to crush Egypt (43:8-13). What seemed a route of escape was instead a guarantee for destruction (44:12-14, 24-29).

 Shockingly, some boldly told Jeremiah they would participate in the idolatry and wickedness of Egypt. They had done so in Jerusalem and had plenty of food and were comfortable. When they stopped doing so, their conditions worsened, so they concluded their best option was to return to their former ways (44:15-18). When comfort takes precedence over holiness, God has no other option but to bring harsh discipline on His people. For faithful Baruch, however, God promised an escape from the punishment that would surround him (45:5). For those who chose to walk with Him, God told them not to fear and promised His presence during the process of discipline and justice (46:28).

 Jeremiah declared to the Egyptians what every human being—regardless of tongue, tribe, or nation—needs to know, “But the day belongs to the Lord, the Lord Almighty—a day of vengeance, for vengeance on his foes” (46:10). Praise God for Jesus and His victory over sin and the peace we find in Him.

Saturday, August 19, 2017—Jeremiah 47-49

 God works on His own timetable, so His people find themselves wondering when He will punish the wicked or rescue the chosen. At times, there will be a glimmer of hope that He has begun to fulfill His word, but the true fulfillment of His plan will be unmistakable. In telling the Philistines of their coming punishment, Jeremiah said they will cry aloud for Yahweh to put His sword away (47:6) because of the depth of their misery, yet God will not be finished with what He has commanded.

 Likewise, His work in Moab will send the false gods and their priests and officials into hiding (48:7). Self-sufficiency and wealth will have no power compared to what God is going to do to His enemies. Military might will not be able to stand up to what He will do (48:14-15). When He finally acts to bring justice and righteousness, there will be ample evidence of His working, and there will be no escape (48:44). God’s people, then, need patience for His fulfillment, trust in His timing, and examination to ensure they stand righteous before Him.

 Because He is just, no one will escape judgment. Jeremiah 49 lists many others—Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazar, and Elam—who will face the consequences of their foolish choices. He will set His throne in the kingdoms of every land (49:38) and give opportunity for restoration (49:39).

 Thank God for His faithfulness and righteousness. Pray for increasing patience in His time and increasing holiness in His sight.

*Read the Bible Through 2017*

Week 33

Sunday, August 13, 2017—Jeremiah 27-29

 Do you surround yourself with people who speak truth or with people who speak what you want to hear? Human nature enjoys having those nearby who will speak of your goodness, attractiveness, and superb ability even when those things are severely lacking. What we need are those who will speak truth in love to shape us and improve us.

 Imagine Jeremiah’s dilemma when he had to tell the people to surrender to Babylon in order to leave. Imagine his reception when he told foreign leaders who came to Jerusalem that they had to do the same, illustrating this advice by wearing a yoke like a beast of burden (27:1-22). His message did nothing to help his popularity.

 In contrast, Hananiah spoke the words everyone wanted to hear. He said the captivity would be brief. The Temple articles would return from Babylon in short order because Yahweh would break the yoke of Babylon (28:1-4). His words were so inspiring even Jeremiah hoped they would be true (28:6), but Jeremiah knew talk was cheap. A prophet is truly a prophet only if his words come true (28:9). Soon thereafter, Hananiah died, Jeremiah continued his ministry, and the exile began its 70-year span.

 After many of God’s people had been taken to Babylon, Jeremiah sent them a letter to encourage them. God remained in control. He had a plan that was at work which included their prospering in Babylon and eventually returning home (29:1-14). Truth is not always comfortable.

 Thank God for those in your life who speak truth in love.

Monday, August 14, 2017—Jeremiah 30-32

 God told Jeremiah, “Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you” (30:2). He was speaking ahead of time about what He was going to do to restore His people from their self-inflicted exile. Having His words recorded ahead of time would give them the opportunity to look back and have proof of His faithfulness and sovereignty. Having the recorded words of all of Scripture allows readers to experience the same today.

 God’s people were in great distress, yet God was going to restore them (30:17-18), and they would respond with shouts and songs of praise. Once again they would be His people, and He would be their God (30:22, 31:1). What God was going to do and how He would accomplish it would only make sense in days to come (30:24), but it was guaranteed.

 This restoration would only come with repentance (31:19). God’s people would remember how much God had done and how precious they were in His sight. They would realize how heinousness of their idolatry and complacency and would beat their breasts in anguish for the disgrace they brought upon Him (31:19). This restoration would offer a new covenant, one written not on tablets but on the human heart (31:31-34).

