

Lesson 87. Jeremiah and the two baskets

Scripture: Jeremiah 24; 2 Kings 23:36 - 25:21

Memory Verse: "My eyes will watch over them for their good... I will give them a heart to know me." (Jer. 24:6-7).

After Assyria conquered Israel (that is, the northern 10 tribes), only the people of the southern kingdom (the tribes of Judah and Benjamin), remained settled in the Promised Land. And THAT is only because God chose to protect them for a season. You might think that the people of Judah and Benjamin would have learned a lesson from what happened to the other 10 tribes. However, instead of learning from what happened to Israel, the people of Jerusalem did not repent and turn back to God. Even when kings Hezekiah and Josiah tried to steer the people back to God, the effects were only temporary. Clearly, like the other 10 tribes of Israel, they couldn't follow and obey God's laws in their own strength; and God was about to allow Jerusalem to be conquered.

The Lord continued to show His presence with the His chosen people through the prophets. In the 13th year of King Josiah of Judah, God called Jeremiah when he was still just a boy. He told Jeremiah, "I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart to be my prophet. Don't be concerned that you are young. I will tell you where to go and what to say, and I will be with you and protect you. What you need to know and declare to the kings of Judah, is that I am watching, and I will certainly carry out all my plans, and that Jerusalem is going to be conquered just like the other 10 tribes."

So Jeremiah obeyed God, and delivered a message to the people of Jerusalem: "Repent! Turn from sin and run to God!"

He continued to spread that message even though the people didn't want to hear it. Some people were very mean to him because of his message. They beat him and imprisoned him (Jer. 20:1-2; 37:14-15) and even threw him down into a muddy hole (Jer. 38:6). But God remained true to His promise that he would watch over Jeremiah (he never promised him his life would be easy).

Eventually, as God promised, Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians. And most of the people were carried off from their homes. God allowed it because the people had rebelled against Him and His ways. But what about God's promise that he was going to make a great nation that would bless the whole world through Abraham's descendants? Did God change His mind? No. God still had a plan for a hope and future for His chosen people, and it was a GOOD ONE!

So one day, God showed Jeremiah two baskets full of fig fruits. The figs in one of the baskets were ripe and full and good for eating. But in the other basket, the figs were shriveled and rotten, and not even edible. God told Jeremiah, "The good figs represent the exiles who were taken to Babylon. My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back here again. **I will give them hearts that recognize me as the Lord (Jer. 31:33-34; 37:14)** The bad figs represent all those who remain in Judah and have "set their hearts against me."

This was one of the darkest times the world had ever seen. The light that came into the world through a promise to Abraham, looked like it was being snuffed out. The home of the Temple of the LORD was going to burn, and the nation that was selected by God to represent His Goodness, Faithfulness, Mercy and Love to the rest of the world had every appearance of being snuffed out completely.

However, the hope contained in the prophesy of the good figs represented hope for the WHOLE WORLD. Jeremiah spent most of his days encouraging people to **repent**. That is, to hate their sin and turn from it and run to God. And even though the people didn't respond with obedience, and therefore suffered consequence for their sin, **God still had a plan that would give people new hearts that would recognize Him as Lord**. This plan, which had been revealed 100 years before Jeremiah's time through the prophet named Isaiah, was that THE Messiah would come and suffer through **an even greater darkness** to bring a Light into the World that could not be extinguished, and would be salvation for those who would repent and follow Him.