

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

וַיִּשְׁמָע וְ	כָּל	הַשָּׂרִים	וְכָל	הָעָם	אֲשֶׁר
heard	H3605	Now when all the princes	H3605	and all the people	H834
H8085		H8269		H5971	
בָּ אֲוֹ	בִּבְרִית	וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ:	וְאֵל	אֶת	
which had entered	into the covenant	and let them go	and every one		H853
H935	H1285	H7971	H376		
עֶבֶד וְ	וְאֵל	אֶת	שִׁפְתּוֹ	חֶפְשׁ	יָם
should let his manservant	and every one	H853	his maidservant	free	
H5650	H376		H8198	H2670	
לְבִלְתִּי	עֶבֶד	וְ	עַד	וַיִּשְׁמָע וְ	וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ:
H1115	that none should serve	H0	H5750	heard	and let them go
	H5647			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.

