

Come to Understanding

They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding,
and they that murmured shall learn doctrine. — Isaiah 29:24

March 14, 2013

Volume 12 Number 6

Let No Man Know of These Words

By the time Zedekiah became king, Judah was well on its way to destruction. They had rejected Yahweh and ignored His word. Consequently, Yahweh was sending His wrath upon them by the hand of Nebuchadrezzar, the king of Babylon, whom He called His “servant.”

8 Therefore thus says Yahweh of hosts; Because you have not heard my words,

9 Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, says Yahweh, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and a hissing, and perpetual desolations. -Jeremiah 25

After the king of Babylon had looted much of Jerusalem of its riches and carried away the most gifted and talented of the people, including the previous king and his family (see 2 Kings 24:13-16), he chose a new king for Judah. He selected the previous king’s uncle, Mattaniah, whose name he changed to Zedekiah!

17 And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his father’s brother king in his stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah. -2 Kings 24

Even though his new name declares the righteousness of Yahweh, Zedekiah continued to lead Judah down the prideful path of evil that it was already on. He even refused to humble himself enough to hear the warnings that Yahweh spoke to him through the prophet Jeremiah:

12 And he did *that which* was evil in the sight of Yahweh his God, *and* humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet *speaking* from the mouth of Yahweh. -2 Chronicles 36

Zedekiah also broke the solemn oath of allegiance that he had made with the king of Babylon and rebelled against him, just as he had rebelled against Yahweh:

13 And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto Yahweh God of Israel. -2 Chronicles 36

Without a God-fearing king, those that should have trusted in the word of Yahweh, “all the chief of the priests,” led the people down a confused path that would ultimately lead to their destruction. The unrepentant nation was on

a downward spiral, adopting as normal, or even righteous, the abominable practices of the heathen as they polluted the house of Yahweh under the pretense of worship:

14 Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of Yahweh which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. -2 Chronicles 36

Nevertheless, even in the face of their defiance against Him and His word, Yahweh demonstrated His love for Judah by sending them faithful messengers to plead with them to repent and return back to Him:

15 And Yahweh God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up early, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: -2 Chronicles 36

However, instead of repenting for their sins, they mocked and misused the messengers and prophets that Yahweh had sent to them. The people of Judah despised the words of Yahweh that were calling upon them to repent:

16 But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of Yahweh arose against his people, till *there was* no remedy. -2 Chronicles 36

In their rebellion against Yahweh, they sought other sources of counsel, whether religious or legal, to justify their desire, not only to continue in their sins, but to increase them!

1 Woe to the rebellious children, says Yahweh, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin: -Isaiah 30

They also sought protection, but not from Yahweh. After they had rebelled against the king of Babylon, they had hoped that the Egyptians would save them:

2 That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt! -Isaiah 30

The Egyptians did help them, causing the Babylonians to flee from Jerusalem (see Jeremiah 37:5). That help, however, was short-lived (see 2 Kings 24:7). It was Jeremiah that gave Zedekiah the bad news that he could not count on the Egyptians to protect them from the Babylonians:

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense,
and caused them to understand the reading. — Nehemiah 8:8

Come to Understanding

7 Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel; Thus shall you say to the king of Judah, that sent you to me to inquire of me; Behold, Pharaoh's army, which has come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land. -Jeremiah 37

The people of the unrepentant kingdom of Judah hated the kind of distressing prophecies that Jeremiah was bringing. Instead, they wanted to hear pleasant-sounding words of encouragement, even if they were lies. They wanted prophets that would tell them that their sins were not sins and, therefore, there was no need to repent of them:

9 That this *is* a rebellious people, lying children, children *that* will not hear the law of Yahweh:

10 Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits:

11 Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. -Isaiah 30

Nevertheless, with the threat of destruction looming over Judah and becoming more certain each day, King Zedekiah hoped to finally hear some "smooth things" from Yahweh. He sought out Jeremiah, sending one of the priests to him in hopes that Yahweh in His mercy would spare Judah from destruction without requiring humble repentance.

2 Inquire, I pray you, of Yahweh for us; for Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon makes war against us; if so be that Yahweh will deal with us according to all his wondrous works, that he may go up from us. -Jeremiah 21

The answer, however, was not what Zedekiah wanted to hear. Even though the king of Babylon was physically fighting against Judah, he was merely a weapon that Yahweh Himself was using against the rebellious kingdom:

5 And I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath. -Jeremiah 21

The more Jeremiah spoke the truth of Yahweh's word, the more the people of Judah hated him:

8 Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that Yahweh had commanded *him* to speak to all the people, that the priests and

the prophets and all the people took him, saying, You shall surely die. -Jeremiah 26

Even though Jeremiah was spared from death at the hands of the priests, the prophets, and all the rest of the people, his offensive prophecies severely diminished his popularity in Judah. Consequently, he was imprisoned (see Jeremiah 32:2-3; 37:15-16).

However, the reality of Jeremiah's extreme unpopularity in Judah created a problem for Zedekiah. Knowing that Jeremiah was a true prophet of Yahweh, Zedekiah wanted to learn what Yahweh was saying, even though he did not want to obey it. Afraid that openly consulting with Jeremiah would likely result in ridicule and scorn by the people of Judah, the king went to him secretly!

17 Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took him out: and the king asked him secretly in his house, and said, Is there *any* word from Yahweh? And Jeremiah said, There is: for, said he, you shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon. -Jeremiah 37

That still was not what Zedekiah wanted to hear. So Jeremiah found himself back in the court of the prison, as well as in a dungeon, from which he was rescued and put back into the court of the prison (see Jeremiah 37:21; 38:6-13).

Nevertheless, Zedekiah continued to secretly consult with the prophet. Jeremiah advised him to humble himself, obey Yahweh, and surrender to the Babylonians:

17 Then said Jeremiah to Zedekiah, Thus says Yahweh, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; If you will assuredly go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then your soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and you shall live, and your house: -Jeremiah 38

However, Zedekiah said that he was afraid to go to Babylon. His fear was not of the Babylonians, but that the Jews that were already there would mock him!

19 And Zedekiah the king said to Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews that have fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me. -Jeremiah 38

Jeremiah told him that there was no need to worry about those people. Obey Yahweh, he said, and live!

20 But Jeremiah said, They shall not deliver *you*. Obey, I beseech you, the voice of Yahweh, which I speak to you: so it shall be well unto you, and your soul shall live. -Jeremiah 38

Accepting Yahweh's offer to save both himself and Judah would require that Zedekiah humble himself and risk being mocked. Instead, he kept up his prideful front as the king of a kingdom that he knew was on its way to destruction, warning Jeremiah not to tell anyone else what he knew:

24 Then said Zedekiah to Jeremiah, Let no man know of these words, and you shall not die. -Jeremiah 38

We, like both Jeremiah and Zedekiah, are likely to be placed in circumstances where we must choose whether to keep Yahweh's word and be mocked or to reject His word in our efforts to please others. When we are, will we respond as Jeremiah did, or will we be like Zedekiah?

Come to Understanding is sent out twice per month free of charge. To add someone to our list of readers, please contact us at:

Institute for Biblical and Historical Studies
P.O. Box 12, 114 East Main Street
Addison, Michigan 49220 U.S.A.
biblical@ibiblical.org

You may view this and past editions online at: www.ibiblical.org
Scriptures are from the:
Proper Name Version of the King James Bible.



©2013 Institute for Biblical and Historical Studies. All rights reserved.
You may freely copy this publication, provided you acknowledge its source and inform us of your use.