

Revival and Reformation

Day 4. Judah on the Verge of Ruin

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“Among those who had hoped for a permanent spiritual revival as the result of the reformation under Josiah was Jeremiah, called of God to the prophetic office while still a youth, in the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign. A member of the Levitical priesthood, Jeremiah had been trained from childhood for holy service. In those happy years of preparation he little realized that he had been ordained from birth to be “a prophet unto the nations;” and when the divine call came, he was overwhelmed with a sense of his unworthiness. “Ah, Lord God!” he exclaimed, “behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.” Jeremiah 1:5, 6.” Prophets and Kings, 407.

Let Us Meditate Upon Psalm 119:49-56

Zain – Seventh Letter of the Hebrew Alphabet

“Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me. The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law. I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD; and have comforted myself. Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law. Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage. I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy law. This I had, because I kept thy precepts.”

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“In the youthful Jeremiah, God saw one who would be true to his trust and who would stand for the right against great opposition. In childhood he had proved faithful; and now he was to endure hardness, as a good soldier of the cross. “Say not, I am a child,” the Lord bade His chosen messenger; “for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee.”

“Gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For, behold, I have made thee this day a defended city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee.” Jeremiah 1:7, 8, 17-19.”

Prophets and Kings, 407.

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“For forty years Jeremiah was to stand before the nation as a witness for truth and righteousness. In a time of unparalleled apostasy he was to exemplify in life and character the worship of the only true God. During the terrible sieges of Jerusalem he was to be the mouthpiece of Jehovah. He was to predict the downfall of the house of David and the destruction of the beautiful temple built by Solomon. And when imprisoned because of his fearless utterances, he was still to speak plainly against sin in high places. Despised, hated, rejected of men, he was finally to witness the literal fulfillment of his own prophecies of impending doom, and share in the sorrow and woe that should follow the destruction of the fated city.”

Yet amid the general ruin into which the nation was rapidly passing, Jeremiah was often permitted to look beyond the distressing scenes of the present to the glorious prospects of the future, when God’s people should be ransomed from the land of the enemy and planted again in Zion. He foresaw the time when the Lord would renew His covenant relationship with them. “Their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all.” Jeremiah 31:12.” Prophets and Kings, 407, 408. 4

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“Of his call to the prophetic mission, Jeremiah himself wrote: “The Lord put forth His hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.” Jeremiah 1:9, 10.

Thank God for the words, “to build, and to plant.” By these words Jeremiah was assured of the Lord’s purpose to restore and to heal. Stern were the messages to be borne in the years that were to follow. Prophecies of swift-coming judgments were to be fearlessly delivered. From the plains of Shinar “an evil” was to “break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land.” “I will utter My judgments against them,” the Lord declared, “touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken Me.” Jeremiah 1:14, 16. Yet the prophet was to accompany these messages with assurances of forgiveness to all who should turn from their evil-doing.”

Prophets and Kings, 409.

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“As a wise master builder, Jeremiah at the very beginning of his lifework sought to encourage the men of Judah to lay the foundations of their spiritual life broad and deep, by making thorough work of repentance. Long had they been building with material likened by the apostle Paul to wood, hay, and stubble, and by Jeremiah himself to dross. “Refuse silver shall men call them,” he declared of the impenitent nation, “because the Lord hath rejected them.” Jeremiah 6:30, margin.

Now they were urged to begin building wisely and for eternity, casting aside the rubbish of apostasy and unbelief, and using as foundation material the pure gold, the refined silver, the precious stones – faith and obedience and good works – which alone are acceptable in the sight of a holy God.” Prophets and Kings, 409.

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“Through Jeremiah the word of the Lord to His people was: “Return, thou backsliding Israel, ... and I will not cause Mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God... Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you.” “Thou shalt call Me, my Father; and shalt not turn away from Me.” “Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.” Jeremiah 3:12-14, 19, 22.

And in addition to these wonderful pleadings, the Lord gave His erring people the very words with which they might turn to Him. They were to say: “Behold, we come unto Thee; for Thou art the Lord our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped ...from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel... We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God.” Jeremiah 3:22-25.” Prophets and Kings, 409, 410.

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“The reformation under Josiah had cleansed the land of the idolatrous shrines, but the hearts of the multitude had not been transformed. The seeds of truth that had sprung up and given promise of an abundant harvest had been choked by thorns. Another such backsliding would be fatal; and the Lord sought to arouse the nation to a realization of their danger. Only as they should prove loyal to Jehovah could they hope for the divine favor and for prosperity.

Jeremiah called their attention repeatedly to the counsels given in Deuteronomy. More than any other of the prophets, he emphasized the teachings of the Mosaic law and showed how these might bring the highest spiritual blessing to the nation and to every individual heart. “Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein,” he pleaded, “and ye shall find rest for your souls.” Jeremiah 6:16.” Prophets and Kings, 410, 411.

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“On one occasion, by command of the Lord, the prophet [Jeremiah] took his position at one of the principal entrances to the city and there urged the importance of keeping holy the Sabbath day. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were in danger of losing sight of the sanctity of the Sabbath, and they were solemnly warned against following their secular pursuits on that day.”

A blessing was promised on condition of obedience. “If ye diligently hearken unto Me,” the Lord declared, and “hallow the Sabbath day, to do no work therein; then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and this city shall remain forever.” Jeremiah 17:24, 25. This promise of prosperity as the reward of allegiance was accompanied by a prophecy of the terrible judgments that would befall the city should its inhabitants prove disloyal to God and His law. If the admonitions to obey the Lord God of their fathers and to hallow His Sabbath day were not heeded, the city and its palaces would be utterly destroyed by fire.” Prophets and Kings, 411.

