Death to the Nation and Life to the Remnant (Jer. 34-35)

Introduction to the Two Panels Jer 26-35 and 36-45

We have been looking at Jeremiah 26 to 45, the second section of the book of Jeremiah, and how it’s a story of the ways and the different responses that people had to the ministry and the preaching of Jeremiah. The theological message that emerges out of this is that God brought judgment on the people of Judah, brought the judgment of exile upon Jerusalem, because of the fact that the people did not listen, they did not obey the word of the Lord that was spoken to them through Jeremiah. Throughout the book, we’re going to see statements like the Lord has repeatedly and reoccurringly sent his prophets, but the people have not listened and obeyed. We get documented evidence of that in the story of Jeremiah’s ministry in chapters 26 to 45.

Along with that, the story of the actual fall of Jerusalem that validates Jeremiah’s ministry, that proves that his warnings of judgment were something that the people should have taken seriously, and that confirms that he is a true prophet of God. We’ve looked at the structure of this section as well and seen a framework around this section through the Jehoiakim passages, chapters 26 to 35. A Jehoiakim story and an episode in 26 through 35 mark off that first panel. There is a second panel, 36 and 45, where again we have Jehoiakim narratives or episodes. Both sections are going to document that Judah did not obey and did not listen to the word of God. They missed an opportunity to be spared from judgment.

In our last section, we looked at the stories at the beginning of the framework in both sections: the disobedience of Jehoiakim after the Temple Sermon is preached and Jehoiakim’s rejection of the word of the Lord. Chapter 36 is Jehoiakim’s destruction of the scroll of Jeremiah’s prophecies. So at the beginning of each one of these panels, there is the possibility that maybe the people will respond and that they will turn from their evil and God will no longer send the calamity that he’s threatened to bring against them. Both
of those raise that possibility, 26:3 and 36:3, we have the word *ulai* perhaps, and the Lord expressing his willingness to relent if they will repent.

What both of these sections are going to show, 26 through 35 and 36 to 45, is the closing down of those opportunities to be spared from judgment. The time of Jehoiachin’s reign in Judah is the watershed moment. There’s still the opportunity to be spared from this judgment. God has given the people recurring opportunities, but there’s one last chance. Then, when Jehoiakim and the people reject word of the Lord, and that continues until the fall of Jerusalem, that judgment that is possible at the beginning of Jeremiah’s ministry that the prophet is warning about becomes irrevocable as we move closer to time of the fall of Jerusalem.

What we have at the end of both panels is a statement of judgment on the nation at large because of the fact that they did not accept the word of the Lord. The possibility of life and death is offered at the beginning of each panel, and the result, the final response is they’re going to reject the word and it brings death. We see that in Jeremiah chapter 35; the judgment that God is going to bring against the people that are remaining in the land that are still in Judah in the final days of Jerusalem and the final days of Judah as a nation. We also see that, there is a judgment that takes in the people as a whole in Jeremiah 44. The judgment there is on the Jewish refuges that are in Egypt. They reject the word of the Lord as well. So at the beginning, maybe they will respond, maybe they will repent; at the end of each panel, now that’s not going to happen.

Listening to word of God is a matter of life and death. Moses had told the people in his day, choose for yourself either life or death. Life will come from following God’s word; death and cursing will come from those who chose to disobey his commands, and we see that working itself out in the life, ministry and preaching of Jeremiah.

Panels Close with a Remnant (Rechabites and Refugees)

But what we also have in the concluding chapters that close each of these panels, in chapter 44 or in the first section in chapters 34 and 35, and then in the second section in chapters 44 and 45 is that there are limited examples of either individuals or groups that responded positively to the word of God. They are going to be spared from the
judgment. They are going to experience the gift and the reward of life because they listened to God. So in a whole, this is a really frustrating thing to look at Jeremiah’s ministry. There’s the possibility that if the people relent, they will be spared. The nation as a whole rejects that opportunity, but there is a remnant who will respond and they are going to experience the blessings that come from obeying God.

