

Monday - Week Twenty-eight

Lesson Eighty-One: Judgment of Judah

Read: Jeremiah 16:1-5, 10-15; 29:1-14; 2 Kings 24-25

Summary: God used Jeremiah to warn the children of Israel about the horrible consequences of their sin: they would lose the Promised Land.

Background and Comments

- Jeremiah had a tough life! God commanded him not to marry as an object lesson about the terrible things that would soon happen in Israel. What a burdensome message Jeremiah carried in his heart: warfare, disease, murder and conquest awaited his beloved Israelites.
- 2 Kings 24-25 make for difficult reading ... especially when we remember how gracious God had been to the Israelites early in their history.
- The letter Jeremiah wrote to the exiles (Jeremiah 29) told them to settle in Babylon instead of trying to revolt and return quickly. They would be there for 70 years. The great news was the promise of a return to Jerusalem.

Lessons for Today

- The consequences of the Israelites' sin were bitter indeed. Yet they are nothing compared to the consequences of the sins of unbelievers in hell. Let this give your personal witnessing an added sense of urgency.
- Verses 10-15 of Jeremiah 16 talk about sins adding up from generation to generation. The Israelites had continued the sins that their parents committed. This made their punishment even more severe. Americans have continued to commit the sins of their parents (abortion, materialism, idolatry, etc.). What might this mean for America's future?
- In Jeremiah's letter to the exiles he warned them against listening to false prophets. There would be those who prophesied that God would rescue them very soon or that they should fight against the Babylonians. It seems that there are always people who say the exact opposite of God's true message. What evidences of that can you see today?

Read: Psalm 119:137-144; Hebrews 4.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, please forgive America for her many sins. Give me the courage to stand up for what is right ... and to use Your Word to change my country one person at a time. Thank You for Your grace. In Jesus' name I pray; Amen.

Tuesday - Week Twenty-eight

Lesson Eighty-two: Daniel's Early Career in Babylon

Read: Daniel 1 and 2

Summary: Daniel is a shining example of rock solid faith. Use him as a role model.

Background and Comments

- If Daniel would have eaten the king's food he would have been sinning in two ways:
 1. Among the king's ration of food there would have been some food God had forbidden the Israelites to eat in the ceremonial law.
 2. At the meals they would have had to consecrate a portion of the food and wine to the Babylonian gods.
- Nebuchadnezzar was not dumb. Instead of telling the wise men his dream and listening to 100 different interpretations (guesses) he told them that they had to tell him the dream AND the interpretation.
- The king's vision had four parts:
 1. A head of gold This represents Nebuchadnezzar's empire (the Babylonian empire - one of the world's strongest)
 2. Chest and arms of silver This represents the next empire: the Medo-Persian. This empire was great but not the equal of the first (hence silver and not gold)
 3. Belly and thighs of bronze This represents Alexander the Great's Greek empire.
 4. Legs or iron, feet of iron/clay This represents the Roman empire. It was incredibly strong (iron) but internally flawed (clay)

Lessons for Today

- It would have been easy for Daniel and his friends to think, "This is our future job. We had better forget our religious ideas and eat whatever they give us. After all, we might be fired (or worse!) if we don't." Have you ever reasoned that way? God never wants us to categorize our life into religious and non-religious parts. God wants to be in control of every part of our life. How can you live your faith at work today?

Read: Psalm 119:145-152; Hebrews 5.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, give me a faith like Daniel's. In Jesus' name; Amen.

Wednesday - Week twenty-eight

Catechism Review

Read Questions 226-234

1. Carefully look at the chart after question 226. Would you agree or disagree with this (and why): "An unbeliever cannot do good works"

2. Explain this statement: "Good works begin and end with God's Word."

What will that mean in your life as you try to live a more godly life?

3. The devil would love to make us loose our faith. The Holy Spirit not only brings us to faith He also keeps our faith strong against the assaults of the devil. How does He do that?

4. The answer to question 232 is very good. What could start to happen if we "count our good works"?

Read: Psalm 119:153-160; Hebrews 6.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You have brought me to faith so that I can bring glory to You now and in heaven someday. Forgive me for the self-centered attitude that so often dominates my thoughts. Focus my attention on You and Your will for me life. In Jesus I pray; Amen.

Thursday - Week Twenty-eight

Lesson Eighty-three: Three men in the Fiery Furnace

Read: Daniel 3

Summary: Read this story of faith and courage with careful attention. These three men were perfectly willing to die for their Lord.

Background and Comments

- These three young men stood up to the King of Babylon. This was much more dangerous than standing up to any government official today. Nebuchadnezzar was an absolute monarch; his will was carried out at once. There were no appeals, courts, lawyers, etc.
- Nebuchadnezzar ordered everyone to worship the giant image for political reasons no doubt. He wanted his kingdom to be united by a common religion. Some modern day leaders have tried that same tactic.
- Who was the fourth person in the fiery furnace? Some Bible scholars argue that this “son of the gods” was the Son of God, the “pre-incarnate Christ” (the Son of God taking bodily form). That might be true. The fourth person in the furnace may also have been an angel.

Lessons for Today

- The wise men who brought charges against these three young Jews owed their lives to Daniel and these three (refer back to the dream incident). Yet they were jealous of their high position and were ready to do anything to bring them down. Jealousy can easily dominate someone’s whole thought process. Have you seen that in your own life ... or at work? How do you combat jealousy?
- These three allowed for the fact that God might not rescue them from the fiery furnace (3:16-18). They told the king that even if God did not rescue them He was still the true God. We know that God is “in charge” of this world even when things don’t happen the way we think they should. How might you explain this to someone who asks: “If God is here why are there so many bad things that happen?”

Read: Psalm 119:161-168; Hebrews 7

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, each of us has our own “fiery furnaces” that threaten us if we stand up for Your truth. Don’t let us fear them; instead let us trust You with our whole heart. I ask this in Jesus’ name; Amen.

Friday - Week Twenty-eight

Life Questions

Topic/Question: Why are there so many Bible translations? Which one is for me?

Bible References and Considerations

- The Bible does not say anything about translations because the authors were writing to people who spoke the same language (the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, the New Testament in Greek).
- Translations are made when an individual or group study the original Hebrew or Greek and then reproduce the thought in another language. The goal of a good translator is to come up with an easily understandable translation that is faithful to the wording of the original language.
- It is possible to “slant” a translation based on your religious ideas. For example, Romans 5:1 states: Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (New International Version). This is an accurate translation of Paul’s Greek. The Contemporary English Version translates this verse: “By faith we have been made acceptable to God. And now, because of our Lord Jesus Christ, we live at peace with God.” To justify means to “declare not guilty”; it signifies a change in our status before God (we are forgiven). To translate this word as “to be made acceptable to God” clouds our new status before God. When it comes to our going to heaven it’s not that our faith does something in our heart that makes us acceptable to God. Our peace comes from God’s forgiveness, not from our changed heart.

Practically Speaking

- No translation is perfect (it’s impossible to completely capture the thought of any piece of literature in a translation) yet many translations are faithful to the originals. God wants us to read the Bible and grow in our faith.
- We generally use the 1984 edition of the New International Version in our churches. This is the most popular translation today ... and is a faithful translation. The 2011 NIV and ESV are also good translations.
- Thank God that our Synod has insisted that our pastors learn Hebrew and Greek. This allows them to go back into the original languages when they prepare sermons and Bible classes. There are very few seminaries that require this of their students.

Read: Psalm 119:169-176; Hebrews 8.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us Your Word. Amen.