

Jeremiah 34:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

This is the word that came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them;

Analysis

This is the word that came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them; This introduces one of Scripture's most tragic episodes of covenant-breaking. Zedekiah proclaimed emancipation of Hebrew slaves, likely motivated by military desperation (needing freed men as soldiers) and hoping this covenant obedience might induce God's deliverance. The verb "proclaim liberty" (liqro' deror) uses the Jubilee year terminology (Leviticus 25:10), suggesting awareness of covenant requirements for debt release and slave liberation.

However, verses 10-11 reveal this as false repentance: when Egyptian intervention temporarily lifted Babylon's siege (37:5), slave owners recaptured the freed servants. The superficial reform—done from desperation, not genuine repentance—exposed hearts unchanged by God's grace. This illustrates Jesus' parable of the rocky soil (Matthew 13:20-21): temporary enthusiasm without deep roots fails under pressure.

Theologically, this verse teaches:

1. External religious actions without heart transformation don't satisfy God
2. desperation-driven reforms differ from genuine repentance

3. covenant obedience done for pragmatic benefit rather than love for God proves hollow
4. true liberty comes through internal transformation, not merely legal decree.

Christ's promise of liberty (John 8:32, 36) requires spiritual regeneration, not just external reform.

Historical Context

The Sabbath year law (Deuteronomy 15:1-18) required releasing Hebrew servants every seventh year—systematically violated in pre-exilic Judah. Zedekiah's decree suggests desperate attempt to fulfill neglected obligations, perhaps influenced by recognition that covenant violations brought judgment. The temporary Egyptian intervention (37:5) gave false hope that deliverance was working, leading to covenant revocation.

Archaeological evidence from ancient Near Eastern slave release edicts shows this practice occurred during crises. However, the biblical account uniquely emphasizes the moral dimension: revoking freedom after granting it demonstrates profound covenant treachery, warranting severe judgment (verses 17-22). The historical episode illustrates that God sees hearts, not merely actions—superficial compliance motivated by fear rather than love insults His holiness.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the contrast between external reform and internal transformation challenge superficial religious observance?
2. In what areas might you be tempted toward desperation-driven religiosity rather than genuine heart change?

3. How does this passage deepen understanding of the liberty Christ brings—
freedom from sin's bondage, not merely external circumstances?

Interlinear Text

מֵאָת	וְרָמִי	הִוּ	אֲלֹ	בְּנֵי	הַ	אֲשֶׁר	בְּדַבָּר	רַ	כָּל	לְקֹרֵ	אַת	בְּרִית	אֶת	
This is the word													that came unto Jeremiah	
	H834	H1961	H413										H3414	H853
H1697														
יְהֹוָה	אָמַר	בְּרִית	לְךָ	פָּמָ	לְךָ	צְדָקָה	אֶת							
from the LORD	after	had made	that the king	Zedekiah		a covenant								H854
H3068	H310	H3772	H4428	H6667		H1285								
כָּל	בְּיֹרְשָׁלָם	אֲשֶׁר	בְּעַמְּךָ	רַ	מְ	לְקֹרֵ	אַת	לְבָם						
with all the people		H834	which were at Jerusalem		H3389		to proclaim							H1992
H3605								H7121						
H5971														
דְּרוּרָה														
liberty														
H1865														

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 25:10 (Parallel theme): And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.

Jeremiah 34:17 (Kingdom): Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.

2 Kings 11:17 (Covenant): And Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD and the king and the people, that they should be the LORD'S people; between the king also and the people.

Isaiah 61:1 (References Lord): The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

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