

**Jer. 34, 39, 45, The Promises to the Survivors:
Zedekiah, Ebedmelech, and Baruch
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A. Overview

1. The Point

How do you comfort someone whose world has collapsed around them? This chapter is the third in which we have seen Jer doing exactly that. As we study it, we'll keep in mind its parallels with the other two, and from these comparisons learn some valuable lessons about comforting and encouraging one another.

2. Structure:

- a) ch. 30-33 are the New Covenant section of the book.
- b) ch. 46-51 are the Oracles against the Heathen.
- c) This leaves 34-45.
 - 1) Historical as opposed to poetic: describes events before (34-39) and after (40-45) the fall of Jerusalem.
 - 2) Shows that in both periods there was some obedience (34-35, 40-41) and more rejection (36-38, 42-43) of God's word.
 - 3) Punctuated by three promises to three individuals who receive special protection from the Lord: Zedekiah the King (34:1-5), Ebedmelech the Slave (39:15-18), and Baruch the Scribe (45:1-5).

B. 1, God Speaks Through Jeremiah

In all three cases, God sends the word of encouragement by way of Jer, to a specific individual. So for us:

- 1. Encouragement is person-to-person. God does not speak directly to Zedekiah, or Ebedmelech, or Baruch, but to them through Jeremiah. So God wants to touch us through one another. It's lovely to be able to say, "God comforted my heart," but more often he wants to do it through us. That means that we need to be sensitive to his leading when he is sending us, and willing to be receptive to encouragement from one another.
- 2. The content must be the Word of God. All three passages are very clear that the Lord sent Jer in each case with a divine message. In our own wisdom we have nothing worth saying. But we do have the Bible, and it is more than sufficient.

C. 1-2, Who is Baruch?

- 1. Chronologically, the earliest reference to him is in 36:4 (ca. 605 BC), where Jer summons him to write down his prophecies. Baruch not only writes them, but reads them repeatedly in the temple and briefs the princes on them. Then when Jehoiakim burns the scroll, Baruch transcribes the book again.
- 2. In 32:12-16, when Jer is imprisoned under Zed (ca. 587 BC), Baruch still dares to be with him, and it is to him that Jer

commits for safekeeping the purchase deed of Hananiah's field.

3. After the fall of the land, in 43:3,6, we find him as one of the remnant in the land, taken to Egypt with Jer.
4. 51:59 shows that his brother Seraiah was a royal official under Zed, so he is from a respectable family.
5. Together with Zed (the King) and Ebedmelech (a slave), a good example of the social diversity of those to whom God shows favor. Every social level is included. We know that wealthy believers should not despise poor ones (James 2), but it's just as wrong to consider it a religion of the lower classes, supporting them in class struggle against the rich (e.g., liberation theology). God's true people includes those of different classes living together in mutual love and support.

D. 1-3, What are the Circumstances?

1. Fourth year of J'kim, cf. 36:1. Baruch wrote the first scroll in this year (36:1-4); the King learned of it and destroyed it the following year (36:9).
2. So this is Baruch's response to the work of 36:4. He is not just a human typewriter, transcribing the words of Jer. As a believer, he is deeply touched with what he hears, and expresses his spiritual concern.
3. As with the other two, the message comes at a specific time, under specific circumstances. Jer is sensitive to Baruch's discomfort, and open to the Lord's word of comfort for him. So we need to be sensitive to the immediate circumstances in which people find themselves. *Divinely given comfort is always relative to divinely permitted stress.*
 - a) "Rejoice with those who do rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15);
 - b) "As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart" (Prov. 25:20);
 - c) "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it" (Prov. 15:23).

E. 4-5, The Message of Comfort

In all three cases, the message has two parts:

1. Judgment is coming, ...
 2. ... but I will deliver you through it.
- God does not encourage us to ignore the tragedy around us, but to persevere through it. Believers are not Pollyannas, always viewing the world through unnaturally rosey glasses. We see the evil in the world; indeed, we see it more acutely than does the unbeliever, because we see it in contrast with the perfect righteousness of Christ, and we know, as the unbeliever does not, that judgment is coming. The Lord does not take us out of the world, but he does deliver us from the evil one (John 17:15).

1. 4, The Message of Judgment

Note the polar terms, "build/break; plant/pluck." As in 1:10 and 31:28, God is fully in control of both judgment and salvation. Man-made religions often have two great gods, a good one in continual struggle with a bad one. People cannot conceive of a single God big enough to bring both blessing and cursing. But the Bible can ... and does.

Consider the impact of such a sovereign God on both sinner and saint. It's not what the movies make it out to be. Sometimes the wicked seem to prevail over the righteous, and reinforcements arrive too late to punish the wicked or save the righteous. But one day all will stand before God, and then no evildoer will go unpunished, no saint unprotected.

2. 5, The Message of Salvation

Baruch isn't promised much. "Life for a prey" seems to have the same sense as "by the skin of your teeth." He'll lose all his property, but he will have his life, and that's more than many others.

Interestingly, this promise was made to those who would fall away to the Chaldeans (21:9; 38:2), but the only ones to whom it specifically announced (Ebedmelech and Baruch) do not seem to have done this.

3. Finally, consider the addenda to the message of salvation in all three reassurances. Zed and Ebedmelech each give us a different reason for their being spared, while Baruch gives us a conclusion one should draw.

a) Why does God spare some?

1) 34:5 (Zedekiah), his own sovereign will.

2) 39:18 (Ebedmelech), their trust in him.

3) How often do theologians seek to oppose these to one another! Yet here they are, side by side, in contexts so parallel that we cannot help but see them as both true.

b) What should one conclude from the fact that one has been delivered? 45:5, "Don't seek great things for yourself." Ps. 131 is a good commentary on this verse, and may in fact have inspired it.

1) What does it mean, not to seek great things for oneself? Ps. 131:1 associates it with a haughty heart and lofty eyes. Recall Ecclesiastes. Life is full of uncertainty and disappointment, so don't set your hopes on high achievements, but be content with what you have, and enjoy God's daily blessings. Cf. Rom. 12:16, this lack of ambition will enable you to live in harmony with others, in

a way that a grasping, striving spirit would make impossible.

- 2) How does one attain it? Ps. 131:2-3. This attitude results from becoming a weaned believer. A young infant thinks that anything harder than milk and harsher than the breast is intolerable, just as immature Christians often can't rejoice in the midst of sorrow. The solution is not to remove oneself from the sorrow, but to recognize that that's the way the world is, and to develop the spiritual resources to deal with it--becoming weaned from the close care of those who led you to the Lord, and able to trust in the Lord in the midst of the storm.

Conclusion

- These examples of encouragement show us that encouragement must be
1. *personal*, delivered by one believer to another, not left to happen in devotions;
 2. *biblical*, a word from God, not just pleasant thoughts;
 3. *fitted* to the circumstances;
 4. *sober*, in view of the circumstances of our world; pointing to God not as taking us out of the world, but as strengthening us in it.

Hymn: How Firm a Foundation

Analysis

45, Baruch's Privilege (J'qim)

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