So what we have at the end of each of these panels is there is a contrast between the death of the nation and the salvation of key individuals who respond in a positive way to God or to his word. In the first panel, the positive response and the promise of life and deliverance is going to be given to a group of people called the Rechabites. That may be a group of people or name that you are completely unfamiliar with. They are a very obscure group, but they are promised life in contrast to the judgment that is going to fall on the nation as a whole.

In the second panel, we have the judgment of the refugees in Egypt. They’re going to continue in their idolatrous ways. God is not going to spare them, but we also have the salvation of an individual, a member of the faithful group. And his name is Baruch, Jeremiah’s scribe. So the tragedy in all of this is that there is the possibility that the nation as a whole can experience life and blessing. The reality is that only a tiny minority of people are actually going to respond in a positive way, and they alone will be the ones that experience the blessing of salvation.

Throughout Israel’s history, we have to varying degrees, the people at large seem to be disobedient to God. They’re stiff necked. They’re rebellious. They’re hard hearted. But no matter how badly things turn in the history of Israel and Judah, there is always a faithful remnant. In the Northern Kingdom, during the days of Ahab’s apostasy, when his wife Jezabel led the people astray into Babel worship, there are still faithful prophets in Israel, and there are still faithful servants of God. Ahab even has one of his officials, Obadiah, who is a faithful, loyal, devoted follower of the Lord. And in the last days of Judah, the nation as a whole has drifted away from God.

In Jeremiah chapter 5, the Lord imagines someone going through the city of Jerusalem and trying to find one righteous person. They can’t even find a single righteous
person. Judah and Jerusalem has become even more wicked then Sodom and Gomorrah. But even in this time of national apostasy, where God has reached a point that he says, ‘I’m going to bring judgment,’ there are still some faithful individuals. Now the group that is promised salvation and deliverance in the first panel, or in chapter 35, at the conclusion of this is this group called the Rechabites.

Rechabites (Jer 35)

Let me read the opening verses of Jeremiah 35, and we will talk about the Rechabites and who they are and why they’re in this story and why they’re significant. Chapter 35 verse 1 says this: “The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the days of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah.” So we’re back in the time of Jehoiakim; this is the conclusion to the frame in the first section. “Go to the house of the Rechabites and speak with them and bring to the house of the Lord, into one of the chambers; then offer them wine to drink. So I took Jaazaniah, the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah and his brothers and all his sons and the whole house of the Rechabites.” And I may have slaughtered some of those names there. “I brought them into the house of the Lord and to the chamber of sons of Hanan, the son of Igdaliah, the man of God, which was near the chamber of the officials, above the chamber of Maaseiah, the son of Shallum” some of these other leaders in the sanctuary. And it says in verse 5, “Then I set before the Rechabites, pitchers full of wine, and cups, and I said to them, ‘Drink wine.’” But they answered, ‘We will drink no wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, “You shall not drink wine, neither you nor your sons forever. You shall not build a house; you shall not sow seed; you shall not plant nor have a vineyard; but you shall live in tents all of your days, that you may live many days in the land when you sojourned.” We have obeyed the voice of Jonadab, the son of Rechab, our father in all that he commanded us, to drink no wine, all of our days, ourselves, our wives, our sons, our daughters, and not to build houses to dwell in. We have no vineyard or field or seed but we have lived in tents and have obeyed and done all that Jonadab our father commanded us. But when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against the land, we said, “Come and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans and the
army of the Syrians. So we are living in Jerusalem.”

So what in the world is going on here, or the larger question here that you may be asking, so what? The Rechabites were a nomadic clan that lived in Judah and they were faithful to one of the vows that their forefather, Jonadab, had taken back during the days of Jehu 200 years ago. Their forefather, Jonadab, came along during the time when Israel in the Northern Kingdom had been unfaithful to the Lord. They had been worshipping Baal that Ahab and Jezebel had promoted. Then King Jehu came along in order to purge Israel of this apostasy.

