

JEREMIAH 22

SERMONS FOR THE KINGS

In the last chapter, we read of the message which Jeremiah gave in response to King Zedekiah's request. But here we have a record of some sermons which the prophet preached before the king's court, during some of the preceding reigns; and hereby it is shown that the kings and the people had fair warning given them, long before that fatal sentence of chapter 21 was pronounced upon Zedekiah (the last of Judah's kings). It is clear that they were forewarned – years in advance – of how they might have prevented that ruin from coming upon them. The first of these messages (verses 1-9) appears to have been sent to the royal family during the reign of Jehoiakim (609-598 BC). It relates partly to Josiah's son Jehoahaz, who had just been carried away (609 BC) by Pharaoh Necho into Egypt; and partly to another of Josiah's sons – Jehoiakim – who succeeded his brother and was now upon the throne. The king and princes are exhorted to execute judgment – and they are assured that if they did so, the royal family would flourish; but otherwise, it would be ruined. In verses 10-12, Jehoahaz (here called by his other name of Shallum) is lamented; while his brother Jehoiakim is reproved and threatened (verses 13-19). But the prophet also delivered another message (verses 20-30) during the short three-month reign of Jehoiakim's son (and Josiah's grandson) Jehoiachin, who was also known as Jeconiah or Coniah. This king was charged with an obstinate refusal to hear, and he was threatened with destruction, too.

As was mentioned above, the first nine verses were probably spoken during the reign of Josiah's son, King Jehoiakim. The king is spoken to as the man who was sitting upon the throne of David, the man after God's own heart. Jehoiakim ought to have followed David's example, and then he would have enjoyed the benefits of the promises that were made to David. In this address, the prophet speaks promises of a most gracious nature, which were to assure both the king and his people that they would certainly enjoy peace and prosperity if they were obedient to the Lord. But if they failed to walk in Jehovah's ways, very heavy denunciations were threatened. The way to preserve a government is for those who are in authority to bow the knee to Christ, to govern their people in righteousness, and to lead them in the ways of the Lord. But alas! Sin will be the ruin of the houses of princes and rulers, as well as of ordinary citizens.

In verses 10-19, we find a sentence of death upon two kings – both being the wicked sons of a very pious father. King Josiah had mercifully been prevented from seeing the evil that was to come in his kingdom, and he was re-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A sermon in which the royal family is advised to execute justice, and warned of destruction if they are disobedient – verses 1-9
- ❖ A sermon of lament for Jehoahaz and threatening for Jehoiakim – verses 10-19
- ❖ A sermon directed against Jehoiachin, also known as Coniah – verses 20-30

moved to see the good to come in the heavenly world. Therefore, the people had no reason to weep for him, but there was every reason to lament for his son Jehoahaz – here called Shallum, in verse 11. Shortly after the death of his father, Shallum had been taken by Pharaoh Necho to Egypt, where he would live and die as a wretched captive.

But in verses 13-19, we proceed to read of the doom of King Jehoiakim – the brother of Shallum, who had been placed on Judah’s throne by Pharaoh Necho when he had taken Shallum with him to Egypt. This short but pointed sermon begins with a solemn woe for all his awful crimes. When children despise their parents’ “old fashions,” they commonly come short of their true excellences. Jehoiakim knew that his father Josiah had found the way of obedience to God to be the way of comfort, yet he would not tread in his father’s footsteps. And what would be the end of his course of wickedness? He would die unlamented – hated by his people because of his oppression and his cruelty (verse 18). And so far from being honored with the ceremonies and splendor that usually accompanied the funeral of a king, Jehoiakim would be so little missed that his dead body would merely be dragged outside the gates of Jerusalem to rot away in the elements – just like the carcass of a dead donkey. Let us pray for grace to be delivered from Jehoiakim’s sins – and his end! We cannot help remembering that this very man was the one who cut up and burned the written words of the Lord, which the prophet Jeremiah had penned by the hand of his secretary Baruch. He had not liked the condemnations of his wicked lifestyle that were embodied in those words, and so he endeavored to destroy the Word of the Lord. But – as J. C. Ryle has pointed out – so far from annihilating the written Scriptures, this wicked king only succeeded in having the Lord add one more line therein, which stated that he would be given the disgraceful burial of a donkey!

Verses 20-30 contain an address that Jeremiah made concerning Jehoiakim’s son and Josiah’s grandson, Jeconiah – here called Coniah (verse 24). The state of the Jewish nation is described here under a threefold character: very haughty in a day of peace and safety, very fearful when alarms of trouble are given, and very much cast down under the pressure of those troubles. As for the king himself, the prophet says that he would close his days in bondage in Babylon. He would be made a captive and die in a foreign land. Let our great concern be that we die in Christ, and then it will be well with us no matter when or where we die – even if it is in a far country. Those who hear the voice of Jesus and follow Him have eternal life; they shall never perish, neither shall any enemy pluck them out of His Almighty hands!

We praise You, Lord, for Your reluctance – as illustrated in this chapter – to punish unrepentant sinners, although they have richly merited Your wrath and displeasure! Amen.

