddess. She exemplifies the order and justice God has built into creation. Lady Wisdom appears elsewhere in Proverbs; for example in 1:20-33 she calls upon people to heed her teachings and so to find life. The embodiment of wisdom as a lady who invites people to follow her is a distinctively Israelite idea, with no analogy in Egyptian teaching” (“Maat and Lady Wisdom,” sidebar on Proverbs 8, p. 971).

Wisdom’s direct appeal here ends with the assurance of life and blessings to those who find and heed her and death to those who reject her (verses 32-36).

Acts 6 – 7:22

We are now going to read about the murder of Stephen. This is the lead up to that crime. You will notice that the wisdom that Stephen spoke caused the accusers not to be able to resist his words. So these men had to resort to lies and false witnesses.

You all should take note of this. You will be accused of falsely when the persecution begins. Speak the truth and be a good witness. Who know what purpose Yehovah is going to cause through your words and actions.

This event with Stephen leads us to the first encounter with Paul. How will your actions lead? We will never know if you do not do the will of the Father and keep and teach the commandments.