*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

August 5 - 10

*The Prophet Jeremiah*

**Monday, August 5 Jeremiah 41:1-15**

*“They killed Gedaliah”*

 Gedaliah had begun the reconstruction of life in the land following the defeat to the Babylonians and had become a symbol of hope but Ishmael, a member of the royal family, murders Gedaliah. The killing is both a strike against the Babylonians (who had installed Gedaliah as the governor of Judah) and an attempt by Ishmael to usurp power.

 After four years of civil war (1861-1865), with the southern states in tatters and the whole nation exhausted from the conflict, President Lincoln began to look for ways to rebuild the nation and to reconcile its various factions. A twisted soul named John Wilkes Booth assassinated Lincoln before he could put his plans for reconciliation into effect, and the resulting turmoil in the southern states over severe reconstruction policies was extremely costly.

 Johanan, a military man loyal to Gedaliah, and his soldiers intercept Ishmael. The two groups met near Gibeon, with the result that most of the captives taken by Ishmael are recovered by Johanan and his officers, but Ishmael and eight of his men escape.

*We live in a world, Lord, where good people are senselessly killed. Amen.*

**Tuesday, August 6 Jeremiah 41:16 – 42:6**

*“They were afraid of what the Babylonians would do”*

 After the murder of Gedaliah (see yesterday’s devotion), the question faced by Johanan and his band is, “What now?” Nebuchadnezzar will not take kindly to the assassination of his hand-picked governor, and there is every reason to expect reprisals in some form. Their fear of Babylonian retaliation and the treachery of men like Ishmael cause them to consider fleeing the region. Their choice of venue is Egypt, where already a sizable group of Judeans live. Egypt is not (yet!) under the control of the Babylonians, so if Johanan and the group make it safely there, they may have some expectation of continued security from the Babylonians.

 Should the remnant associated with Johanan (and until recently with Gedaliah) flee to Egypt or not? They seek the counsel of God through Jeremiah and promise obedience to the prophetic word. There is an implied self-curse in verse five, should the company of Judeans not heed the Lord’s instruction. Jeremiah agrees to seek counsel from the Lord and to tell them everything the Lord reveals.

*We seek your guidance, Lord, to show us the way to take. Amen.*

**Wednesday, August 7 Jeremiah 42:7-22**

*“The Lord has told you: ‘Do not go to Egypt’”*

 Jeremiah’s reply to the request of Johanan to seek the counsel of God about whether they should go to Egypt or stay in Judah takes two forms, one positive and the other negative. After ten days he begins with the preface, “This is what the Lord says,” where the gist of the positive message is that God will preserve this remnant of Judeans if they trust him and stay in the land. In language associated with Jeremiah’s call, God promises to build and to plant them in the land and there to protect them from the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar.

 However, should they choose to disregard God’s word and flee to Egypt, judgment will come on them there. This negative message from God should be read in light of verse five, where the people had asked that God be a “true and faithful witness” against them if they disobey his revealed word. Jeremiah adds his personal word to the group in verses nineteen through twenty-two, indicating that a choice for Egypt means that they are self-deceived and will not escape judgment.

*When we obey you, Lord, it brings your goodness to our lives. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

August 10 - 15

T*he Prophet Jeremiah*

**Thursday, August 8 Jeremiah 43:1-13**

*“You lie!”*

 Those remaining in Judah, led by Johanan, have asked Jeremiah to seek the Lord’s direction on whether they should stay in Judah or go to Egypt (which they clearly prefer). When Jeremiah reveals the Lord’s will that they stay in Judah, they accuse him of lying to them. The end result is that Johanan leads the group to Tahpanhes in Egypt, forcing Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch to go with them. Tahpanhes was located in the eastern section of the Nile Delta and was one of several cities in Egypt with a Judean population.

 Having arrived in Tahpanhes, Jeremiah is directed by God to take some large stones and bury them in the courtyard of a government building. He explains this act by saying that God will grant his “servant Nebuchadnezzar” a seat over these stones when the Babylonian king spreads out his royal canopy, indicating that Babylon will conquer Egypt. Moreover, judgment will come on those Judeans who think they have escaped the reach of the Babylonians by fleeing to Egypt, in direct disobedience to God’s command that they remain in Judah.

*Stubborn refusal to heed your word, Lord, has devastating consequences. Amen.*

**Friday, August 9 Jeremiah 44:1-30**

*“We will not listen to your messages from the Lord”*

 The somber words of Jeremiah are eloquent reminders of what life can be like when one is estranged from God and has little clue of the power of inherited corruption. Especially hard to deal with are those people who insist they know something about God; for them, being sent into exile (or whatever difficulty) cannot be God’s work. It would be nice (so human reflection might go) if we could discover the key to saving ourselves consistent with what we think we know about God.

 The pathway to life begins by acknowledging that every road leads to death except the one charted by God. Jeremiah’s contemporaries in Egypt simply could not face the fact that they had been (and remained) part of a failed political and religious enterprise. Tragically, they were willing to do almost anything to try to save themselves: kidnap Jeremiah and Baruch, worship the Queen of Heaven (a Canaanite goddess), and so on. What they refused to do was to acknowledge their failure and depend on the God of grace, who can make all things new.

*There is a way that leads to life, Lord, and those who find it never die. Amen.*

**Saturday, August 10 Jeremiah 45:1-5**

*“This is what the Lord says to you, Baruch”*

 The prophecy concerning Baruch is out of place chronologically with the preceding chapters. Verse one provides a date in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, which coincides with the command from the Lord in 36:1 for Jeremiah to prepare a scroll of his prophecies. The fallout over Baruch’s reading from the scroll may have been an early occasion for public persecution of this scribe, who was Jeremiah’s secretary and companion. Why does this account come at the end of the description of the Egyptian experience of Jeremiah and Baruch?

 The placement of this prophecy serves to reinforce the claim that Baruch’s presence in Egypt is not the result of God’s disfavor. God calls Baruch to be faithful and assures him that his personal safety resides with God. While there is a cost to serving the Lord in times such as these – Baruch has no more “right” (to use modern Western language) than anyone else to expect that he will escape the consequences of corporate and social evil - God tells him that his life is a gift, and he has been called to use it well.

*You remain faithful, Lord, when the times are evil. Amen.*