

Lesson for February 22, 2009

Old Testament Survey

The Prophetical Books

Jeremiah and Lamentations

Jeremiah's ministry was for the most part prior to the captivity and was directed toward Judah. His ministry began about 60 years after Isaiah's death. Jeremiah's prophesies included the Babylonian captivity, the return to their land after 70 years of captivity, the dispersion of Judah into other lands, the day of judgment on the Gentile powers and the remnant of grace.

For the first part of Jeremiah's ministry, Judah enjoyed a relative peaceful time under the rulership of Josiah. Josiah was only eight when he became king and as he grew older he acknowledged the true God. The result was that he had all idols and objects of pagan idol worship removed from the Temple. Unfortunately Josiah died at a young age and the new ruler returned to pagan worship.

Jeremiah continued his warnings to the nation of coming judgment and captivity. However, Judah did not heed his warnings regardless of who was king at the time. Crisis after crisis brought Judah to the edge of destruction as a nation as Jeremiah's warnings were ignored. Finally in about 605 B.C. the Babylonian captivity began for Judah. Jeremiah more than any other prophet encountered opposition to his message and suffered greatly at the hands of the religious establishment. He was ordered beaten by the priests of the Temple for proclaiming the destruction of the sanctuary. Many false prophets existed at the time Jeremiah lived and constantly attempted to stir up the exiles against him.

Jeremiah was known as the "weeping prophet" because of his grief over the callous response to the warnings of the coming judgments from God. Though at times Jeremiah became despondent, he remained faithful to his calling as God's prophet to Judah. Jeremiah's ministry to Judah lasted for forty-one years.

Jeremiah responded to God's call to be His messenger to Judah and God equipped him to fulfill that call. Jeremiah was fully aware that he would face opposition from kings, princes, priests and others, but he also knew God would enable him to endure the suffering.

Like Jeremiah, the believer in the Church Age has been called to represent Jesus Christ to their individual generation. God has designed a plan for each believer in eternity-past and fully expects the believer to fulfill that plan. Only by faithful intake of Bible doctrine and consistent application of that doctrine can the Church Age believer expect to discover and execute God's unique plan.

God's Plan for the Believer in the Church Age

Over the years we have studied many of the doctrines related to all the wonderful assets that we have as believers in Jesus Christ. We have looked at what God predestined for us in eternity past. We have seen that He predesigned a plan for each of us and that we were on His mind when He was doing this. Along the way we have studied the Christian way of life and discovered that it is a life of thinking.

We know from our previous studies that our position in Christ is secure and permanent. It can't be changed by anything that we do or fail to do. This position is secured by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, apart from any human works of any kind. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is what places us in union with Christ and is neither seen nor felt.

I have quoted Matthew 11:28-30 on many occasions where Jesus said, "...my yoke is easy and my burden is light." But let's examine this passage a little closer today. Jesus said, "Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and you will find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." The yoke in the Greek is something that couples two things together. We are coupled together with Jesus Christ and we are commanded to learn about Him. We are told that He is meek and lowly of heart. Sounds like "Milton Milktoast" and I think this is the image that most people, including Christians, have of Jesus Christ. Let me assure you that Jesus Christ was not a "milktoast," when He was on earth nor is He now. Meekness in the Greek means grace in the soul, not arrogant but full of the resources of God. It in no way signifies weakness. Jesus Christ in His humanity was the most well-balanced man in history. Lowly of heart in the Greek means humility of soul, knowing exactly who you are in Christ and fulfilling God's plan. This is what Jesus Christ did - as a young man under the filling of the Holy Spirit, He learned and applied Bible doctrine and went to the Cross in a state of perfection. A better translation of Matthew 11:28-30 would be, "...take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am full of the resources of God, having a maximum amount of grace in my soul. I exhibit the maximum amount of humility and teachability. Learn this and you find rest for your souls."

Most of us have, or have had, a preconceived idea about the Christian life. Perhaps we think that it is a system of good works or a life of morality (i.e. keeping the Ten Commandments, etc.). Perhaps we think that it is being an activist for a so-called Christian cause or even a political one. Perhaps we think it is being a sweet, gentle, humble person.

The world in its blindness, guided by those religious leaders who are themselves blind, see the Christian life as a list of rules or regulations not to be violated. There are many varied opinions about the Christian life. What I would like for us to do is set aside any preconceived ideas that we might have, and look at what God's Word tells us is the Christian life. If the Christian life is indeed a life of thinking, and I believe we have already documented this from the Word of God, then the question arises, "What should I be thinking?" I believe the Word of God once again has the answer. "Let this mind be in you, that was also in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:5) Since the Word of God is the thinking of Christ, it stands to reason that we should be thinking Bible doctrine. (Romans 12:1-2)

Remember, our goal as believers in Jesus Christ is to reach spiritual maturity. A mature believer is one who has a maximum amount of doctrine in his soul and has learned to apply this doctrine to his daily life. Application of Bible doctrine changes our thinking in a drastic, but wonderful way. Our norms and standards begin to change and we begin to think divine viewpoint instead of human viewpoint. In other words, the character of our Savior, Jesus Christ is being formed in us and the fruit of the Holy Spirit is being produced through us. We begin to view the world in a different way; we exhibit impersonal love for all mankind, wanting just as God does, for all men to come to know the truth. So we begin to share our faith with friends and family.

The book of Lamentations (sorrows) was also written by Jeremiah and is a personal testimony of the grief that Jeremiah felt over the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Judah. In five chapters Jeremiah described the wrath of God as it was poured out upon the nation of Judah because of their rebellion. Jeremiah did not "sugar-coat" the message as he described God's anger toward Judah for rejecting Him. Yet amid the anger the loving kindness of God is seen in not utterly destroying them.

Jeremiah described what he saw as the city of Jerusalem was overrun by Judah's enemies. Not only was the city destroyed, the Temple was violated as the enemy entered the Holy Place to plunder its contents. Children were displaced and families torn apart as the enemy led them into captivity. Jeremiah had warned them of the coming destruction, but they refused to believe him and instead persecuted him. In the end, the prophesy of God's prophet came true as it always does.

A valuable lesson can be learned from this story for any nation, but especially a client nation to God. God is patient and kind, but He is also a jealous God. If you have been blessed by God as a client nation, (like the United States), God expects to be honored by her citizens. The only thing that will delay discipline from God when a nation fails to honor Him is a strong faithful remnant of believers. As the remnant shrinks, the possibility of severe discipline increases.

Nationalism

One of the four divine institutions is nationalism. Nationalism is a system established by God in order to preserve the freedom of a nation. The United States is one of the most blessed nations in history and has operated as “a client nation to God” from the day it was founded. A client nation is one in which freedom exists for all people. This freedom includes freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of thought, etc. One of the keys to the success of “client nation U.S.A.” is a strong military organization, which is a very Biblical concept. Throughout history, the nations that did not develop a strong military were overtaken and enslaved by stronger nations.

The protection of our citizens from all enemies (within the nation and outside the nation) is a principle of nationalism. This does not mean that we are isolationists. On the other hand, God does not want us allying ourselves with evil, corrupt, tyrannical nations. The client nation to God is responsible for the protection and perpetuation of freedom. If there is an enemy that threatens that freedom, the client nation must be prepared militarily to deal with it (this includes believers). Christians within the client nation are also responsible for the preservation of God’s Word and the dissemination of the Gospel of Christ throughout the world.

When a nation fails to acknowledge or forgets to acknowledge the divine establishment principles from God, it will ultimately fail. A nation that acknowledges these principles will survive and freedom will be perpetuated. Such was the nation of Israel until they turned their backs on God and His principles of freedom.

