

## **Class 9: Jeremiah 34-39, 52**

### **The Destruction of Jerusalem**

**May 24, 2017**

The last few months of Jerusalem under Zedekiah are difficult. God describes the terrible suffering of the people earlier. We are told how Jeremiah suffers at the hands of the king. Finally, we see the record of the end of the city (and restated again in chapter 52).

**Prophecy Against Zedekiah:** in Jeremiah 32 we are told that the king had imprisoned Jeremiah for promising that he would be taken to Babylon and die there. There is here again the formal delivery of prophecy to the king; note the expression “see the king eye to eye”, perhaps looking to his fate at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. He would die in Babylon at peace, and (unlike his brother) be mourned by the people.

A second message comes to Zedekiah through Jeremiah. This speaks to a jubilee enacted by the king. This action appears to be an attempt to obey the law of God (Deut. 15:12, Ex. 21:2, 23:10). It may be the case that the Babylonian army soon after withdrew (Jer. 34:21). Yet soon afterwards the free were set upon and enslaved again. God considers this type of promise breaking worse than before, as He does when we break any oath or covenant.

**The Rechabites:** Jeremiah is commanded to meet the leader of the clan of the Rechabites. Their ancestor Jonadab had aided King Jehu in freeing Israel from the house of Ahab (2 Kings 10). Sometime later they had moved to Judah. God make Jeremiah offer them wine, which they refuse per the oath of their ancestor. God then declares them to be an example that Judah ought to have followed of men who honor their fathers. God ends by declaring “*Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not lack a man to stand before Me always.*”

**Jehoiakim’s Reaction:** we now jump back in time to the reign of Jehoiakim, Zedekiah’s brother. This event takes place in the same time as chapter 25. It describes an encounter between the King and Jeremiah where Jeremiah was commanded to write the sermons he had preached and deliver them to the people. Since he has been banned from the temple, he command Baruch to go there are read these lessons. It seems to take time, as it is a year later that this event occurs. When Baruch reads the words, Micaiah (grandson of Shaphan) reports to the king’s scribes these words. They call Baruch to them, and have him read again. In apparent sympathy, they tell him and Jeremiah to hide.

Now the king receives the scroll through these scribes. As he reads it, he slices pieces off and burns them. He then orders the arrest of Baruch and Jeremiah. God orders Jeremiah to draft the book again. He curses Jehoiakim that his body will be left outside for this action, and he will have no children on the throne of David.

**Zedekiah’s Warning:** Again moving forward in time, chapter 37 is during the reign of that last king Zedekiah. He was placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar, and he would break his vow of service to that king (2 Kings 24:18-20). Ezekiel brought a curse on Zedekiah for this oath breaking (Ezekiel 17:15-18). Zedekiah had hoped for deliverance from the Egyptians, and indeed it seemed perhaps it might come, as the Babylonians withdrew to engage the Egyptian army.

However, God delivers a message to Zedekiah. The Egyptians will be overcome, and the Babylonians will return. They will burn up the city.

During this lift in siege, Jeremiah leaves to go to the land of his ancestors. When leaving, an army captain confronts him and accuses him of defecting. He is imprisoned and beaten. Later, King Zedekiah calls Jeremiah for a word from God. Jeremiah has already given him plenty of messages, for which Jeremiah is imprisoned. Jeremiah points out the irony of the moment – that the false prophets were indeed false. Jeremiah is placed into a safer custody and provided food (explaining how he manages to eat while all others are starving) until the end of the siege.

**Jeremiah in the Cistern:** Chapter 38 takes place during the terrible siege of Jerusalem. Passhur, who had persecuted him in chapter 20, comes to the king and reports the message of Jeremiah (all the way back to chapters 14-16). The king delivers Jeremiah into their hands, and they cast him into a cistern (assumedly to die of deprivation).

However, Ebed-melech the Ethiopian eunuch heard of this, he rescued Jeremiah by petitioning the king for his safety. Once delivered, the king again asks to speak with Jeremiah, again asking him about his future. Jeremiah points out that such conversations have not gone well before; so King Zedekiah promises to spare him even if he speaks a truth he does not want to hear.

Jeremiah's last prophecy to Zedekiah is this: if he were to surrender to the King of Babylon, he and his house would live, and the city would not be burned. If not, the city will be destroyed. The King tells Jeremiah he fears the defectors, but Jeremiah promises that if he surrenders, he will be safe. The King's decision is to hold out, and orders Jeremiah to not speak to anyone; Jeremiah is remanded to the court of the guard until the end of the siege.

**The Fall of Jerusalem:** Chapters 39 ad 52 both record the end of the siege of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar breached the wall in in the year 586 BC. When the wall was broken, the army and the king and his family made a run for Jericho, which was intercepted by the Babylonians. King Nebuchadnezzar ordered Zedekiah's sons executed, and then had Zedekiah's eyes put out. He was taken a captive to Babylon, where he would die.

Chapter 39 also tells of the fate of Jeremiah in this event. King Nebuchadnezzar orders his general to release and take care of Jeremiah. He is remanded to the custody of the new Babylonian governor Gedaliah (son of Ahikam who had saved him in 26:24, not the Gedaliah who abused him in 38:1). A message is sent from God to Ebed-melech: he will be preserved for trusting in the Lord.

### **Making Applications:**

1. What might have been the purpose of the commands of Jonadab the Rechanite to his family?
2. King Jehoiakim's actions are much like many in the world who hear the word of God. They burn it or tear it apart so as not to be held accountable to it. Scriptures remark here that the king did this without fear.
3. How is Jeremiah's imprisonment a means by which God takes care of him?
4. Why is it that King Zedekiah keeps asking Jeremiah for a prophecy when he has already delivered one to him?