 To demonstrate his faith in God’s promise, despite the devastation around him, Jeremiah bought a field. The deed would be valid when his family returned to Judah after the captivity was over (32:15). Live with faithfulness fueled by the testimony of Scripture. God will do what He says.

Tuesday, August 15, 2017—Jeremiah 33-36

 While Jesus’ ministry was growing, John the Baptist sat in jail. He sent some of his disciples to Jesus to ask whether He was the One, the Messiah. Jesus quoted a prophecy from Isaiah about God’s ability to restore and renew and assured John he had not misplaced his hope. Sitting in uncomfortable places can make the most devoted question God’s actions.

 Jeremiah, too, sat incarcerated, and God spoke to him with words of hope. Despite the rejection of both Israel and Judah, God was going to restore. Until that time, His people could call on Him, and He would answer them and tell them great and unsearchable things (33:3). Until someone could stop the sun from rising (33:20), His plans would work.

 Because God is faithful, He calls his people to be faithful. During a season of repentance, they freed their slaves as God instructed but decided to take them back (34:16). This double-mindedness was a symptom of their inner weakness. In contrast, the Recabites remained faithful to their tradition despite the ease with which they could have compromised (34:14). God is always looking for those whose hearts are fully surrendered to Him. They will find blessing and become an example for His glory.

 Jeremiah prophesied for decades and had few who would listen to him. When King Jehoiakim listened to his words, he cut the scroll into pieces and burned them after they were read (36:23). Despite hardship or rejection, God is calling people to faithful obedience. Will you answer?

Wednesday, August 16, 2017—Jeremiah 37-39

 Jeremiah’s book is not arranged chronologically, and there are times the text helps the reader realize this. In chapter 36, Jeremiah cannot travel freely. Jeremiah 37 notes its content occurred before he was put in jail (37:4). The “chaos” of reading the book and aligning events mentally is nothing compared to the actual chaos occurring in the hearts of God’s people and in the land where they lived. Throughout the text, one thing is constant—the people “paid no attention to the words the Lord had spoken through Jeremiah” (37:2; see also 38:15).

 Like modern-day prophets, Jeremiah was not useful to the king or the people when he spoke against their choices and standards, but the king did want to hear from Jeremiah if he had some news about deliverance from evil and oppression (37:17). Like contemporary truth-seekers, Jeremiah spoke hard things, and the people accused him of discouragement and hatred (38:4). His detractors were not satisfied with his being jailed or censored. They wanted him dead.

 Despite the forces against him, Jeremiah found an unlikely friend in a foreigner, Ebed-Melech (38:7), who pled with the king for Jeremiah’s safety. While Jeremiah was not completely free, he was alive and given provision. Then, all he had prophesied finally came to pass and Jerusalem fell to Babylon and burned to the ground. Because of his trust in Yahweh, Ebed-Melech escaped with his life (39:18).

 Pray for growing faith which speaks truth in love and trusts Him regardless of circumstances.

Thursday, August 17, 2017—Jeremiah 40-42

 When Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son, Isaac, God provided a ram caught in the thicket. Abraham called God Jehovah Jireh, the God Who Will See to It. God has astounding ways to provide because God sees from beginning to end.

 For more than 40 years, Jeremiah had predicted the tragedy his city was now experiencing. He himself was shackled and being led away from the place he loved when, unexpectedly, the commander of the guard released him to go wherever he wished and promised provision there. Jeremiah chose to go back to Jerusalem, and the commander “gave him provisions and a present and let him go” (40:5). Jews who had been scattered came to fill the void of the Jews who were deported, and they harvested “an abundance of wine and summer fruit” (40:12). God will provide. His people can count on it.

 While God was providing for His people, there were still evil forces at work. Ishmael of the Ammonites came to the appointed leader of the Jews, Gedaliah, and assassinated him. Ishmael and his troops also killed many of the Jewish soldiers and people. Johanan, a Jewish officer, mustered a force and overthrew Ishmael and liberated the remnant, but they were afraid to stay in the land because the Babylonians would be angry because of the death of their appointed leader. They asked Jeremiah to pray for them so they would hear and heed the direction of God (42:1-6).

 Pray for faith in His provision marked by obedience to His word.

Friday, August 18, 2017—Jeremiah 43-46

 God was grieved over the disaster He had inflicted on His people (see 42:10), and He was instructing them on how to endure the discipline. There was no reason for them to experience undue frustration and misery. He told them not to flee the Babylonians by going to Egypt, but that made little sense to many of His people (43:1-3). They went to Egypt where God told Jeremiah to illustrate to the people how God was going to use Babylon