Jonadab, who was the ancestor of the Rechabites was a friend and supporter of Jehu’s reforms and as Jonadab saw the corruption and how in many ways Canaanite influence had drawn the people of Israel away from the Lord, he took a vow that he hoped in some way, would preserve his family and keep them faithful to the Lord. His vow involved three specific things. They would not plant crops, they would not live in houses, instead they would live in tents, and they would not drink wine. The purpose of all of this was in some way to keep his family isolated from the corruption of Israelite society and from the Canaanite influence that had come about as a result of Ahab and Jezebel promoting the worship of Baal. All of this happens during the time of Jehu’s reforms. You can read about this in 2 Kings chapter 10 verses 15-17. This ancestor of the Rechabites is mentioned in that specific passage.

Now was there anything ungodly about living in houses, planting crops, and drinking wine? Actually, they were things God had promised to Israel as blessings for living in the promised land. Deuteronomy chapter 6 verses 10 and 11, “I’m going to give you houses that you didn’t build, I’m going to give you vineyards that you didn’t plant, and I’m going to bless you with the abundance of all the crops that are going to be in the land.” So in a sense Jonadab was taking a vow that really deprived his family of specific covenantal promises that God had given to the people of Israel as a whole but again this was a voluntary vow to God that I think in some sense, again, was an attempt to keep his family loyal to the Lord.

Now some people have suggested that the Rechabites by the time that we get to
Jeremiah’s day, 200 years later, that this may simply be one family or it may actually be a guild of people that have bonded together. They may be metal workers, the word “Rechabites,” is similar to the word for “chariot.” Some people have suggested that they were builders of chariots. So maybe it’s a guild but in some way, because of this vow, they have kept themselves separate from society. Now again there is nothing commanded by God that specially says you’re not supposed to do these three things. In fact, this was a blessing God had given and they had voluntarily denied themselves these things and they had become an isolated, identifiable group as a result of this.

Rechabites and Nazirite Parallel

Looking at an ancient parallel, we may compare them to the Nazirites. Remember a Nazirite vow? Numbers chapter 6 verses 2-4 involved three things: When the person took the vow they did not cut their hair, they did not drink anything alcoholic or in fact eat any sort of grape product, and they did not come in contact with a dead body. Now, being a Nazirite normally, except in extreme examples like Samson, that was simply something that you did for a short period of time to express your devotion to God. Maybe it was taken to pray to God over something that was urgent. But the Rechabites had also taken a voluntary vow, and it was something that had not just been Jonadab, but they and actually continued this for 200 years. So here’s this family, here’s this clan, or maybe a group or a guild that has bonded together. Looking at a contemporary example, we may compare them to the Amish in America. They are like the Israelite Amish; they are an identifiable group that in some sense has separated themselves from society by these 3 specific things.

But it tells us that as they’re living in Jerusalem in the last days, because the pressure from the Babylonian army has forced them to come into the city walls. Jeremiah brings them to the temple and he not only brings them into the temple, he puts jars and flasks of wine in front of them, he tells them to drink. Maybe we could portray this and imagine this as another one of Jeremiah’s sign acts, but it seems kind of ironic here. This family has been faithful to their vow for 200 years and Jeremiah is telling them to break it in the temple!
So in chapters 26 and 36, Jeremiah has preached some important messages to the people of God at the temple and the people didn’t listen. So now Jeremiah brings the Rechabites to the temple, tells them to drink wine, revoke your family custom that has been going on for 200 years, one may wonder what’s Jeremiah doing here?

