

Jeremiah 34:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Now when all the princes, and all the people, which had entered into the covenant, heard that every one should let his manservant, and every one his maidservant, go free, that none should serve themselves of them any more, then they obeyed, and let them go.

Analysis

Now when all the princes, and all the people, which had entered into the covenant, heard that every one should let his manservant, and every one his maidservant, go free, that none should serve themselves of them any more, then they obeyed, and let them go. The phrase "entered into the covenant" (ba'u baberit) describes a formal covenant ceremony, likely involving the ritual described in verses 18-19 where participants passed between severed animal parts, invoking curse upon themselves if they violated the oath. The comprehensive participation—"all the princes, and all the people"—indicates national covenant renewal, suggesting widespread recognition that covenant violation brought the Babylonian siege.

The initial obedience—**then they obeyed, and let them go**—appears commendable, but verse 11's "but afterward they turned" reveals this as temporary, crisis-motivated compliance rather than heart transformation. The Hebrew verb "obeyed" (vayishme'u) means "heard/heeded," but genuine hearing produces perseverance (James 1:22-25). Their swift reversal when circumstances improved (verse 11) exposed the obedience as pragmatic calculation: "If we free slaves, perhaps God will lift the siege." When Egyptian intervention temporarily relieved Babylon's pressure (37:5), they recaptured the freed servants, proving

their hearts unchanged.

Theologically, this demonstrates:

1. External compliance without internal transformation is worthless before God
2. crisis-driven religious observance differs fundamentally from genuine repentance
3. God tests hearts by changed circumstances—initial enthusiasm proves nothing without perseverance
4. the Reformed doctrine of regeneration's necessity finds support here: only supernatural heart-change produces lasting obedience.

Historical Context

The covenant ceremony likely occurred during the siege's height when Jerusalem's fall seemed imminent. Ancient Near Eastern covenant rituals involving dismembered animals are well-attested (Genesis 15:9-17; Jeremiah 34:18-19). The freed servants would have provided additional soldiers for defense, giving pragmatic military motivation alongside religious considerations. When Pharaoh Hophra's Egyptian army approached, forcing temporary Babylonian withdrawal (Jeremiah 37:5-11), the relieved slave-owners recaptured their freed servants. This historical sequence demonstrates that without genuine repentance, external reforms evaporate when pressure lifts. Archaeological evidence shows the Babylonian siege resumed after Egypt's retreat, culminating in Jerusalem's destruction (586 BCE)—validating Jeremiah's warnings that false repentance brings judgment rather than deliverance.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How can you distinguish between genuine repentance and crisis-driven religious observance in your own life?
2. What does the swift reversal when circumstances improved reveal about human nature apart from regenerating grace?
3. How should church leaders respond to apparent conversions and commitments made during crises or emotional moments?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	יִשְׁמַע	וְ	כָּל	בְּשֶׁר	יָמִים	וְכָל	בְּשֶׁר	יָמִים	וְ	כָּל	בְּשֶׁר	יָמִים	וְ	אַשְׁר	
heard	H3605	Now when all the princes		H3605	and all the people		H3605	and all the people		H3605	and all the people		H3605	and all the people	H834
H8085		H8269		H5971											
וְ	אָוֹ	בְּ	אָוֹ	בְּבָרָית	וְ	יָשַׁלְחוּ	וְ	אָוֹ	בְּ	אָוֹ	בְּבָרָית	וְ	יָשַׁלְחוּ	וְ	אָוֹ
which had entered		into the covenant		and let them go		and every one		and every one		and every one		and every one		and every one	H853
H935		H1285		H7971		H376		H376		H376		H376		H376	
וְ	עָבֵד	וְ	עָבֵד	וְ	אָוֹ	בְּ	אָוֹ	בְּ	אָוֹ	בְּ	אָוֹ	בְּ	אָוֹ	בְּ	אָוֹ
should let his manservant		and every one		and every one		his maid-servant		free		free		free		free	
H5650		H376		H853		H8198		H2670		H2670		H2670		H2670	
וְ	עָבֵד	וְ	עָבֵד	וְ	עָבֵד	וְ	עָבֵד	וְ	עָבֵד	וְ	עָבֵד	וְ	עָבֵד	וְ	עָבֵד
that none should serve		that none should serve		that none should serve		that none should serve		that none should serve		that none should serve		that none should serve		that none should serve	
H1115		H5647		H0		H5750		H0		H5750		H0		H5750	
וְ	יָשַׁלְחוּ	וְ	יָשַׁלְחוּ	וְ	עָוֹד	וְ	עָוֹד	וְ	עָוֹד	וְ	עָוֹד	וְ	עָוֹד	וְ	עָוֹד
and let them go		and let them go		and let them go		and let them go		and let them go		and let them go		and let them go		and let them go	
H8085		H7971		H8085		H7971		H8085		H7971		H8085		H7971	

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 26:16 (Parallel theme): Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and to the prophets; This man is not worthy to die: for he hath spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God.

Jeremiah 26:10 (Parallel theme): When the princes of Judah heard these things, then they came up from the king's house unto the house of the LORD, and sat down in the entry of the new gate of the LORD'S house.

