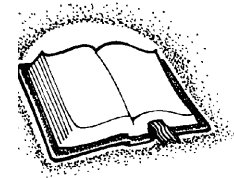


Unlocking the Bible (31)



Mould Me and Make Me

Lessons from the Book of Jeremiah

We now come to the second of the Major Prophets: Jeremiah. Some time has passed since Isaiah. The people had not repented and so God was about to visit them in judgment, as He had promised.

That was the awful prospect that Jeremiah was called to deal with. His was the task of making the people accept what was their due. It was for him to say: 'Get real!' He pleads with them to take what is coming to them.

Looking at the book as a whole, as we have done with the other books, what does it say? In simple words, it is a message of **judgment** and **hope**. Partly due to the passion involved and the intensity of the situation it is not a book which has a clear pattern and systematic structure. It is a set of pleas, urging the people to accept what was coming to them as redemptive punishment.

The earlier part is a series of accusations about their sinfulness and the judgment they deserve. It is summarised in the charge: *"My people have committed two sins. They have forsaken Me, the spring of living water,; and have dug their own cisterns - broken cisterns - that cannot hold water."* There is despair that a nation should turn its back on such a benevolent God. In doing so, they not only abandon the old ways but are increasingly attracted to far less noble and worthy gods idolised by the other nations.

By any count, they are in a serious condition. They are rebellious, stubborn and bent on their own destruction. Punishment is inevitable. Jeremiah is told time and again not to pray for them - it's too late. Their sin is *'written with a pen of iron*. Even should Moses and Samuel, appear to plead on their behalf, it would make no difference. Judgment is inevitable. The end is sure. The unthinkable will happen. God's very own people will be broken and crushed. Jerusalem will be conquered.

But, there is hope. God's intention and purpose is to bring into being; *"a people who will be a name, a praise and a glory"*. But, while their sins mar their image, that noble status cannot be enjoyed; they need to be purged through captivity. Taken captive by another nation for 70 years will break them. But they will be re-made, like the remoulding of the marred potter's vessel. And they will be kept, like the tree, reaching out to streams of water during drought, and so showing *"green leaf in drought"*. Hope will come through enduring their punishment with grace.

This promise of hope is further developed with a letter to the exiles encouraging them to, *"build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce"* and to settle in the strange land. The cleansing process will take time. They are to accept it willingly and patiently, for the future is assured.

Nowhere is this better expressed than in the well-known, oft-quoted verses from chapter 29 *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future,"* declares the LORD, The redemption will be complete with a new covenant and, more importantly, the laws of God written in their hearts and becoming effective.

The whole book echoes Peter's words: *"humble yourselves under the Mighty Hand of God, and he will exalt you in due season"*. Or the sentiments of the hymn: *"And from the ground there blossoms red, life that shall endless be"*.