Amos chapter 2, verse 12 says that one of the sins of the Israelites is that they made the Nazirites drink wine. They encouraged these people who were expressing their devotion to God to do something that broke their vow. In a sense it looks like Jeremiah’s doing the same! Drink wine. But the amazing thing that happens, as Jeremiah tells the Rechabites to do this, they refuse to do what the prophet has told them! Now this sounds a lot like the people of Judah. The king of Judah and the people of Judah have refused to listen to the word of the Lord at the temple, but the irony is God blesses the Rechabites because they don’t do what the prophet tells them.

Rechabite Object Lesson

Now the point of this is that there is a very powerful object lesson in all of this. Jeremiah and the Lord want the people to understand something. If the Rechabites have been this loyal and faithful to a family tradition that was not directly commanded by God, then why have the people of Judah not listened to the words of the Lord that were commanded to them by God himself? The Rechabites have been faithful to human tradition, and in a sense that’s commendable. I believe that it’s played a real role in helping them in some way be faithful to God. It’s commendable, but it’s the instruction of their father, it’s the tradition of a man. What Judah has not listened to is the word of the Lord. So even though these people actually disobeyed the prophet and don’t do what the prophet tells them. The Lord ends up blessing them and rewarding them for their faithfulness to their father’s traditions.

So here’s the message that emerges out of the story of the Rechabites, here’s what the prophet, here’s what the Lord, wants to say to the people: the Lord instructs Jeremiah to go to the people of Judah and says this, verse 14, “The command that Jonadab the son of Rechab gave to his sons, to drink no wine, has been kept, and they drink none to this day, for they have obeyed. [They have listened; shama’], to their fathers command.” The
irony is, the people of Israel have not listened to the Lord, they have listened to their father’s command, “I have spoken to you persistently, but you have not listened to me. I have sent to you all of my servants the prophets, sending them persistently, saying, “Turn now every one of you from his evil way, and amend your deeds, and do not go after other gods to serve them, and then you shall dwell in the land that I gave you to your fathers.’ But you did not incline your ear to listen to me.” Remember the Rechabites have been faithful to their father’s vow for two hundred years but the Lord has been dealing with Israel and Judah for hundreds of years, and they have persistently disobeyed God. They have persistently not listened to the prophets. Therefore, “Behold, I am ringing upon Judah and all of the inhabitants of Jerusalem all of the disaster that I have pronounced against them.” So there is the context here. The people have not listened to God, and as a result of that there is going to be a national judgment that is going to fall upon all of the people that are still remaining in the land. The Lord is going to bring these various waves of exiles, and God is going to judge the nation. Why? Because they did not listen to God. But the Lord is going to bless the Rechabites because they did listen to their father.

Jer 26-35 Panel Development

So as we look at the panel of Jeremiah 26-35 there is the possibility at the beginning in chapter 26, of all of the nation being spared from judgment. However, at the end of the panel at chapter 35, “You have no listened, you have not obeyed, you have responded to Jeremiah in exactly the same way you responded to the other prophets. Therefore I am bringing disaster on these people.” Listen to the promise that is given to the Rechabites: “But to the house of the Rechabites Jeremiah said, ‘Thus said the Lord of hosts because you have obeyed the command of Jonadab your father and kept all of his precepts and done all that he commanded you, therefore thus say the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall never lack a man to stand before me.” Now that is not a promise that they are going to endure forever but it is a promise that as long as this clan is in existence they will have someone to represent them in front of God.

So there is death for the nation as a whole and there is life for this tiny group. There is the possibility at the beginning of Jerimiah’s ministry that this entire people, that
the nation as a whole can experience life if they will just turn to God and respond to him and obey him. At the end of the cycle there is disappointment here because the only group that is going to be spared from this judgment is the Rechabites.

Rechabite Ironies

Now I think, there are some very affective rhetorical devices that are going on here. There are some reasons why the use of the Rechabites here is an especially effective way of conveying the message that the Lord wants to give people as a whole. First of all, the mere fact that the Lord has to use this obscure tribe, the Rechabites who really are not even citizens or residents of Jerusalem to begin with, the fact that he has to use them as his example of obedience. Jeremiah has had to look long and hard to find someone that has been faithful.