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“But by the great mass of the people the call to repentance and reformation was unheeded. Since the death of good King Josiah, those who ruled the nation had been proving untrue to their trust and had been leading many astray. Jehoahaz, deposed by the interference of the king of Egypt, had been followed by Jehoiakim, an older son of Josiah. From the beginning of Jehoiakim’s reign, Jeremiah had little hope of saving his beloved land from destruction and the people from captivity. Yet he was not permitted to remain silent while utter ruin threatened the kingdom. Those who had remained loyal to God must be encouraged to persevere in rightdoing, and sinners must, if possible, be induced to turn from iniquity.

The crisis demanded a public and far-reaching effort. Jeremiah was commanded by the Lord to stand in the court of the temple and speak to all the people of Judah who might pass in and out. From the messages given him he must diminish not a word, that sinners in Zion might have the fullest possible opportunity to hearken and to turn from their evil ways.”

Prophets and Kings, 412.

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“The prophet [Jeremiah] obeyed; he stood in the gate of the Lord’s house and there lifted his voice in warning and entreaty. Under the inspiration of the Almighty he declared:

“Hear the word of the Lord, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these.

For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, forever and ever.” Jeremiah 7:2-7.” Prophets and Kings, 413.

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“The unwillingness of the Lord to chastise is here vividly shown. He stays His judgments that He may plead with the impenitent. He who exercises “loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth” yearns over His erring children; in every way possible He seeks to teach them the way of life everlasting. Jeremiah 9:24. He had brought the Israelites out of bondage that they might serve Him, the only true and living God. Though they had wandered long in idolatry and had slighted His warnings, yet He now declares His willingness to defer chastisement and grant yet another opportunity for repentance.

He makes plain the fact that only by the most thorough heart reformation could the impending doom be averted. In vain would be the trust they might place in the temple and its services. Rites and ceremonies could not atone for sin. Notwithstanding their claim to be the chosen people of God, reformation of heart and of the life practice alone could save them from the inevitable result of continued transgression.” Prophets and Kings, 413.

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“Thus it was that “in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem” the message of Jeremiah to Judah was, “Hear ye the words of this covenant,” – the plain precepts of Jehovah as recorded in the Sacred Scriptures, – “and do them.” Jeremiah 11:6. And this is the message he [Jeremiah] proclaimed as he stood in the temple courts in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim.

Israel’s experience from the days of the Exodus was briefly reviewed. God’s covenant with them had been, “Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be My people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.” Shamelessly and repeatedly had this covenant been broken. The chosen nation had “walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward.” Jeremiah 7:23, 24.”

“Why,” the Lord inquired, “is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding?” Jeremiah 8:5. In the language of the prophet it was because they had obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God and had refused to be corrected. See Jeremiah 5:3. “Truth is perished,” he mourned, “and is cut off from their mouth.” Jeremiah 7:28.” Prophets and Kings, 414.

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“The time had come for deep heart searching. While Josiah had been their ruler, the people had had some ground for hope. But no longer could he intercede in their behalf, for he had fallen in battle. The sins of the nation were such that the time for intercession had all but passed by. “Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me,” the Lord declared, “yet My mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth. And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them. Thus saith the Lord; Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity.” Jeremiah 15:1, 2.

A refusal to heed the invitation of mercy that God was now offering would bring upon the impenitent nation the judgments that had befallen the northern kingdom of Israel over a century before.” Prophets and Kings, 415.

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“Cruel were the mockings he [Jeremiah] was called upon to endure. His sensitive soul was pierced through and through by the arrows of derision hurled at him by those who despised his messages and made light of his burden for their conversion. “I was a derision to all my people,” he declared, “and their song all the day.” “I am in derision daily, everyone mocketh me.” “All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him.” Lamentations 3:14; Jeremiah 20:7, 10.

But the faithful prophet was daily strengthened to endure. “The Lord is with me as a mighty terrible One,” he declared in faith; “therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be really ashamed; for they shall not prosper: their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten.” “Sing unto the Lord, praise ye the Lord: for He hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evildoers.” Jeremiah 20:11, 13.” Prophets and Kings, 420.

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“The experiences through which Jeremiah passed in the days of his youth and also in the later years of his ministry, taught him the lesson that “the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” He learned to pray, “O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in Thine anger, lest Thou bring me to nothing.” Jeremiah 10:23, 24.

When called to drink of the cup of tribulation and sorrow, and when tempted in his misery to say, “My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord,” he recalled the providences of God in his behalf and triumphantly exclaimed, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.” Lamentations 3:18, 22-26.”

Prophets and Kings, 420, 421.

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Let Us Meditate Upon Psalm 119:57-64

Cheth – Eight Letter of the Hebrew Alphabet

“Thou art my portion, O LORD: I have said that I would keep thy words. I intreated thy favour with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to thy word. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments. The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law. At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments. I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts. The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes.”

Let Us Pray

“Jeremiah called their attention repeatedly to the counsels given in Deuteronomy. More than any other of the prophets, he emphasized the teachings of the Mosaic law and showed how these might bring the highest spiritual blessing to the nation and to every individual heart. “Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein,” he pleaded, “and ye shall find rest for your souls.” Jeremiah 6:16.”
Prophets and Kings, 411.