

Uri(j)ah

prophet & martyr?

Jeremiah 26:16-24

26:16 Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and to the [mostly false] prophets; **This man [Jeremiah]** is not worthy to die: for he hath spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God.

26:17 Then rose up certain of the elders of the land, and spake to all the assembly of the people, saying, **26:18 Micah** the Morasthite prophesied in the days of HEZEKIAH king of Judah, and spake to all the people of Judah, saying,

Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest.

26:19 Did HEZEKIAH king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death? did he not fear the LORD, and besought the LORD, and the LORD repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against them? Thus might we procure great evil against our souls.

26:20 And there was also a man that prophesied in the name of the LORD, **Uri-jah** the son of Shemaiah of Kirjathjearim, who prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah: **26:21** And when JEHOIAKIM the king, with all his mighty men, and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death: but when **Uri-jah** heard it, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt; **26:22** And JEHOIAKIM the king sent men into Egypt, namely, Elnathan the son of Achbor, and certain men with him into Egypt. **26:23** And they fetched forth **Urijah** out of Egypt, and brought him unto Jehoiakim the king; who slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people.

26:24 Nevertheless the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with **Jeremiah**, that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death.

comparing prophets

It is highly unusual for two prophets of the Lord to be placed side by side for comparison purposes like Micah and Urijah seem to be in Jer. 26:17-23.

First, Micah, one of the so-called minor prophets, is directly quoted by those that hoped to protect Jeremiah (26:16-17). They argued that, despite the earlier prophet's bold message against Jerusalem (26:18), King Hezekiah wisely listened to him and spared his life.

Then Urijah, is suddenly introduced in the written record (26:20). (He probably was not mentioned in the discussion at the time.) Unlike Micah, Urijah was killed because of his message. Jeremiah used this to show that the decision about himself could have gone either way. He could have been killed like Urijah or spared like Micah.

Jeremiah's main message through Urijah, however, may be to show that it is vain to flee to Egypt.

negatives

As is often the case in this series of studies, the lack of information about Urijah, rightly or wrongly, easily leads to various negative conclusions. Most of the critical lines below are based on the fact that little is recorded about Urijah. Though he is in the Bible and we know that his message was in line with Jeremiah's (26:20), nothing else positive about him is recorded. Worst of all, Urijah's fear and flight to Egypt ARE recorded.

(Fleeing to Egypt is shown to be sinful and vain for the Jews in general in 2:18, 24:8, and 42:14-19.)

Not all the true prophets of the Lord in the Bible were faithful to the end. For instance, the man of God in First Kings chapter 13 was killed by a lion because he did not return immediately from Bethel as he had been commanded.

Did Urijah directly disobey the Lord when he fled to Egypt? Since no prohibition against doing so is mentioned in chapter 26, we do not know for sure. *(However, we do know with certainty that going to Egypt was not good in general and that his fleeing there was in vain.)*

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

A	Urijah is in the Bible, but ...
A-1	() little is said about him.
A-2	() he is only in Jer. 26:20-23.
A-3	() his name only appears three times.
A-4	() he wasn't a writer like Jeremiah and Micah.
A-5	() most of Jeremiah chapter 26 is not about Urijah.
B	Urijah was a prophet, but ...
B-1	() he mainly prophesied in Egypt.
B-2	() his words are not recorded (26:20).
B-3	() he fled to Egypt because of fear (26:21).
B-4	() his message was probably mostly negative.
B-5	() he only repeated what Jeremiah said (26:20).
B-6	() he was not as successful as Micah (26:17-19).
B-7	() according to 26:23, the common people hated him.
B-8	() his ministry probably did not last as long as Jeremiah's.
B-9	() the emphasis is more on his death than his words (26:20-24).

positives

Jeremiah is the longest prophetic book in the Bible, slightly longer than Isaiah and Ezekiel. One of the reasons it is so long is because of the many minor characters (like Urijah) who are mentioned therein, far more than in Isaiah.

God's message in Jeremiah therefore is more than just what the prophet said. We are also to learn from the human interaction, examples, and contrasts. *(There are various characters in the first six chapters of Daniel too, but not as many as in Jeremiah.)*

Urijah was a true prophet, but was he a great one? If greatness is only relative, he does not fare well compared to Jeremiah who had a much larger ministry (B-8). On the other hand, the death of every true servant of the Lord is precious in God's sight (Psa. 116:15), and Urijah was the only one of the three prophets in chapter 26 who became a martyr. *(Of course, one can also argue that Urijah was not a true martyr because he fled to Egypt (D-5). Even so, it is still true that he was killed because of his God-given message.)*

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

C	It's good to learn from Urijah's connections.
C-1	() Urijah was a close friend of Jeremiah (26:20).
C-2	() Urijah helps show the sinfulness of Jehoiakim.
C-3	() Urijah helps show the great danger that Jeremiah faced.
C-4	() He helps show that God's plan varies from person to person.
C-5	() It's encouraging to see that the Lord had more than one prophet.
C-6	() Urijah probably did not have many good connections in Egypt.
C-7	() The account of Urijah's life and death is thought-provoking.
C-8	() His flight contrasts with Jeremiah's steadfastness (26:14).
C-9	() It is good to compare and contrast God's servants.
D	It's good that the Urijah passage is short.
D-1	() We do not need to know more about Urijah.
D-2	() People are not interested in minor characters like Urijah.
D-3	() Jer. 26:20-23 is long enough to show why Urijah was killed.
D-4	() If we knew more about him it might distract from what is written.
D-5	() In Egypt, Urijah was probably out of God's will (26:20-21, 42:14-19).

conclusions

worksheet answers

The most obviously incorrect statement is B-1. Urijah fled to Egypt because of fear (B-3) rather than in order to prophesy beside the Nile. Thus he probably was silent while there, trying in vain to maintain a low profile and avoid Jehoiakim's men.

In addition, it is probably true that the fearful prophet did not have many good connections in Egypt (C-6), but that was not his main problem. Various verses in Jeremiah seem to indicate that he should have stayed in Judah (D-5). Yet, he probably would have been killed either way, though there is no way to know for sure.

Even so, there is a clear contrast between Urijah's fear and Jeremiah's steadfastness (C-8). In fact, this is probably one of the main points of the entire chapter. In order to learn from the many characters in Jeremiah, it is sometimes good to compare and contrast them (C-9).

Finally, there are a few other lines which are incorrect (B-5, B-7, and C-1) or at best only partly correct (B-6, D-2 and D-3).

So what?

The final verse in chapter 26 says that Jeremiah's life was spared because a man named Ahikam helped him. This is true, of course, but the prophet's life was spared many times. So there must have been more than just human help involved.

Why is Urijah mentioned? Thankfully, we do not need to pick just one reason from among the various that have been suggested. More than one is true, and the two main ones both have something to do with Jeremiah. These are: 1.) that he helps show the great danger Jeremiah faced (C-3), and 2.) that he helps show that standing firm like Jeremiah is better than fleeing to Egypt.

In conclusion, to apply these things to our lives we need to understand what fleeing to Egypt represented in Jeremiah's time.

To flee to Egypt was to vainly trust in men or, to a lesser extent, one's own ability to save oneself rather than trusting in the Lord. Moreover, Urijah shows that to do so is natural and tempting even for believers, though it will be vain and deadly in the end.

applications

Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most needful.