The second thing that is ironic, and again we’ve already mentioned this. The Rechabites exposed a lifestyle that did not fully allow them to enjoy all the blessings of the covenant: the houses, the vineyards, the crops, the products that the Lord would give them. In fact, they probably by working their craft had to trade that for food because they didn’t raise crops themselves. They did not get to enjoy the vineyards, the wine, the houses, and all of the things that the lord had prepared for these people. Yet they are the ones that are spared and are going to experience blessing. But it is a very limited kind of blessing because they live a life that again, doesn’t allow them to fully enjoy the land flowing with milk and honey.

The third irony here is that this passage never really tells us anything directly about the piety of the Rechabites, or their devotion or commitment to God. We assume that the purpose behind this the reason for this vow initially Jonadab may have thought my people are not going to grow crops, live in houses and drink wine. It was a way of keeping them separate from the corruption of the society around them. We assume that the Rechabites have continued this as part of their devotion to God but there is nothing specifically stated about their love for the Lord or their devotion to God. They even disobey the commandment that the prophet gives them at the beginning, “drink wine” so it’s almost as if they are unresponsive to the prophet but yet the Lord rewards them.
Again the final irony of all of this is that the Lord rewards them for their obedience to the traditions of their fathers. The contrast is, if God would bless these people who have kept this voluntary vow, then why has Israel and why has Judah, why have they not listened to the word of God? The word of God and our response to that is a matter of life and death. The Rechabites will experience life, the nation as a whole will experience death and this blessing again comes from listening to the teaching and paying attention to the tradition of their fathers. So there are some interesting things going on here. Here is our example of the remnant. What does the remnant look like? It’s the Rechabites, it’s the Amish of Judah that is going to be preserved.

Now the promise that is given to the Rechabites that they will not lack a man to stand before me, is the same promise that is given to the Levites and the house of David in Jeremiah 33. Now when that promise is given to the Levites and to David in Jeremiah 33 it has great national significance. It means that the role of the Davidic king, even though God is judging them in the present, that role, and that special relationship God had with David is going to be continued. That special covenant promise that God made to David that he would establish his throne forever is going to continue. That’s central to the life of Israel as a nation and it’s going to be central to its restoration. When the Lord says, “The Levites will never lack a man to stand before me” that’s important, because for the nation, the role of the Levites were to be the priests and the people that served at the temple, that mediated God’s blessings. But when we come to chapter 35 and it says: “The Rechabites will never lack a man to stand before me” that has great significance for the tribe, but doesn’t mean much for the nation.

Jeremiah 34: Reversal and Enslavement of the Israelites?

So, all of this portrayal of the Rechabites as being the ones who are the faithful examples, who are the ones and the only ones in this section to experience the blessing of life; this is an incredible condemnation on the nation of Judah as a whole. What is laid beside the example of the faithfulness of the Rechabites is the national disobedience of Judah. When we go back to chapter 34, and a specific act of disobedience that is going to happen at the end of Judah’s history, and again the timeframe of Zedekiah and the
timeframe of Jehoiakim are often laid side by side. Here’s the event in chapter 34, Zedekiah brings the national judgment that is decreed in chapter 35 that brings first panel to and end and says the people had a chance to experience life. But they’re not going to receive it because they did not respond to God in the right way.

We go back to chapter 34 and now we’re in the last days Judah. It’s the time of Zedekiah, the Babylonian invasion and the army is pressing on Judah and in a serve way. Verse 7 of chapter 34 says, “Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke all of these words to Zedekiah to Judah, in Jerusalem, when the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all of the cities of Judah that were left, Lachish and Azekah, for these were the only fortified cities of Judah that were remained. So we see a place in chapter 34 7 where there are only three fortified cities of Judah left: Lachish, Azekah, and Jerusalem. When we read the Lachish letters that are extra biblical sources they talk about the same time. They mention that the signal fires that Azekah have gone out. So it’s going to get worse. The reason that things are going to get worse is directly tied in verses 8 to 22 in Jeremiah 34 to a direct act of disobedience against God and God’s law that happens during the time of Zedekiah.

