

JEREMIAH 39

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

The melancholy story of the fall of Jerusalem is what is before us in this chapter; and it serves to disprove the lies of the flattering false prophets, and to confirm the faithful words of God's messenger. Hitherto, Jerusalem had been spared; but now, the people had filled up the cup of their iniquities. Nebuchadnezzar's army of Babylonian soldiers encamped against the city for the third time; and after an 18-month-long siege, it finally fell into his hands in 586 BC.

The city of Jerusalem was surrounded by a wall which was only approachable on the northern side, and it was on that side that the Babylonian soldiers formed their camp. But the Jews had a far more powerful foe than the enemy outside the city walls! Terrible famine – the worst of all evils – seized the inhabitants to a fearful extent, for there was no more bread in the city. A long wail of sorrow went up to heaven from every part of Jerusalem. And where was Jeremiah at this moment? He was still shut up in the court of the prison. Surely he somehow learned of what was going on in the city, and he knew what the final result would be. The people were now reaping the sad and bitter fruits of their transgressions. He had warned them of the consequences; and he had besought them to repent, but all in vain. And now nothing awaited them but the sword or captivity, and their beautiful city would soon be lying in ashes.

When a breach was finally made in the city walls, the Babylonian troops began to rush in like an angry sea, pouring out its turbulent fury upon the Jews. They slew their young men with the sword, and they had no compassion even upon the young maidens or the elderly men. A hundred different forms of anguish gathered in that once-holy city. War is always terrible, but no hand of any historian can tell in unvarnished words all the horrors of the slaughter and destruction of a city by such soldiers as the cruel and merciless Babylonians.

As for King Zedekiah, he took advantage of the gloomy darkness of night to sneak out of Jerusalem with his men of war. But he was pursued by the Babylonian soldiers, who overtook him, captured him, and brought him to their master. Full of fury at his revolt, Nebuchadnezzar first ordered Zedekiah's sons to be slain in his sight; and then he put out his eyes and bound him with brass chains to carry him away to Babylon.

The Babylonians did not immediately destroy the Temple. About a month after the capture of the city, Nebuchadnezzar sent Nebuzaradan – the captain of the guard – to complete the work of destruction. He set on fire all the houses of the important citizens of Jerusalem, the king's house, and the house of the Lord.

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The Babylonians capture the city of Jerusalem and destroy it, and King Zedekiah and the people are carried away to Babylon as captives – verses 1-10
- ❖ Great kindness is shown by the Babylonians to Jeremiah – verses 11-14
- ❖ Ebed-melech receives a special promise of safety from God – verses 15-18

Thus the Temple – which had been the abode of the Shekinah-glory for many years, and the place of solemn sacrifice and worship – became a heap of charred ruins. The Lord’s glory had departed, and so this structure was now worth no more than any other building. A portion of the vessels of the Temple had already been carried away previously, and now the rest were seized – including the two beautiful pillars, the brass sea, the twelve brass oxen which were under it, and many other articles of brass and gold and silver which King Solomon had made. All these items were taken to Babylon – the brass articles, in particular, being broken to pieces before being carried away.

And what became of the inhabitants of the city? With the exception of some of the poor people of the land – who had nothing anyway; and therefore, were scarcely even worth carrying away – Nebuchadnezzar took the people away to live a life of slavery and captivity in Babylon. Under the burning sun, they were compelled to journey on foot for at least 700 miles. And their captors surely cared so little about their necessities that many of the women and children, in particular, probably fainted and died along the way.



But let us return now to Jeremiah. He was one of those upon whom the Lord had set His mark of preservation; and therefore, no one could take away his life. He was freed from prison, but then it seems that he was taken to King Nebuchadnezzar. Perhaps the conqueror had heard of him before; but at any rate, he gave Nebuzaradan a strict charge to deal kindly with him, and to do him no harm. Then he was taken back to Jerusalem; and he was committed to the care of Gedaliah, whose father Ahikam had been Jeremiah’s friend in times of former trouble (chapter 26:24).

At the end of this chapter, we read the gracious message which the Lord gave to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, to assure him of a recompence for his kindness to Jeremiah. This message was delivered to him immediately after he had done that act of kindness to the prophet; but it is mentioned here after the narrative of the capture of the city, in order to show that just as God was kind to Jeremiah at that time, so He was also merciful to Ebed-melech for his sake. It was a token of special favor to both of these men that they did not perish in any of the calamities that befell their countrymen. Whatever else may be uncertain, the Lord’s care of His children is sure. Under His sacred wing, there is safety – even when every danger is abroad. Can we accept this promise as sure and certain? Then in our own present emergencies, we shall find that it stands fast!

Lord, we confess that by nature, we are no different than the rebellious Jews who fell into the hands of the Babylonians. We ask You to cover our iniquities and transgressions under the blood of the Lord Jesus, and to make good on Your promise of safety and protection to all Your children who place their trust in You! Amen.