Let me read a few verses here and then we’ll set the context and the setting of what’s going on. In verse 8 right after verse 7 there are only three fortified cites still standing, “The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, after king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to make a proclamation of liberty to them, that everyone should set free his Hebrew slaves male and female so that no one should enslave a Jew, his brother. And they obeyed, [they shama ’ed] rare example here of the people of Judah here actually doing something that obeyed God. Here’s what’s going on. The Old Testament law had instructed the people of Israel that they were not to permanently enslave their fellow Israelites. If an Israelite was required to become a slave because of a debt he owed to another person he was only required to serve for 6 years. But in the seventh year Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 15 that person was to be given the opportunity to go free. When you release them as a slave you are actually to give them provisions so that they could set themselves up for their new life. There was never to be a
permanent enslavement of any other Israelite. God had laid that out very clearly in his law.

What this passage reflects is that there had been a long time when Judah had not observed this law. Now some scholars have argued that what does Zedekiah did here is not directly tied into these commandments because there is general amnesty given to all the servants and Zedekiah simply saying, “Look, we’re going to make a covenant and we’re going to release all of our servants.” I think it simply reflects the fact that it has been so long since they have obeyed God’s command that they have to proclaim this general amnesty I still see a connection to Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 15. So this is a positive thing. They listened and they obeyed and they’re doing what God’s law commanded them to do. They are releasing their slaves what they’re really trying to do though is that as the Babylonian army is pressing on them, maybe they can find some way to get God’s favor, and maybe they should have paid attention to God’s word. “If we do this kind act to our slaves and if we give this general amnesty then maybe there’s the possibility that God is going to take his judgment away from us.”

But Jeremiah 34:11 is going to say this but afterward, and maybe for some reason the Babylonian army withdraws we read about that happening in some other passages, things aren’t as tight as they once were. The Babylonian army is not pressing on them as much as they were previously when they issued the decree when they made the covenant and they released their slaves but afterward they turned around. There’s our word shuv. “They took back,” there’s the causative form of our verb shuv. “They took back the male and female slaves they had set free, and brought them back into subjection as slaves.” So we begin this episode with something that looks very positive: they obeyed one of the specifics precepts of the law of God by releasing their slaves they listen they shama-ed they obeyed, they repented, they shuv-ed they turned their direction. But what this passages is saying is they’re going to put themselves back under judgment because what happened is they repented of their repentance. Throughout the book of Jeremiah they have been a turning-away people who need to turn back. Now, finally, they do turn, they do what God commands them and then they shuv and they turn away from what God has
said once again. And as a result of that, they bring themselves back under a sentence of judgment. The Lord says this: “You recently repented.” We finally had an example where you finally you *shuv*-ed you did what God commanded you to do. “You repented and did what was right in my eyes by proclaiming liberty, each to his neighbor, and you made a covenant before me in the house that is called by my name.” So they did two things: they turned around and they made a covenant. Now the problem throughout Jeremiah’s ministry that he’d been charging the people that he’d broken the covenant. They made a covenant to do what is right in God’s eyes.

But again verse 16 they repented of their repentance. You turned around and profaned my name when each of you took back his male and his female slaves, whom you had set free.”

So at the end of the first panel what we have is, an example of national disobedience in the city of Jerusalem where Zedekiah and the people blatantly tried to manipulate God by keeping his precept for a little while when they’d originally released their slaves. Then when things get easy again, or when the pressure of the Babylonian army relieved a little bit but when they take their slaves back as a result of that, there is national judgment.

As a result the possible relenting of judgment that set was forth in chapter 26 is not going to happen and that national judgment is set in contrast to the faithfulness of the Rechabites. Who know it’s not even their command it’s not even their obedience of God, it’s commandments of their father. They will be spared from judgment. There is national judgment there is a tiny remnant that experiences light. Response to the word of God is a matter of life and death we’re reminded of that again and again. We see that in the contrast of Jerusalem and the Rechabites. Listen to the decree of judgment that God is going to pass, listen to the sentence that he executes on them because of their unfaithfulness in this particular covenantal thing that’s going on in 34 verse 17 Loken, “therefore thus says the Lord, you have not obeyed me by proclaiming liberty everyone to his brother and to his neighbor.” They have taken away the liberty of these people that were released. So the Lord says, “Behold, I proclaimed to you liberty. We got a repetiton
here a word play going on. You took away the liberty of these Hebrew servants I’m going to give you liberty and here’s what this liberty’s going to involve. I’m going to give you liberty to die by the sword, by pestilence, by famine declares the Lord and I will make you a whore to the kings of all the earth. Throughout the prophets there’s going to be this emphasis on that idea that the punishment fits the crime. You took away their liberty, I’m going to give you liberty and it’s going to liberty to die in some pretty horrible ways.

The other aspect of this where the punishment fits the crime is that as they made this covenant they followed the rights and the rituals that were often assisted with the ancient Near East which involved the cutting up of animal. It seems like the purpose why they did this, they would cut the animals up, they would lay them out, this was part of the sacrifices and things they did as they were making these covenants. The covenant partners would walk between the animal parts and what this solemn ceremony is signifying is that the covenant partners were binding themselves to this agreement and saying to each other, if we don’t keep the terms of this agreement then may the same thing happen to us that have happened to these animals that we have offered as part of this ritual.

We see this happening in the covenant between God and Abraham back in Genesis 15 Abraham falls asleep as God passes through the animal parts and God obligates himself to keep the covenant. They had obligated themselves to do what God had said. First of all, their fore fathers had obligated to that when they had received the Mosaic Law at the beginning. They have recommitted themselves; they have made a covenant. So what God says is, because you have not kept that covenant, the punishment is going to fit the crime. He says this in verse 18: “And the men who transgress my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and pass between the parts.” There is going to be a national judgment because of the disobedience of the nation as a whole. And so, at the end of the panel, what we have at the end of the first panel is the national judgment of the people who did not keep their covenant. They repented of their repentance, and we have the
promise of life to the Rechabites.

End of Second Panel (Jer 45)

Now, as we go to the end of the second panel, we’re going to see something very similar. We go to chapter 45. Here is the promise of life that’s given at the end of the second panel. In chapter 36, again, at the beginning of this, it’s the same situation. If the people will obey, if they will listen, if they will turn from their sinful ways, God will relent and give them life. Are they going to do that? And, in chapter 37, Zedekiah, his attendants, the people, they did not obey the word of the Lord. That’s why Jerusalem fell and this whole panel’s going to document more disobedience. But, the promise of life that is offered in 36, and is given to one individual in chapter 45. Again, note the size of the remnant. In the first panel, it’s a small remnant, it’s a small clan, it’s an obscure group and you get the idea that Jeremiah had to look long and hard to find someone. At the end of the second panel, the remnant consists of one individual. The Lord gives this promise to Baruch, and remember Baruch is Jeremiah’s faithful scribe. Baruch is the man who had the courage to go to the temple and read the words that Jeremiah had dictated to him. That was a courageous act. Because of his faithfulness, because of his obedience, because of the fact that he remains with Jeremiah, through thick and thin, the Lord’s going to give him this promise. “Thus says the Lord God of Israel,” chapter 45:2, “O Baruch: You said, ‘Woe is me! For the Lord has added sorrow to my pain.’” And so, Jeremiah was a weeping prophet, Baruch was a weeping scribe. I mean, both went through the similar things. “‘I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest.’ Thus, shall you say to him, Thus says the Lord: Behold, what I have built I am breaking down, and what I have planted I am plucking up.” That is the whole land. There are those key verbs that are introduced to us back in chapter 1 to talk about Jeremiah’s ministry of judgment. The Lord’s bringing this about. But here’s the promise to Baruch: “As for you, do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not, for behold, I am bringing disaster upon all flesh, declares the Lord. But I will give your life as a prize of war in all of the places to which you may go.” So, Baruch, even if you go to the temple, and the king hates you, and does not want to hear your message, I’m going to protect you and preserve you. Baruch, when
Johannan and the military officials take you and Jeremiah and lead you away into Egypt, and you have to go into this foreign land, I’m going to be with you. Baruch, whenever all these experiences are happening to you and Jeremiah, whatever happens, I’m not promising you that you will not have to go through difficulty; do not seek great things for yourself. That term is used in Jeremiah 33 to talk about the ultimate restoration land. Baruch’s not going to get to live to see those kinds of blessings, but God will reward him with his life because of his faithfulness to God.

Notice what he says: “I will give you your life as a prize of war in all of the places to which you may go.” I like the way that William Holladay has explained that little expression. He says that it’s an old soldier’s joke, that we went into battle and what plunder did we get? Well, the only plunder that we got is that we escaped with our very lives, and that’s all that God is promising to Baruch. He will escape with his very life. But Baruch experiences the blessing of life that is offered to the people at the beginning of Jeremiah’s ministry, but was rejected by them. Listening to the word of God is a matter of life and death. Baruch will experience God’s blessing because of the fact that he has been obedient to God.

That act of faithfulness and obedience is directly contrasted to the disobedience of the Jewish refugees that are in Egypt in Jeremiah chapter 44. Remember, the prophet we’ve looked at this passage before, the prophet comes and confronts them about their idolatrous ways. They need to put those practices behind them, they need to be faithful to the Lord. Being in this foreign environment, it seems, has added to their willingness to follow these other gods. They say to Jeremiah: “As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not listen to you. We will do everything we have vowed. We will make offerings to the Queen of Heaven, pour out our drink offerings to her. We will not listen to you.”

This kind of brings us to the end of everything that we’ve observed in 26-45. There’s constantly the charge. The people did not listen to God: they did not pay attention to his word. Well, at the very end of this, they blatantly say we will not listen to what the
Lord says.

It’s also interesting to contrast chapter 44, at the end of the second panel, and this national disobedience with the refugees in Egypt with the disobedience of the people in Judah in chapter 34. Because what you have in chapter 34 is that the people reneg on a vow to do what is right. What you have going on here, is that the people persist and express their willingness and their commitment to fulfill a vow that involves doing something that is wrong. We’re going to keep offering our sacrifices, we’re going to keep making our offerings to these pagan deities because we believe that they can bless us in ways that the Lord did not. In fact, the disaster that has come upon us as a nation came about as a result of Josiah’s reforms where he took those things away from us.

Here’s God’s response to the words that they have said and we come to the end of this: The Life of Baruch, the Judgment of the People. The Lord says this: “‘I have sworn by my great name,’ says the Lord, that my name shall no more be invoked by the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying ‘As the Lord God lives.’ Behold, I am watching over them for disaster and not good.” They did not turn away from their? So the Lord’s going to bring disaster on them. All of the men of Judah who are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by famine, until there is an end of them. And those who escape the sword shall return from the land of Egypt to the land of Judah, few in number, and all of the remnant of Judah, who came to the land of Egypt to live, shall know whose word shall stand, mine or theirs.”

So there is going to be a judgment of those people in Egypt. There’s going to be a judgment of the remnant there and they are going to be practically wiped out. Only a tiny minority of them will come back to the land. So again, at the end of the second panel exactly the same thing that we’ve seen in the first: there is a people-wide judgment followed by the salvation of a tiny remnant. Jeremiah had also told the people that the hope for Israel’s future lay.

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